



bOLT

No. 7, March 1973.

60c

Mtshali on
Mtshali

A conversation
with Guy Butler

Adam Small:
New Poems

MTSHALI ON MTSHALI

*By the middle of last year Mr Mtshali's book **Sounds of a Cowhide Drum** had sold 11 000 copies in South Africa alone. It has also been published in Britain and America where it has been well received. This is unusual success for a book of poetry. Until now, just about everybody has had something to say about the phenomenon, except Mtshali himself.*

What has poetry done for me? This is the most pertinent question I have been asking myself since the publication of my anthology entitled: *Sounds of the Cowhide Drum*.

There are, I feel, two sides of the story that I wish to discuss. Fortune and fame are words that spring into mind. The first side is physical. That means material gain. This has been considerable if one realises that poets are not amongst the wealthiest of people. Perhaps I do not attach much significance to money. I did not when I saw down to write the poems have money as my objective. I would have been disappointed if I had.

From the world-wide publicity that the book received I should be a 'tycoon'. The mere fact that I am not speaks for itself. I will not dwell on this point any further except to say that many people judge a man by his material possessions and of these only a few do I have.

The second side of this story is the spiritual one. The motive for writing the poems was primarily to satisfy an inner feeling, an urge to create 'something'. The secondary factor was to try and communicate these inner feelings to anyone who happened to care and listen.

This attempt to communicate has had a traumatic effect on me and badly bruised my soul. The reason for that being the novelty of that attempt. Let me be well understood. Several Blacks have written poetry with varying degrees of consistency, successful poetry at that. But my position was different. I was innocently and genuinely employed as a 'messenger'. This was seized upon, glamourised, romanticised and, presto, I became an underprivileged Black who was 'gifted' but had to do menial work. Most of these newspaper write-ups were genuine, but some were quite patronising.

Readers, mostly White, bought and read the book out of curiosity. "Can you really write English?" "Who taught you to write English so well?" are some of the questions I have been asked.

Other Whites bought the book to salve their consciences. Others because they really appreciated poetry. I have not categorised any reader according to his political leanings. I am not a Liberal, Nationalist or Progressive but a Black who tried to articulate the daily hopes and disappointments of his life.

I have said very little about my fellow Blacks' reaction because it is not in my nature to generalise. The vast majority of my people have been enthusiastic. Many have told me to 'keep it up'.

From Black youth I have had a varied response. Some have expressed disappointment at the lack of revolutionary fire in the poems. Others have found them platitudinous; perhaps that is a question of 'familiarity breeds contempt'.

On the whole I feel that the publication of the book has caused me to adjust to a few changes in my life. I used to enjoy the obscurity of a nonentity.

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A CITY DOCTOR

There's no-one to tell. Dying without friends
doesn't make you or anyone else sad.

You were lover of the sea and five or six maritime cities,
of which this was the last, I study the wrinkles
and cambered soles of your last pair of size thirteens;
take your old Ford out of the basement garage,
and cruise the seafront with salt filming the windscreen.

We seem to stop by appointment here and there,
seeing a barman you knew once coming off the pier
with a small catch of shad in a potato sack.

I try to picture, the way city people do, his family sitting to supper,
if he has a family. He nods. I put the parking lights on,
and buy a paper; head for the harbour to finish your round.

OLD SALT

Sedated by breakwaters and today's
milk westerly, your ocean gives itself
up quietly to seven city beaches.

The room they've given you on the 14th floor
is all windows. Your visitors look out
and give you, over their shoulders, bulletins
on seabirds, shipping, the weather, surfing form.
You pretend to read the papers, never leave the bed,
knowing how much water is out there.

Today I count a dozen ships queueing in the anchorage.
Every couple of hours a tug comes, and another one goes in.

SPARRING PARTNERS

Your hands stay big. You curl them to mime
the punch-drunk's weave and roll when I ask how you are.

Puzzled, your fists circle, look at each other
from crags of wrist. From there to the shoulders
you're nothing. You watch your arms
suddenly flutter to the bed, the hands spreading
to emergency landings on the empty arena of your chest.

THE GAMBLERS

Every Wednesday I bring you
a race-card, and by Saturday morning,
in and out of absences, you've filled in
the stray crosses of one more permutation.

You have to tell me where to go, without surprise
that after fifteen years I still don't know.
In there, I'm helpless in the crush
of steady losers, maintaining your claim
in the records of the arithmeticians of odds.

On Monday our ticket goes to the wash
in the back pocket of my jeans. Set out to dry,
then brown and brittle as an old gum leaf,
your selection's still decipherable. They'd pay us out

if we'd won, but neither of us looks to see.
On Wednesday the Greek pats my hand across the counter,
gives me a sure thing with Saturday's card.

THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

Seven bedraggled and impoverished whites are discovered clinging to the remnants of the night's fire. The stage is empty but for a heap of tools in one corner and a wooden doorframe standing upright front right of the fire.

It has been a cold early summer night in the Karoo and, they are struggling to keep going until the first rays of sun induce amnesia. Their clothing is inadequate and dirty. Few of them wear shoes. They have, between them, two saucepans, some jam tins and a few small cloth bags of food, stamp-mielies, coffee and sugar. They do not have a tent, but they have socks, a few blankets and some tarpaulins.

The terrain is rocky and sandy. Nothing significant is visible, only a suggestion of termination by the sky. Even when the sky brightens it is not really sufficient to make out the landscape. It is about 4 o'clock in the morning.

The action begins with Vic walking around inside the barbedwire enclosure, counting the barbs on the wire.

ROSS: Hey Vic, sit down! *(Pause)*
Vic, for God's sake sit down.

(Vic walks around the whole enclosure counting the barbs, then sits down beside Dot.)

VIC: You awake?

DOT: I can't sleep,

VIC: Listen. The dawn wind. Can you hear it starting?

DOT: I can't get warm either.

ROSS: Its the dew. It gets into your joints.

VIC: The stars are on their way out.

TINY: Its like a lights switch off, eh.

VIC: I heard a thrush.

DOT: I can't. Can't hear nothing.

MINNIE: Is there anything to drink?

GEORGE: When it's light we'll be better off.
MINNIE: You always say that, and it's not true.
VIC: The stream sounds hell of close in the dark.
ROSS: How the hell can you hear a handful of muddy pools?
GEORGE: Wait till daylight. We'll try again.
TINY: Days is bloody hot. Don't want another one like yesterday.
MINNIE: It's a chance we take.
GEORGE: Anybody dream anything? Anything we could use?
DOT: I was in a warm bed.
GEORGE: That's no use.
DOT: I remember the feeling of blankets. It's nice when you get them snooked up round your ears.
MINNIE: Where's your guitar, Tiny?
DOT: Ja. I'd forgotten about your guitar.
TINY: Dunno.
MINNIE: Lost?
TINY: Fell offa lorry when we come here. Didn't stop for me to pick him up.
MINNIE: We could burn the pieces if we had them.
GEORGE: No. The warm bed's no good.
MINNIE: What do you want?
GEORGE: It isn't right.
MINNIE: It would be in this god-awful place.
ROSS: That long hair of yours should help a little.
MINNIE: You and your bloody hat. You should worry, eh!
(Turns to George.)
My legs are stiff. Numb. Pins and needles.
DOT: It's the stones here. They dig into your bones.
MINNIE: It's the sand. Feels like coal grit.
DOT: Maybe it is.
TINY: Hey Vic, got a smoke?
VIC: Where from?
TINY: Oh hell. Ross, got a smoke?
ROSS: No. *(Meanwhile he lights one up surreptitiously)*
TINY: Christ. Is awful. No smoke.

VIC: (to Dot) D'you think we'll see the sun today?

DOT: Ja, always do. You can't escape that. I'm getting dried out like biltong.

VIC: Worried?

DOT: (*thinking*) How about that! On our street with the sun came the morning milk. All along the milky way. Black men delivering white milk.

VIC: Forget it.

DOT: We entitled to remember anything we like.

GEORGE: Come on. Didn't anybody dream anything?

ROSS: Give us time.

MINNIE: You always say that.

ROSS: (*angry*) Well, give us time then.

DOT: You don't *know* what a dream is!

ROSS: Ah, shut up.

(*In the darkness, Tiny whistles "April in Portugal"*)

GEORGE: O come on, for God's sake. We can't begin the day like this.

VIC: Soon as the sun's up they can't remember anything.

DOT: Ja. Like every day was a blank. Every night you lie there and sukkel with things you'd like to forget.

GEORGE: You don't have to be so feeble.

ROSS: I'm pretty sick of it. How long have we been here, and what have we done! Except stick up a doorframe.

VIC: How's the fire?

ROSS: And I'm sick of you. Been wanting to say it for weeks. You evade everything.

VIC: I don't .

ROSS: You don't talk sense.

DOT: Leave him alone. He's not in your class. It was stupid of them to send us here with no plans. What can we do without plans?

(*She begins to rise and put on shoes and socks*)

GEORGE: We got more than most of the others. Five shovels, a pick, and a hammer. A doorframe.

MINNIE: Why didn't they send a door?

DOT: And nails?

ROSS: For what?

MINNIE: How can they expect us to make bricks?
GEORGE: In the stream.
ROSS: With mud and straw?
GEORGE: Why not? We can do what we like here. That's what they said.
ROSS: They only said it. I want it in writing.
DOT: What difference would it make?
GEORGE: I know a good place. We dig a pit next to the stream, and mix in a lot of clay and grass.
ROSS: And then?
DOT: Then we build. Isn't it a school?
MINNIE: A church.
DOT: No. It's a clinic.
ROSS: O Jesus!
MINNIE: Can you remember chloroform?
GEORGE: You tell me.
MINNIE: You said they told you to come here.
GEORGE: That's right. They gave me directions. Look, the endorsement clerk drew this picture for me.
(He produces a dirty piece of paper from his pocket and unfolds it and shows it to them.)
ROSS: Give here. *(He studies it in the firelight.)*
GEORGE: The lorry dumped us here, see. And then we walked.
ROSS: It doesn't make sense. This paper doesn't show anything.
GEORGE: I think that's the end of the road about a mile back.
ROSS: This is useless.
(He crumples up the paper and throws it into the fire. George rapidly retrieves it.)
GEORGE: One of these days I'm going to hit you, Ross.
ROSS: They made you boss-boy because you're simple minded. Falling for a load of crap like that!
DOT: Well, do you think they'll come back and see how we're getting on?
ROSS: And if they don't?
TINY: We leave all this shovels here and walk back.
GEORGE: It took four days to get here by lorry.

TINY: I walk it.

DOT: Oh ja!

GEORGE: And when you get there?

MINNIE: You're right.

GEORGE: He's not you know.

VIC: Can we make the coffee now?

DOT: Yes. Go and fill the saucepan, luvvie.

GEORGE: We are not going back!

(Vic goes off alone with the saucepan in the direction of the stream.)

DOT: That's better. We're making a little progress, George.

ROSS: My God, what words you kick about.

(Tiny whistles, again.)

MINNIE: Why did they say *this* place?

ROSS: Ask them!

TINY: We not seen no people since we got here.

ROSS: Go back to your Greek shop, Tiny.

TINY: *(highly indignant)* I Portuguese!

MINNIE: They ought to take some interest in us.

ROSS: An old man with a sheep. I've seen one person.

MINNIE: Speak to him? No, you wouldn't bother.

ROSS: No. All old men ever do is bum tobacco.

DOT: Well, it's up to us to make a start. Show 'em what we can do.

(She busies herself with the coffee and the fire.)

GEORGE: Everything begins somewhere.
Last place we were was much worse than this. Rocks everywhere. Boulders big as sheep. The nearest water was half a mile away, bottom of a donga. Ask Dot.

DOT: Ja. He's right.

GEORGE: Had to carry everything. But we build.

ROSS: What?

DOT: A long building with a zinc roof. Wasn't it a school?

GEORGE: Had pipes in it.

ROSS: A gas oven.

DOT: *(fed up)* Ah you . . .

ROSS: So the point is soon as you're finished they kicked you out. Anywhere. They don't care.

GEORGE: It's good to be busy. Better than that transit camp. All you heard all day long was people dying.

DOT: Ah you can't talk George. I'll bet the most you ever suffered was a lousy little room in a boarding house.

GEORGE: I had a good job as a foreman.

MINNIE: I had my own bathroom with thick blue carpets and a pale blue wash basin and bath. I'd like to sit on a nice lav again.

ROSS: Now you stink. Look at your hair Minnie.

MINNIE: I'd like to cut it off but I'm scared it won't grow again.
(Vic returns from the direction of the stream carrying a saucepan filled with water.)

VIC: Wonder if I got a frog in this lot. How's the fire?

TINY: Is a fine.

VIC: I was right after all. I heard a thrush at the stream.

TINY: How you know?

VIC: Can tell by the song.

TINY: Sing it.

VIC: *(pauses, thinks)* . . . I can't.
(The others laugh at him. Dot turns angrily towards him in an effort to protect Vic.)

DOT: Go and fetch some more wood, luvvie. *(Pause)*
My favourite dream is I'm a Arab merchant.

MINNIE: Ja. What d'you know about it?

DOT: Don't you like it Minnie?

MINNIE: Why must you be a Arab? What's wrong with what you used to be?

DOT: Dunno. I'm always a Arab.

GEORGE: Well, nobody's got any decent dreams.

DOT: What do you want, George?

GEORGE: Let's wake up Baarbe.
(Baarbe who has been sleeping all this time is shaken awake by George.)

BAARBE: What is it?

GEORGE: What were you dreaming?

BAARBE: I smell coffee.

TINY: Water she just on.

BAARBE: It's cold, eh? What time?
VIC: Nearly dawn.
BAARBE: Something happened?
VIC: No. Just getting ready for work.
GEORGE: What did you dream, Baarbe?
BAARBE: I don't remember.
GEORGE: Come on, Baarbe. We'll listen.
BAARBE: Let me sit up. Ja. Vel. What was I dreaming?
Something. O ja. Was very funny. I was in a
big church, lots of people listening to me talk, eh.
And I have special words for them. Ja, I was
telling a lecture on green.
TINY: On what?
BAARBE: On green.
MINNIE: The colour?
ROSS: You're mad.
MINNIE: My dream was better than that.
GEORGE: But yours never get us any further, Minnie. It's the
future we've got to find.
MINNIE: I regret the future.
GEORGE: That doesn't make sense.
MINNIE: I regret it that I'm not going to have milk with
my coffee.
GEORGE: Regret belongs to yesterday not tomorrow.
MINNIE: Always at this time
DOT: If the inspector hears you, Minnie, he'll clap you
inside.
MINNIE: For dreaming?
ROSS: At my trial they said I was responsible for my dreams.
TINY: I didn't have no trial. I can think what I like.
GEORGE: You'd better take it seriously, Tiny.
TINY: Ja sure. I want to eat, work, sleep, forget. You
keepa the dream. We finished.
GEORGE: It's important to remember everything. Then we
can map out the future.
DOT: Christ Jesus I'm sick of visions. All people ever had
was visions. And all these dreams of the whole world
— what they did was bugger me up. Trees don't
have dreams.

- TINY: Is right!
- ROSS: How do you expect us to remember when we don't even get enough to eat?
- DOT: Aah, let's get on with the coffee!
- GEORGE: We must keep discipline.
- ROSS: No George. That's just what they get you for. You're not supposed to have discipline or organisation. Just endurance and obedience.
- DOT: Ja (*thinking*) How's it go again . . . "At any time between sunrise and sunset, anyone found loafing shall be enjoyed to ten lashes by any officer who shall enjoy him to his ten lashes. By order!"
- ROSS: Christ! They don't even speak English.
- MINNIE: I'm so cold. I never thought it'd be like this. I was for them all the way.
- ROSS: Then it's your own damned fault.
- GEORGE: Shut up, Ross!
- MINNIE: Lend me your blanket Vic. If only I had that blue bathroom carpet life would be bearable.
- GEORGE: You haven't got it so you'd better lay off. Life must be bearable without your bloody carpet.
- MINNIE: It's not my fault I'm white. I was born in a blue bathroom.
- DOT: You're not white luvvie. You're dirty grey. Your hair's not even blond anymore. Looks like old tow rope.
- MINNIE: I haven't got a comb. I don't care. I just want to go home.
- GEORGE: You haven't got a home, Minnie. So just shut up! You want to break the lot of us? You know what that does. It's useless. We're here, and that's that.
- DOT: Ja, with five shovels, a pick, a hammer, a doorframe leading nowhere. And Georgie Porgie.
- GEORGE: We can build anything we like – hospital, school, church. Anything. Because it's all ours. They won't chase us off if we co-operate.
- MINNIE: You call that a choice? How can anyone live like this?
- GEORGE: What do you want? Think they'll send *you* back to the suburbs? You want to be a washgirl or a nanny?
- DOT: Give me a Singer sewing machine.
- MINNIE: (*crying*) Yes. I want my Singer sewing machine.

GEORGE: Bloody women.

VIC: Listen. I was living with my sister and her kids and a old school teacher and his family. Ten of us in one room. We emptied dustbins. Got rations for it so it were a good job. Had to walk six miles to work every day, and back again at night. No time off. Sundays as well. At night it were awful. The gangs was running everything. If you didn't pay protection rations they took the women away, or they beat you up. It wasn't any good for the teacher. He hanged himself from a tree with a piece of electric wire.

MINNIE: And you just left your sister? Sis.

VIC: What must I do? Soon as you open your mouth you lost your teeth.

DOT: We're awful. We don't even talk English any more. We talk a sort of a dustbin language.

GEORGE: That's why we got to start again and remember. Everything we learned at school.

MINNIE: "The curfew told the knell of parting day."

VIC: Told it what?

MINNIE: I dunno. I forgot.

DOT: English is a dead language — like us.

BAARBE: I remembers . . .

VIC: Can you remember Latin?

BAARBE: Ja. Amo, amas, amat . . .

DOT: Nobody knows what you are talking about.

BAARBE: I love, you love, he loves.

ROSS: The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

GEORGE: Stop it. That's not what we must remember. We must remember the other things. Things that are really us.

TINY: Like a what, eh?

ROSS: Look at us, for God's sake, We aren't *anything!* We don't matter to anybody!

GEORGE: We'll never get nowhere if you talk like that. They gave us this bit of ground. That's a start.

ROSS: That's the end.

GEORGE: It's a start. Stage two, we build something.

MINNIE: A blue bathroom.

GEORGE: No. A school. We've got to teach ourselves.

(He walks over to the shovels by the doorframe.)

MINNIE: And who's coming to your school? One, two, three, four, five six, seven people. For what?

GEORGE: *(angry)* To learn. You've got to believe in *something*.

MINNIE: What for? Where's the coffee?

VIC: Boiling.

DOT: You talk too much, Minnie.

MINNIE: Come on. *Dish up*. I'm freezing.

(Dot takes the water off the fire and pours it into the tins which she previously has put coffee and sugar into, stirs them, and passes them around.)

TINY: I rather work than go to school. My papa she got vegetables garden. I was work there a long time, but I no go to school.

BAARBE: Nothing to eat?

(They stare at him.)

GEORGE: Drink your bloody coffee.

TINY: Hey Vic. You say you hear the bird.

VIC: Ja.

TINY: We can eat a bird. When I was boy we shoot doves in vegetables garden and to cook them.

DOT: You can't eat a bird. There's not enough meat on it to fill an eggcup.

TINY: I'm hungry.

VIC: We're not killing it. I like its singing.

TINY: I more important than birds. I going to catch it.

VIC: No you're not.

TINY: You want to stop me eh?

GEORGE: *(angrily, breaking them up)* Knock it off. You know you couldn't catch it if you tried. In your hands? Drink your coffee and shut up. *(Pause)* Won't be long to sunrise. Who's on shovels today? *(Four of them put up their hands)* Only four? *(Dot reluctantly raises her hand)* Ja. Think I forgot you? I remember everything, see.

BAARBE: What was I dreaming? You can't remember that.

GEORGE: Yes I can. You were making a speech.

BAARBE: Go on.

GEORGE: You didn't tell me any more.

DOT: It was about green.
BAARBE: Yes. That's right. You want to hear the rest, George?
MINNIE: As long as its not about nice things.
BAARBE: It was a secret. I had a special secret with a name for it. Or two names.
MINNIE: What?
BAARBE: Two words. I think if I use these words I will change everything. I know what they mean and I am going to tell everybody who is here what the words mean.

DOT: You're nuts!
GEORGE: Listen to him, Dot.
BAARBE: I'm talking to them and I've got a secret in two words — ZEITBLOM and ZAFBLOM.
MINNIE: What the hell's that?
DOT: Ssh!
VIC: It's Afrikaans.
BAARBE: ZEITBLOM and ZAFBLOM.
VIC: Afrikaans. I'm sure of it.
DOT: No. There were no words like that in Afrikaans.
GEORGE: So what does it mean?
BAARBE: To hands, or a green flower. I say those words and everything is changed. Ja. You see.

(He gets up and walks toward the fence, stretching and scratching, and gazing pensively into space, and returns smiling almost to himself.)

What was it again. Oh ja. There was a boy, and a bird. A small boy, and he was by a lake, a huge smooth lake, with tall green trees and lush green grass — and he was making things, moulding the clay in his hands. And he made himself a bird from the clay, and he took the bird, and he gently threw it up, and it flew, and it flew away. It was free. Ja. Free.

GEORGE: Baarbe, that's beautiful. What is it?
BAARBE: It was my dream.
DOT: *(Cutting them)* No, its no good!
GEORGE: We must keep trying.

(Baarbe comes back and sits down.)

ROSS: It's not a message. Doesn't make sense.

MINNIE: Why must everything make sense?
ROSS: It sounded like a fairy story.
MINNIE: I like fairy stories. But I can never remember them.
GEORGE: We never had such a bad start as this.
DOT: Does it matter what we fish out of the dark? It's always us. Always only us.
GEORGE: We must get something in our hands.
ROSS: Like what?
TINY: Why you a not leave a us alone eh?
MINNIE: Yes. It'll be all right. Next week the lorry will come. Bring us some rations. We'll go on working. Why do you want to change everything? We're finished. Beated.
GEORGE: (*angrily*) When the going was good you didn't want to change either.
MINNIE: I want to die. I'm not a human being any more.
GEORGE: Well I am. You can take everything away but I'm still a human being. I'm human till I'm dead. And even then I'm human.
ROSS: You're not a human being unless you're in a position to convince *them* that you are. And you don't convince anyone.
DOT: He convinces me.
GEORGE: I'm not going to give up. Not for you. Not for anyone.
ROSS: Well what can *we* do? Re-make the world with five shovels, a pick and a hammer?
GEORGE: Yes. We can.
ROSS: You don't know when you've lost, do you?
MINNIE: I know I'm not even human any more.
GEORGE: (*very angry*) You *are* human!
MINNIE: Oh, look at me. What do you see? You just told me my face is dirty. And my hair? And between my legs? Call these clothes? And I'm hungry. I'd do anything for anybody if he gave me a bath.
GEORGE: That doesn't count. We all sell our souls. That makes us human. It's when you don't care at all, that's the end.
MINNIE: I don't want to be human. I want to be clean.
(*Tiny whistles*).

VIC: Have some more coffee, Minnie.

TINY: Hey Ross, you say you see man with sheep eh?

ROSS: Yes.

TINY: Where?

ROSS: Just below the stream.

TINY: We can eat a that sheep.

ROSS: That was a week ago.

DOT: Sis!

TINY: Why?

DOT: I'm ashamed of you.

TINY: I buy it from him.

DOT: What with. You haven't got a bean. You want to steal it.

TINY: Yes. I hungry. Don't you understand? I hungry.

DOT: We're all hungry. Stealing won't help us.

GEORGE: Can't you get it into your bloody manure-ridden head? This way we're free.

TINY: Free to starve. Free to die.

(George has jumped up to Tiny who flashes a knife he has been whittling wood with.)

GEORGE: Those are real choices.

TINY: You crazy. If you only free to starve, you not free. We starve because they eat. Like pigs. Porkho.

GEORGE: You want to be vermin again? Rummage on their garbage heaps? Hunger will never drive me back to that. I've had enough.

TINY: Go on then. Starve. I'm leaving. I going to find that man and her sheep and eat it. And if she won't give it to me I take it, see.

GEORGE: You don't come back here, see. We don't want you. They'll find out what you did and arrest us all. If you go, you go – you don't come back here! We don't want you!

TINY: Who's going to find out?

GEORGE: I am. I struggled for ten years to get this chance.

TINY: You like a being in hell!

GEORGE: Yes. I can live here.

TINY: You keep your hell. No music. No food. You not speak my language even.

DOT: Nobody speaks your language anymore. You know that.

TINY: Orright! I going back to town. Friday nights can walk through town and smell a bit of life. Look in the cafes, see the cars on the street. See the rich people shopping. Sometimes you get a parcel you carry for five cents. Five cents is *food*. Is all right. Is me. The life is there even if she is not for me. All you got here is rock and sand and dirty water. And the sun all day like a big stupid pumpkin. Nothing she wants to grow here. How can I to live where there nothing else wants to grow?

GEORGE: I got nothing more to say.

TINY: All right. I going before is too hot and I forget. Goodbye, eh.

(Nobody answers him)

You not want to say the goodbye?

BAARBE: Wait George, you can't let him go.

(Ross gets up)

GEORGE: I don't give a damn.

ROSS: Wait a minute Tiny. I'm coming with you.

GEORGE: No Ross! Why *you* going?

ROSS: I'm going, George. Nothing will ever grow here.

MINNIE: Go away you bloody pigs. *(Runs to front stage)*

DOT: *(Chasing after Minnie)* Minnie!

MINNIE: I hope they catch you and you die. Cowards. Bloody cowards.

(Baarbe comes forward and comforts Minnie and leads her back to the fire. Dot remains out in front.)

BAARBE: It's no use. We shall never find them in the dark. Drink your coffee Minnie. You know I got a daughter like you. Every morning before breakfast she used to play the piano. Made the world a little beautiful. She was just like you.

MINNIE: People like me make the world ugly.

BAARBE: No. You say what you think.

MINNIE: What happened to her? Your daughter?

BAARBE: They took her away. Two years ago.

MINNIE: They took her away?

- BAARBE: Ja. Like you. Somebody took her away. Perhaps she is also somewhere . . .
- DOT: O God, Baarbe. Let's talk about something else. We're like a lot of old crocks talking away.
- MINNIE: What was her name?
- BAARBE: Gina. Regina. She's twenty four now.
- DOT: How can you remember birthdays when you don't even know what day of the week it is?
- BAARBE: Just before the apricot blossom.
- MINNIE: *(Jumping up and running in the direction where Tiny and Ross left.)* Bloody pigs. Bloody selfish pigs.
- (she sits down crying with frustration.)*
- (George returns from having chased after Tiny and Ross, much out of breath.)*
- GEORGE: It's no good. At least they didn't take anything.
- DOT: Don't apologise for them, George.
- GEORGE: They could've pinched our food. Tiny is very strong.
- DOT: Jesus. That all you got to say?
- MINNIE: *(taunting George)* Why didn't you knock 'em down eh? Answer me! Why didn't you knock 'em down? Because you a coward. You a bloody coward.
- (George gets to his feet and slaps her in the face and she falls.)*
- GEORGE: Shut up. You don't understand anything. You don't even want to talk sense. You think it's easy for me. You think I wanted them to go?
- DOT: *(coming across and comforting Minnie)* Easy, sweetheart. George is just as dom as the rest of us. We all bloody dom. 'S not his fault.
- MINNIE: Well whose fault is it then?
- BAARBE: They must be in the valley now.
- VIC: The patrol's going to catch them. They got dogs.
- DOT: How do you know?
- VIC: I seen them.
- BAARBE: It's still dawn. Perhaps they'll hide away somewhere and go on tonight. Nobody knows they are gone. Only us.
- GEORGE: You trying to help them, Baarbe?
- DOT: Can it, George.

MINNIE: No. Go on.

GEORGE: Doesn't matter what they do. They got Parish 641 burnt in their skins just like the rest of us. Like a lot of vrot oranges with names and numbers stamped on 'em.

DOT: Tiny is clever. Perhaps they won't even find them.

GEORGE: You know what will happen. Sooner or later they'll pick 'em up. And they'll come back here with them. A big green truck and soldiers with guns. "Pick up your bloody rubbish and get in." And they'll drive us back to that transit camp. I worked for ten years to get this. Ten miserable, stinking years. And they've gone and bugged it all up.

MINNIE: (*calmer*) Why didn't you stop them, then?

BAARBE: Can we stop the stars from going out?

MINNIE: You didn't even try to talk with them.

GEORGE: I thought they understood.

DOT: Understood what?

GEORGE: That we meant something, together, all of us.

BAARBE: Yes. We do.

GEORGE: No. It's a lie. I thought I was O.K. if I got a bundle of grass or a pot of clean water. If I made a few bricks I made something. This time, I thought, they won't take it away.

DOT: You were wrong, that's all. Anybody can be wrong.

BAARBE: We are only building our graves, George.

MINNIE: And there won't be anybody to pick flowers for them.

(*Vic has been standing some way out of the firelight, keeping the watch.*)

VIC: It's getting lighter.

DOT: Can you see them?

VIC: Remember those ruins we passed, half a day from here.

DOT: Ja.

VIC: Must be a old farmhouse.

BAARBE: I remember.

VIC: They'll go for there.

DOT: Ja. Imagine what they'll find.

GEORGE: Nothing.

- DOT: Maybe a few books.
- GEORGE: Books is no good to them.
- DOT: No good to anyone. Be happier if we couldn't even speak, let alone read.
Used to be I'd welcome the sun. Chased away the night and bad memories. I used to love the new day. Getting up, bathing, breakfast with my cat, get into the old chorrie and drive off to school. I had a classroom full of pictures and flowers and shells. All the things kids loved about the world. I used to read all night long cause I couldn't sleep. I hated the dark.
Now its the sun.
The old sunny boy, it does me in. Seems to me at night all the words I ever knew come limping back across the dry grass.
- MINNIE: I'm cold.
- DOT: Once the stars were so clear, they could've carried us through the next day.
- VIC: Yesterday my shovel was so hot I got blisters.
- DOT: Mine was heavy too.
- BAARBE: My hands wêre like these stones.
- MINNIE: So what's the point of it? I don't understand you people. What are you trying to do? You just talk and talk.
- DOT: Nothing else we *can* do.
- MINNIE: It doesn't help me.
- DOT: 'Cause you don't listen sweetheart. You're too angry to listen.
- MINNIE: I listen. All the time I listen. And what I hear is words, and they don't make sense. And they don't stop me shivering.

(George endeavours to build up the fire by putting a few more sticks and twigs on.)

- MINNIE: You shouldn't do that. They'll see us.
- GEORGE: Who?
- MINNIE: The patrols.
- GEORGE: They know we are here Minnie.
- MINNIE: They'll see us.
- GEORGE: It's not for them. It's for Tiny and Ross.

(Minnie jumps up and kicks the fire to pieces.)

MINNIE: (*viciously*) Then they can get lost. They can bloody well get lost.

DOT: (*grabbing Minnie*) Minnie! Its *good* if they come back. It means no trouble for us.

MINNIE: They were going home.

DOT: Minnie. They got no home.

MINNIE: They're going home. Next week they'll be laughing their heads off at us.

DOT: Minnie. You don't listen.

MINNIE: They'll go to bioscope again.

DOT: O God, I give up.

MINNIE: (*exaltedly*) In bioscope it's dark and warm. There was a super flick once. They lived out in the country, just this ole man and his daughter on a farm. And this robber come along, least they thought it was a robber but he was really good. And they used to sit down in a kitchen and eat real food on a clean tablecloth. And she were doing all the cooking and wore pretty clothes.

(*A silence. They wait for her pathetic memory to run itself out.*)

She saved the outlaw.

(*They are still silent.*)

He loved her. Do you hear me? He loved her!

(*She breaks down and cries bitterly.*)

DOT: (*kneeling beside her comforting her*) Minnie. When you are as old as I am . . . (*She doesn't finish her sentence.*)

BAARBE: What.

DOT: Nothing. You forget. It's easy.

VIC: I remember one lunch time, I went into our yard. First thing I see was the sky, high, thin clouds, lots of them all over, and everything was still and hot. And I see our maid. She was sitting down, and I said, "Funny sky, eh?" and she said, "Someone is die, master?" I remember that. I dunno why.

DOT: Because something is die.

MINNIE: Let's go George. I'll pack up our things.

GEORGE: And them?

MINNIE: Tiny and Ross are gone. Why not us?

GEORGE: (*Pointing to Vic, Baarbe and Dot*) What about them?

MINNIE: They won't mind. You understand don't you, Baarbe? You understand?

BAARBE: What must I say?

MINNIE: Dot?

(Dot bends down and looks away, avoiding Minnie's pleading look.)

Vic?

(Vic gets up too but doesn't look at her. He moves away from the fire and stares into the distance.)

Vic! I'm talking to you.

(Minnie senses a victim.)

Vic!!

(Vic is suddenly all attention. He has heard something out in the dark and communicates this sense to the others, even to Minnie.)

VIC: Hey!

GEORGE: What is it?

VIC: Listen.

GEORGE: What?

VIC: Shouting. Someone's running.

(The others join Vic and try to hear something.)

MINNIE: I can't hear anything.

GEORGE: Ssh!

DOT: Dogs?

VIC: No. Shouting.

GEORGE: *(Gripping Vic)* For God's sake. What was that?

VIC: A shot.

MINNIE: O no.

VIC: A rifle shot.

BAARBE: The shouting has stopped.

MINNIE: Why can't I hear anything?

DOT: They're dead.

VIC: There was only one shot.

MINNIE: Who?

GEORGE: Only one shot. Jesus, it's quiet.

MINNIE: *(laughing, wildly, madly)* I told them. I told them.

(She collapses, laughing, sobbing, in a heap by the fire. They leave her alone this time and stand awed on the other side of the fire. Vic remains watching.)

GEORGE: *(going to Baarbe)* So it's the end eh? I mean, it's tickets; eh? So what're we going to do? *(worried)* Baarbe, what are we going to do?

BAARBE: *(shaking his head, he speaks almost in a whisper)* I don't know.

DOT: Hide.

GEORGE: Where?

DOT: In the mudholes.

GEORGE: They'd find us anywhere.

BAARBE: Pack up.

GEORGE: What?

BAARBE: Pack up. Sit and wait.

GEORGE: No.

BAARBE: *(puts his arm around George's shoulders)* George. You don't understand.

(Vic, who has been watching in the darkness, is suddenly alert again.)

VIC: Hey! Hey! There's somebody coming.

GEORGE: What!!

VIC: Somebody running. I can hear him. Keeps stumbling.

GEORGE: One of them's got away. Coming back here.

DOT: Coming back. Why?

GEORGE: Ssh!
(to Vic) What can you see?

VIC: Only shadows. I think. No. He's shouting. Calling.

DOT: What's he saying?

VIC: It's Ross.

DOT: It's Ross. O my God, it's Ross.

(They all move back to the fire, apprehensively. Ross enters panting, gasping for breath, carrying Tiny on his shoulders. He struggles monumentally to keep standing because he knows even here he may not be wanted. Ross stands, and stares at them while he struggles for his breath.) (They stare at each other for a long time until George bursts out angrily.)

GEORGE: Why you come back here? You got our death warrant.

MINNIE: Get out of here.

GEORGE: We don't want you anymore, Ross. You wanted to go back. Well you can bloody well go back.

MINNIE: This is *our* place.

GEORGE: *Our* place.

DOT: Wait, something's wrong.

(Dot runs to the front as Ross drops the body of Tiny on the ground. She kneels over the body examining the blood from the wound, as George moves over towards Ross with the pick raised ready to strike him.)

GEORGE: I know what's wrong. I always wanted to clobber you Ross. You can bloody well get out. Go on. Get out. Voetsak! Pig shit!

(Ross makes no response. He is still exhausted. Baarbe walks up to George and removes the pick as George raises it behind his shoulder to strike.)

GEORGE: Let go! Let go!

BAARBE: *(shouting)* Stop it! George! What are you trying to do?

GEORGE: Let go Baarbe please. I'm warning you!

(Baarbe has the pick. George's anger and courage are showing up as wavering and watery, faltering.)

BAARBE: *(having got the pick, stands between George and Ross.)*

I am old. Easy to kill. It doesn't mean anything to *you* that we are still human beings. You have just thrown everything away, like rotten seed. Here animal! Here *(offering the pick)*

GEORGE: Get out of my way, Baarbe. I can't wait much longer.

BAARBE: Good! Then I will stay in your way. You are afraid now. Aren't you?

GEORGE: He's wrecked my life.

BAARBE: *(shouting)* Yes. Yes. He's wrecked your life. I'm sorry for you. And when a baby can't get what he wants he looks like you, George. Got an ugly mouth. He thinks he's the *only* person in the whole world. Show me why *you* are innocent, George.

MINNIE: What have we done?

BAARBE: Good. Ask yourself that, Minnie. But I want George to answer.

GEORGE: We done nothing.

BAARBE: So ja. Nothing. We all done nothing. We are *all* innocent?

GEORGE: No. We're not *all* innocent.

MINNIE: *We* are.

BAARBE: You are right, George. We are not all innocent. *You're* not. *I'm* not.

GEORGE: I'm innocent.

DOT: (*crouched over the body, looks up and shouts*)
He's dead!

(*Ross simply stares at her, uncomprehending and dazed. It is clear that something happened to him out there.*)

BAARBE: Ross. Listen to me. What happened?

DOT: Where's the patrol?

BAARBE: Why did you leave us, Ross? Why?

ROSS: This is not a prison camp.

BAARBE: No.

ROSS: But it is! In here. (*tapping his forehead*)

BAARBE: I know.

ROSS: Then if you felt it, why didn't you come with us? I mean — it doesn't make sense, Baarbe. Everyone is so pleased because he's got a purpose. A purpose God! A monstrous will.

BAARBE: Those are bitter words.

ROSS: What *are* we?

BAARBE: We've all got to die.

ROSS: You remember the sea? What it was like to walk on a beach? Your feet crunching the shells and bones of a million dead things. Why did they live? For us to walk on?

BAARBE: Yet, for us to walk on. But with our shoes off, barefoot, so we *know* what these things feel.

ROSS: Because we are also shells. Sea-garbage.

BAARBE: Why are you so bitter?

ROSS: No Baarbe. The questions stop there. No more questions allowed.

BAARBE: Yes — One more is allowed. Tiny was also a shell. What did he want for us to walk on him? He was rubbish too?

ROSS: I was scared, Baarbe. O God, I was suddenly scared. I've never been scared. Not of anything living. Not of the patrols and their bloody dogs. I was walking behind Tiny. And I was alone; just the smell of salt bush. And suddenly I was *nowhere*, Baarbe. Do you understand? I wasn't *going* anywhere! I was lost!

Then the patrol saw us, shouted, "Stop! Where are you going?" That was the question. Just the right question, Baarbe.

Tiny was pulling my hand. "Come on," he said. We stumbled into a donga. He was close. Then there was a shot. Only one. And he gripped my hand, hard, and fell into my arms, shaking.

DOT: (*collapsing again onto the body with sobs*) Oh no!

ROSS: He was crying like a baby. He was holding on to me, like he was afraid of drowning. "Go back," he said. "You come too," I said. "No, you go" he says, "I can't move." So I picked him up and started to run up the donga. I didn't know where I was going.

DOT: Didn't you see our fire?

BAARBE: You came back to us.

ROSS: Where else must I go?

BAARBE: Nowhere.

ROSS: And he's dead.

GEORGE: We're all dead, now.

DOT: What if the patrol finds him here?

GEORGE: You wouldn't listen to me, I don't care.

DOT: Well I do care. We must hide him, fast.

GEORGE: You can't hide that!

BAARBE: No. But we can bury him.

DOT: How?

BAARBE: In the foundation.

DOT: Well come on.

BAARBE: Help us, George.

GEORGE: No.

ROSS: (*coming up to George*) Look, I know what you're feeling. I'm trying to tell you something. Anger doesn't help. I was angry. But you go out there, and face *that*, that night when you're all alone and you see nothing makes sense.

- GEORGE: Leave me alone. You wouldn't listen.
- DOT: Why don't you listen? He's trying to tell you, George. We *can't* leave each other alone.
- BAARBE: Come on. It's getting light. I can see it coming now. We must bury him at once. Help me.
- (Baarbe, Ross and Vic lift Tiny and place him on the tarpaulin and walk over to the trench by the doorframe and put him down. They pick up the shovels and begin to shovel on some gravel)*
- (The dawn light is just beginning to brighten. George doesn't bother to look. He and Minnie are huddled together.)*
- ROSS: We ought to say something.
- DOT: What's there to say.
- BAARBE: What I was thinking. When they built the great wall of China they had thousands of workmen. Slaves. People who didn't matter to anyone. And when they died they were thrown into the foundations, mixed up with the sand and stones. They just built them into the wall. On and on. And when the wall broke in a few places the archaeologists dug about because they didn't believe what was written down. But it was true.
- DOT: Ja. We're no different.
- BAARBE: No. We're no different. You, me, Ross, Vic, George, Minnie. Perhaps Minnie most of all because she cannot understand. Always they build us into their great walls, crush us to pieces like sea-shells, walk on us with their nailed boots. 'Cause life is cheap. But what we mean is not cheap.
- DOT: Nobody cares, or even knows. Who's left to care about what we mean?
- BAARBE: Someone will remember. Always, someone will remember. In the end, nobody will forget us. As we can never forget those bones, like seeds, in the Great Wall of China.
- ROSS: Tiny remembered something.
- DOT: Tiny?
- ROSS: I think he saw this place like it was green everywhere.
- DOT: Ja, and himself sitting under a tree playing his guitar.
- ROSS: Now it's all smashed.
- BAARBE: No. The dream is not smashed. We can remember that.

- DOT: Funny eh? I can almost smell wet earth. Wasn't a bad dream was it Baarbe?
- BAARBE: All dreams are good, when you can understand them. I once dreamed I was playing a violin in a great concert hall, and when I finished a beautiful woman came up to me and said, "Thank you. You saved my life."
- DOT: That's funny, eh?
- BAARBE: You think I'm any different from the rest of you?
- DOT: No. It's just nice to hear you say it, that's all.
- BAARBE: Ja. To say it. How to say it. The seeds we planted years ago – and the fields are already white with the harvest.
- DOT: Go on!
- BAARBE: What must I say? My head is full of nonsense. I can't remember. A few phrases. A man can carry comfort in his hands. Only a man's hands. The same he holds up to count the stars. Thousands and thousands of stars.
- DOT: I'm afraid.
- BAARBE: Yes. We all afraid, now.

EXEUNT.

BOLT No. 8

*New poems from: Stephen Gray
Mike Nicol*

Fiction: Christopher Hope

John Torres *on* **Reinaldo Ferreira**

Reviews

Mike Kirkwood *Eva Royston*
on Peter Porter *A new book on Roy Campbell.*

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NOBEL PRIZE ADDRESS

The Full Text

Just as that puzzled savage who has picked up – a strange cast-up from the ocean – something unearthed from the sands – or an obscure object fallen down from the sky – intricate in curves, it gleams first fully and then with a bright thrust of light. Just as he turns it this way and that, turns it over, trying to discover what to do with it, trying to discover some mundane function within his own grasp, never dreaming of its higher function.

So also we, holding art in our hands, confidently consider ourselves to be its masters; boldly we direct it, we renew, reform and manifest it; we sell it for money, use it to please those in power; turn to it at one moment for amusement – right down to popular songs and night clubs, and at another – grabbing the nearest weapon, cork or cudgel – for the passing needs of politics and for narrow-minded social ends. But art is not defiled by our efforts, neither does it thereby depart from its true nature. But on each occasion and in each application it gives to us a part of its secret inner light.

But shall we ever grasp the whole of that light? Who will dare to say that he has defined art, enumerated all its facets? Perhaps once upon a time someone understood and told us, but we could not remain satisfied with that for long; we listened, and neglected, and threw it out there and then, hurrying as always to exchange even the very best – if only for something new! And when we are told again the old truth, we shall not even remember that we once possessed it.

One artist sees himself as the creator of an independent spiritual world; he hoists onto his shoulders the task of creating this world, of peopling it and of bearing the all-embracing responsibility for it; but he crumples beneath it, for a mortal genius is not capable of bearing such a burden. Just as man in general, having declared himself the centre of existence, has not succeeded in creating a balanced spiritual system. And if misfortune overtakes him, he casts the blame upon the age-long disharmony of the world, upon the complexity of today's ruptured soul, or upon the stupidity of the public.

Another artist, recognizing a higher power above, gladly works as a humble apprentice beneath God's heaven; then however, his responsibility or everything that is written or drawn, for the souls which perceive his work, is more exacting than ever. But, in return, it is not he who has created this world, not he who directs it, there is no doubt as to its foundation; the artist has merely to be more keenly aware than others of the harmony of the world, of the beauty and ugliness of the human contribution to it, and to communicate this acutely to his fellow-men. And in misfortune, and even at the depths of existence – in destitution, in prison, in sickness – his sense of stable harmony never deserts him.

But all the irrationality of art, its dazzling turns, its unpredictable discoveries, its shattering influence on human beings – they are too full of magic to be exhausted by this artist's vision of the world, by his artistic conception or by the work of his unworthy fingers.

Archeologists have not discovered stages of human existence so early that they were without art. Right back in the early morning twilights of mankind we received it from hands which we were too slow to discern. And we were too slow to ask: For what purpose have we been given this gift? What are we to do with it?

And they were mistaken, and will always be mistaken, who prophesy that art will disintegrate, that it will outlive its forms and die. It is we who shall die – art will remain. And shall we comprehend, even on the day of our destruction, all its facets and all its possibilities?

Not everything assumes a name. Some things lead beyond words. Art inflames even a frozen, darkened soul to a high spiritual experience. Through art we are sometimes visited – dimly, briefly – by revelations such as cannot be produced by national thinking.

Like that little looking-glass from the fairy-tales: Look into it and you will see – not yourself – but for one second, the inaccessible, whither no man can ride, no man fly. And only the soul gives a groan . . .

One day Dostoevski threw out the enigmatic remark: "Beauty will save the world." What sort of a statement is that? For a long time I considered it mere words. How could that be possible? When in bloodthirsty history did beauty ever save anyone from anything? Ennobled, uplifted, yes – but whom has it saved?

There is, however, a certain peculiarity in the essence of beauty, a peculiarity in the status of art: Namely, the convincingness of a true work of art is completely irrefutable and it forces even an opposing heart to surrender. It is possible to compose an outwardly smooth and elegant political speech, a headstrong article, a social program, or a philosophical system on the basis of both a mistake and a lie. What is hidden, what distorted, will not immediately become obvious.

Then a contradictory speech, article, program, a different constructed philosophy rallies in opposition – and all just as elegant and smooth and once again it works. Which is why such things are both trusted and mistrusted.

In vain to reiterate what does not reach the heart.

But a work of art bears within itself its own verification; conceptions which are devised or stretched to not stand being portrayed in images, they all come crashing down, appear sickly and pale, convince no one. But those works of art which have

scooped up the truth and presented it to us as a living force. They take hold of us, compel us, and nobody ever, not even in ages to come, will appear to refute them.

So perhaps that ancient trinity of truth, goodness and beauty is not simply an empty, faded formula as we thought in the days of our self-confident, materialistic youth? If the tops of these three trees converge, as the scholars maintained, but the too blatant, too direct stems of truth and goodness are crushed, cut down, not allowed thought – then perhaps the fantastic, unpredictable, unexpected stem of beauty will push through and soar to that very same place, and in so doing will fulfill the work of all three?

In that case Dostoevski's remark, "beauty will save the world," was not a careless phrase but a prophecy? After all he was granted to see much, a man of fantastic illumination.

And in that case art, literature, might really be able to help the world today?

It is the small insight which, over the years, I have succeeded in gaining into this matter that I shall attempt to lay before you here today.

In order to mount this platform from which the Nobel lecture is read, a platform offered to far from every writer and only once in a lifetime, I have climbed not three or four makeshift steps, but hundreds and even thousands of them; unyielding, precipitous, frozen steps, leading out of the darkness and cold where it was my fate to survive, while others – perhaps with a greater gift and stronger than I – have perished. Of them, I myself met but a few on the archipelago of Gulag, shattered into its fractionary multitude of islands; and beneath the millstone of shadowing and mistrust I did not talk to them all, of some I only heard, of others still I only guessed.

Those who fell into that abyss already bearing a literary name are at least known, but how many were never recognized, never once mentioned in public? And virtually no one managed to return. A whole national literature remained there, cast into oblivion not only without a grave, but without even underclothes, naked, with a number tagged on to its toe. Russian literature did not cease for a moment, but from the outside it appeared a wasteland! Where a peaceful forest could have grown, there remained, after all the felling, two or three trees overlooked by chance.

And as I stand here today, accompanied by the shadows of the fallen, with bowed head allowing others who were worthy before to pass ahead of me to this place, as I stand here, how am I to divine and to express what they would have wished to say?

This obligation has long weighed upon us, and we have understood it. In the words of Vladimir Solv'ev:

*“Even in chains we ourselves must complete
That circle which the gods have mapped out for us.”*

Frequently, in painful camp seethings, in a column of prisoners, when chains of lanterns, pierce the gloom of the evening frost, there would well up inside us the words that we should like to cry out to the whole world if the whole world could hear one of us. Then it seemed so clear: What our successful ambassador would say, and how the world would immediately respond with its comment. Our horizon embraced quite distinctly both physical things and spiritual movements, and it saw no lopsidedness in the indivisible world. These ideas did not come from books, neither were they imported for the sake of coherence. They were formed in conversations with people now dead, in prison cells and by forest fires, they were tested against that life, they grew out of that existence.

When at last the outer pressure grew a little weaker, my and our horizon broadened and gradually, albeit through a minute chink, we saw and knew “the whole world”. And to our amazement the whole world was not at all as we had expected, as we had hoped; that is to say a world living “not by that”, a world leading “not there”, a world which could exclaim at the sight of a muddy swamp, “What a delightful little puddle!” At concrete necks stocks, “What an exquisite necklace!”, but instead a world where some weep inconsolable tears and others dance to a lighthearted musical.

How could this happen? Why the yawning gap? Were we insensitive? Was the world insensitive? Or is it due to language differences? Why is it that people are not able to hear each other’s every distinct utterance? Words cease to sound and run away like water – without taste, color, smell. Without trace.

As I have come to understand this, so through the years has changed and changed again the structure, content and tone of my potential speech. The speech I give today.

And it has a little in common with its original plan, conceived on frosty camp evenings.

From time immemorial man has been made in such a way that his vision of the world, so long as it has not been instilled under hypnosis, his motivations and scale of values, his actions and intentions are determined by his personal and group experience of life. As the Russian saying goes, “Do not believe your brother, believe your own crooked eye.” And that is the most sound basis for an understanding of the world around us and of human conduct in it. And during the long epochs when our world lay spread out in mystery and wilderness, before it became encroached by common lines of communication, before it was transformed into a single, convulsively pulsating lump – men, relying on experience, ruled without mishap within their limited areas, within their communities, within their societies, and finally on their national territories.

At that time it was possible for individual human beings to perceive and accept a general scale of values, to distinguish between what is considered normal, what incredible; what is cruel and what lies beyond the boundaries of wickedness; what is honesty, what deceit. And although the scattered peoples led extremely different lives and their social values were often strikingly at odds, just as their systems of weights and measures did not agree, still these discrepancies surprised only occasional travelers, were reported in journals under the name of wonders, and bore no danger to mankind which was not yet one.

But now during the past few decades, imperceptibly, suddenly mankind has become one — hopefully one and dangerously one — so that the concussions and inflammations of one of its parts are almost instantaneously passed on to others, sometimes lacking in any kind of necessary immunity. Mankind has become one, but not steadfastly one as communities or even nations used to be; not united through years of mutual experience, neither through possession of a single eye, affectionately called crooked, nor yet through a common native language, but, surpassing all barriers, through international broadcasting and print.

An avalanche of events descends upon us — in one minute half the world hears of their splash. But the yardstick by which to measure those events and to evaluate them in accordance with the laws of unfamiliar parts of the world — this is not and cannot be conveyed via sound waves and in newspaper columns. For these yardsticks were matured and assimilated over too many years of too specific conditions in individual countries and societies; they cannot be exchanged in mid-air. In the various parts of the world men apply their own hard-earned values to events, and they judge stubbornly, confidently, only according to their own scales of values and never according to any others.

And if there are not many such different scales of values in the world, there are at least several; one for evaluating events near at hand, another for events far away; aging societies possess one, your societies another; unsuccessful people one, successful people another. The divergent scales of values scream in discordance, they dazzle and daze us, and so that it might not be painful we steer clear of all other values, as though from insanity, as though from illusion, and we confidently judge the whole world according to our own home values. Which is why we take for the greater, more painful and less bearable disaster not that which is in fact greater, more painful, and less bearable, but that which lies closest to us. Everything which is further away, which does not threaten this very day to invade our threshold — with all its groans, its stifled cries, its destroyed lives, even if it involves millions of victims — this we consider on the whole to be perfectly bearable and of tolerable proportions.

In one part of the world, not so long ago, under persecutions not inferior to those of the ancient Romans, hundreds of thousands

of silent Christians gave up their lives for their belief in God. In the other hemisphere a certain madman (and no doubt he is not alone) speeds across the ocean to deliver us from religion — with a thrust of steel into the high priest! He has calculated for each and every one of us according to his personal scale of values!

That which from a distance, according to one scale of values, appears as enviable and flourishing freedom, at close quarters, and according to other values, is felt to be infuriating constraint calling for buses to be overthrown. That which in one part of the world might represent a dream of incredible prosperity, in another has the exasperating effect of wild exploitation demanding immediate strike. There are different scales of values for natural catastrophes: A flood craving two hundred thousand lives seems less significant than our local accident. There are different scales of values for personal insults: Sometimes even an ironic smile or a dismissive gesture is humiliating, while at others cruel beatings are forgiven as an unfortunate joke.

There are different scales of values for punishment and wickedness: According to one, a month's arrest, banishment to the country, or an isolation cell where one is fed on white rolls and milk, shatters the imagination and fills the newspaper columns with rage. While according to another, prison sentences of 25 years, isolation cells where the walls are covered in ice and the prisoners stripped to their underclothes, lunatic asylums for the sane, and countless unreasonable people who for some reason will keep running away, shot on the frontiers — all this is common and accepted. While the mind is especially at peace concerning that exotic part of the world about which we know virtually nothing, from which we do not even receive news of events, but only the trivial, out-of-date guesses of a few correspondents.

Yet we cannot reproach human vision for this duality, for this dumbfounded incomprehension of another man's distant grief, man is just made that way. But for the whole of mankind, compressed into a single lump, such mutual incomprehension presents the threat of imminent and violent destruction. One world, one mankind cannot exist in the face of six, four or even two scales of values: We shall be torn apart by this disparity of rhythm, this disparity of vibrations.

A man with two hearts is not for this world, neither shall we be able to live side by side on one earth.

But who will coordinate these value scales, and how? Who will create for mankind one system of interpretation, valid for good and evil deeds, for the unbearable and the bearable, as they are differentiated today? Who will make clear to mankind what is really heavy and intolerable and what only grazes the skin locally? Who will direct the anger to that which is most terrible and not to that which is nearer? Who might succeed in transferring such an understanding beyond the limits of his own

human experience? Who might succeed in impressing upon a bigoted, stubborn human creature the distant joy and grief of others, an understanding of dimensions and deceptions which he himself has never experienced? Propaganda, constraint, scientific proof – all are useless. But fortunately there does exist such a means in our world! That means is art. That means is literature!

They can perform a miracle: They can overcome man's detrimental peculiarity of learning only from personal experience so that the experience of other people passes him by in vain. From man to man, as he completes his brief spell on earth, art transfers the whole weight of an unfamiliar, life-long experience with all its burdens, its colours, its sap of life; it recreates in the flesh an unknown experience and allows us to possess it as our own.

And even more, much more than that; both countries and whole continents repeat each other's mistakes with time lapses which can amount to centuries. Then, one would think it would all be so obvious! But no; that which some nations have already experienced, considered and rejected, is suddenly discovered by others to be the latest word. And here again, the only substitute for an experience we ourselves have never lived through is art, literature. They possess a wonderful ability: Beyond distinctions of language, customs, social structure they can convey the life experience of one whole nation to another. To an inexperienced nation they can convey a harsh national trial lasting many decades, at best sparing an entire nation from superfluous, or mistaken, or even disastrous course, thereby shortening the meanderings of human history.

It is this great and noble property of art that I urgently recall to you today for the Nobel tribune.

And literature conveys irrefutable condensed experience in yet another invaluable direction; namely, from generation to generation. Thus it becomes the living memory of the nation. Thus it preserves and kindles within itself the flame of her spent history, in a form which is safe from deformation and slander. In this way literature, together with language, protects the soul of the nation.

(In recent times it has been fashionable to talk of the leveling out of nations, of the disappearance of different races in the melting pot of contemporary civilization. I do not agree with this opinion, but its discussion remains another question. Here it is merely fitting to say that the disappearance of nations would have impoverished us no less than if all men had become alike, with one personality and one face. Nations are the wealth of mankind, its collective personalities; the very least of them wears its own special colours and bears within itself a special facet of divine intention.)

But woe to that nation whose literature is disturbed by the intervention of power. Because that is not just a violation against

“freedom of print”, it is the closing down of the heart of the nation, a slashing to pieces of its memory. The nation ceases to be mindful of itself, it is deprived of its spiritual unity, and despite a supposedly common language, compatriots suddenly cease to understand one another. Silent generations grow old and die without ever having talked about themselves, either to each other or to their descendants. When such as Akhmatova and Zamiatin – interred alive throughout their lives – are condemned to create in silence until they die, never hearing the echo of their written words, then that is not only their personal tragedy, but a sorrow to the whole nation, a danger to the whole nation.

In some cases moreover – when as a result of such a silence the whole of history ceases to be understood in its entirety – it is a danger to the whole of mankind.

At various times and in various countries there have arisen heated, angry and exquisite debates as to whether art and the artist should be free to live for themselves, or whether they should be forever mindful of their duty towards society and serve it albeit in an unprejudiced way. For me there is no dilemma, but I shall refrain from raising once again the train of arguments. One of the most brilliant addresses on this subject was actually Albert Camus’ Nobel speech, and I would happily subscribe to his conclusions. Indeed Russian literature has for several decades manifested an inclination not to become too lost in contemplation of itself, not to flutter about too frivolously. I am not ashamed to continue this tradition to the best of my ability. Russian literature has long been familiar with the notions that a writer can do much within his society and that it is his duty to do so.

Let us not violate the right of the artist to express exclusively his own experiences and introspections, disregarding everything that happens in the world beyond. Let us not demand of the artist but – reproach, beg, urge and entice him – that we may be allowed to do. After all, only in part does he himself develop his talent; the greater part of it is blown into him at birth as a finished product, and the gift of talent imposes responsibility on his free will. Let us assume that the artist does not owe anybody anything: Nevertheless, it is painful to see how by retiring into his self-made worlds or the spaces of his subjective whims, he can surrender the real world into the hands of men who are mercenary, if not worthless, if not insane.

Our 20th century has proved to be more cruel than preceding centuries, and the last 50 years have not erased all its horrors. Our world is rent asunder by those same old cave age emotions of greed, envy, lack of control, mutual hostility which have picked up in passing respectable pseudonyms like class struggle, racial conflict, struggle of the masses, trade-union disputes. The primeval refusal to accept a compromise has been turned into a theoretical principle and is considered the virtue of orthodoxy. It demands millions of sacrifices in ceaseless civil wars, it drums

into our souls that there is no such thing as unchanging universal concepts of goodness and justice, that they are all fluctuating and inconstant. Therefore, the rule — always do what's more profitable to your party. Any professional group no sooner sees a convenient opportunity to break off a piece even if it be unearned, even if it be superfluous, then it breaks it off there and then and no matter if the whole of society comes tumbling down. As seen from the outside, the amplitude of the tossing of western society is approaching that point beyond which the system becomes metastable and must fall. Violence less and less embarrassed by the limits imposed by centuries of lawfulness, is brazenly and victoriously striding across the whole world, unconcerned that its infertility has been demonstrated and proved many times in history. What is more, it is not simply crude power that triumphs abroad, but its exultant justification. The world is being inundated by the brazen conviction that power can do anything, justice nothing.

Dostoevski's devils — apparently a provincial nightmare fantasy of the last century — are crawling across the whole world in front of our very eyes, infesting countries where they could not have been dreamed of; and by means of the hijackings, kidnappings, explosions and fires of recent years they are announcing their determination to shake and destroy civilization! And they may well succeed.

The young, at an age when they have not yet any experience other than sexual, when they do not yet have years of personal suffering and personal understanding behind them are jubilantly repeating our depraved Russian blunders of the 19th century, under the impression that they are discovering something new. They acclaim the latest wretched degradation on the part of the Chinese Red Guards as a joyous example. In shallow lack of understanding of the age-old essence of mankind, in the naive confidence of inexperienced hearts they cry: Let us drive away those cruel, greedy oppressors' governments and the new ones (We!) having laid aside grenades and rifles, will be just and understanding. Far from it! . . . But of those who have lived more and understand, those who could oppose these young, many do not dare oppose. They even suck up, anything not to appear "conservative". Another Russian phenomenon of the 19th century which Dostoevski called slavery to progressive quirks.

The spirit of Munich has by no means retreated into the past; it was not merely a brief episode. I even venture to say that the spirit of Munich prevails in the 20th century. The timid civilized world has found nothing with which to oppose the onslaught of a sudden revival of barefaced barbarity, other than concessions and smiles. The spirit of Munich is a sickness of the will of successful people, it is the daily condition of those who have given themselves up to the thirst after prosperity at any price, to material well-being as the chief goal of earthly existence. Such

people — and there are many in today's world — elect passivity and retreat, just so as their accustomed life might drag on a bit longer, just so as not to step over the threshold of hardship today — and tomorrow, you'll see it will all be all right. (But it will never be all right! The price of cowardice will only be evil; we shall reap courage and victory only when we dare to make sacrifices.)

And on top of this we are threatened by destruction in the fact that the physically compressed, strained world is not allowed to blend spiritually; the molecules of knowledge and sympathy are not allowed to jump over from one half to the other. This presents a rampant danger: The suppression of information between the parts of the planet. Contemporary science knows that suppression of information leads to entropy and total destruction. Suppression of information renders international signatures and agreements illusionary; within a muffled zone it costs nothing to reinterpret any agreement — even simpler to forget it, as though it had never really existed. (Orwell understood this supremely.) A muffled zone is as it were populated not by inhabitants of the earth, but by an expeditionary corps from Mars; the people know nothing intelligent about the rest of the earth and are prepared to go and trample it down in the holy conviction that they come as “liberators”.

A quarter of a century ago, in the great hopes of mankind, the United Nations Organization was born. Alas, in an immoral world, this too, grew up to be immoral. It is not a United Nations Organization but a united governments organization where all governments stand equal; those which are freely elected, those imposed forcibly, and those which have seized power with weapons. Relying on the mercenary practicality of the majority, the United Nations jealously guards the freedom of some nations and neglects the freedom of others. As a result of an obedient vote it declined to undertake the investigation of private appeals — the groans, screams and beseechings of humble individual plain people — not large enough a catch for such a great organization.

The United Nations made no effort to make the Declaration of Human Rights, its best document in 25 years, into an obligatory condition of membership confronting the governments. Thus it betrayed those humble people into the will of the governments which they had not chosen.

It would seem that the appearance of the contemporary world rests solely in the hands of the scientists; all mankind's technical steps are determined by them. It would seem that it is precisely on the international goodwill of scientists, and not of politicians, that the direction of the world should depend. All the more so since the example of the few shows how much could be achieved were they all to pull together. But no; scientists have not manifested any clear attempt to become an important, independently active force of mankind. They spend entire congresses in renouncing the sufferings of others; better to stay safely within the

precincts of science. That same spirit of Munich has spread above them its enfeebling wings.

What then is the place and role of the writer in this cruel, dynamic, split world on the brink of its own destruction? After all we have nothing to do with letting off rockets, we do not even push the lowliest of hand-carts, we are quite scorned by those who respect only material power. It is not natural for us to step back, to lose faith in the steadfastness of goodness, in the indivisibility of truth, and to just impart to the world our bitter, detached observations: How mankind has become hopelessly corrupt, how men have degenerated, and how difficult it is for the few beautiful and refined souls to live amongst them.

But we have not even recourse to this flight. Anyone who has once taken up the word can never again evade it; a writer is not the detached judge of his compatriots and contemporaries, he is an accomplice to all the evil committed in his native land or by his countrymen. And if the tanks of his fatherland have flooded the asphalt of a foreign capital with blood, then the brown spots have slapped against the face of the writer forever. And if one fatal night they suffocated his sleeping, trusting friend, then the palms of the writer bear the bruises from that rope. And if his young fellow citizens breezily declare the superiority of depravity over honest work, if they give themselves over to drugs or seize hostages, then their stink mingles with the breath of the writer.

Shall we have the temerity to declare that we are not responsible for sores of the present day world?

However, I am cheered by a vital awareness of world literature as of a single huge heart, beating out the cares and troubles of our world, albeit presented and perceived differently in each of its corners.

Apart from age-old national literatures there existed, even in past ages, the conception of world literature as an anthology skirting the heights of the national literatures, and as the sum total of mutual literary influences. But there occurred a lapse in time: Readers and writers became acquainted with writers of other tongues only after a time lapse, sometimes lasting centuries, so that mutual influences were also delayed and the anthology of national literary heights was revealed only in the eyes of descendants, not of contemporaries.

But today, between the writers of one country and the writers and readers of another, there is a reciprocity if not instantaneous then almost so. I experience this with myself. Those of my books which, alas, have not been printed in my own country have soon found a responsive, world-wide audience, despite hurried and often bad translations. Such distinguished western writers as Heinrich Böll have undertaken critical analysis of them. All these last years, when my work and freedom have not come crashing down, when contrary to the laws of gravity they have hung sus-

pended as though on nothing — on the indivisible dumb tension of a sympathetic public membrane; then it was with grateful warmth, and quite unexpectedly for myself, that I learned of the further support of the international brotherhood of writers. On my 50th birthday I was astonished to receive congratulations from well-known western writers. No pressure on me came to pass by unnoticed. During my dangerous weeks of exclusion from the Writers' Union the wall of defense advanced by the world's prominent writers protected me from worse persecutions; and Norwegian writers and artists hospitably prepared a roof for me, in the event of my threatened exile being put into effect. Finally, even the advancement of my name for the Nobel Prize was raised not in the country where I live and write, but by Francois Mauriac and his colleagues. And later still entire national writers' unions have expressed their support for me.

Thus I have understood and felt that world literature is no longer an abstract anthology, nor a generalization invented by literary historians; it is rather a certain common body and a common spirit, a living heartfelt unity reflecting the growing unity of mankind. State frontiers still turn crimson, heated by electric wire and burst of machinegun fire; and various ministries of internal affairs still think that literature too, is an "internal affair" falling under their jurisdiction; newspaper headlines still display: "No right to interfere in our internal affairs!" Whereas there are no internal affairs left on our crowded earth! And mankind's sole salvation lies in everyone making everything his business; in the people of the East being vitally concerned with what is thought in the West.

The people of the West vitally concerned with what goes on in the East. And literature, as one of the most sensitive responsive instruments possessed by the human creature, has been one of the first to adopt, assimilate, to catch hold of this feeling of a growing unity of mankind. And so I turn with confidence to the world literature of today — to hundreds of friends whom I have never met in the flesh and whom I may never see.

Friends! Let us try to help if we are worth anything at all! Who from time immemorial has constituted the uniting not the dividing strength in your countries, lacerated by discordant parties, movements, casts and groups? There in its essence is the position of writers: Expressers of their native language — the chief binding force of the nation, of the very earth its people occupy, and at best of its national spirit.

I believe that world literature has it in its power to help mankind, in these, its trouble hours, to see itself as it really is, notwithstanding the indoctrinations of prejudiced people and parties. World literature has it in its power to convey condensed experience from one land to another so that we might cease to be split and dazzled, that the different scales of values might be made to agree, and one nation learn correctly and concisely the true

history of another with such strength of recognition and painful awareness as it had itself experienced the same, and thus might it be spared from repeating the same cruel mistakes. And perhaps under such conditions we artists will be able to cultivate within ourselves a field of vision to embrace the whole world: In the centre observing like any other human being that which lies nearby, at the edges we shall begin to draw in that which is happening in the rest of the world. And we shall correlate, and we shall observe world proportions.

And who, if not writers, are to pass judgement – not only on their unsuccessful governments (in some states this is the easiest way to earn one's bread, the occupation of any man who is not lazy) – but also on the people themselves, in their cowardly humiliation or self-satisfied weakness? Who is to pass judgement on the light-weight sprints of youth, and on the young pirates brandishing their knives?

We shall be told: What can literature possibly do against the ruthless onslaught of open violence? But let us not forget that violence does not live alone and is not capable of living alone: It is necessarily interwoven with falsehood. Between them lies the most intimate, the deepest of natural bonds. Violence finds its only refuge in falsehood, falsehood its only support in violence. Any man who has once acclaimed violence as his method must inexorably choose falsehood as his principle. At its birth violence acts openly and even with pride. But no sooner does it become strong, firmly established, than it senses the rarefaction of the air around it and it cannot continue to exist without descending into a fog of lies, clothing them in sweet talk. It does not always, not necessarily, openly throttle the throat, more often it demands from its subjects only an oath of allegiance to falsehood, only complicity in falsehood.

And the simple step of a simple courageous man is not to partake in falsehood, not to support false actions! Let that enter the world, let it even reign in the world – but not with my help. But writers and artists can achieve more: They can conquer falsehood! In the struggle with falsehood art always did win and it always does win! Openly, irrefutably for everyone! Falsehood can hold out against much in this world, but not against art.

And no sooner will falsehood be dispersed than the nakedness of violence will be revealed in all its ugliness – and violence, decrepit, will fall.

That is why, my friends, I believe that we are able to help the world in its white-hot hour. Not by making the excuse of possessing no weapons, and not by giving ourselves over to a frivolous life – but by going to war!

Proverbs about truth are well-loved in Russian. They give steady and sometimes striking expression to the not inconsiderable

harsh national experience:

"One word of truth shall outweigh the whole world."

And it is here, on an imaginary fantasy, a breach of the principle of the conservation of mass and energy, that I base both my own activity and my appeal to the writers of the whole world.

ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN'S NOBEL PRIZE ADDRESS,
1970 © The Nobel Foundation 1972.

BARRY O. HIGGS

Three Poems

BUTTERFLY

A butterfly on the water:
Two butterflies !
How can a butterfly be wet ?

TWO DEATHS

When Mini stood up and started singing
The whole of Africa split open with a thousand voices.
You could hear the women of Lesotho stamping on Verwoerd.

TWO MEANINGS

The heart and not the essence is the desire.
You cannot call a poet a bloody liar.
The Chinese genius makes a spark a fire.

OVID: LETTER TO FLACCUS (*EX PONTO* I. x.)

Naso sends you the best of health, Flaccus,
(If one may wish away what's not his own.)
Clapped out and up to nothing any more,
I'm not as well as I would like to be:
My pulse rate's fine, my temperature is down,
I suffer no hot flushes, have no pain,
And cannot say I'm ever short of breath,
And yet, I cannot keep a damn thing down:
How I bitch when mealtimes roll around;
Nothing on earth (or heaven, come to that.)
Not nectar and ambrosia, God's meat
And drink though these may be,
Served by the pretty hand of Hebe herself,
Would resurrect my deadened appetite
But stiffens in my gut for days on end.
Mind you, I wouldn't tell just anyone
In case I was accused of going soft:
Go soft! I ask you: in a hole like this?
O, I should be so lucky!
I hope to God that anyone who thinks
That Caesar may have let me off lightly
Has it as easily!
For even sleep, which fattens skinny frames,
Is starving me. Flaccus, I waste away.
While I don't close an eye, my sorrows snore
Beside me, grosser with each passing day.
Mine's not a face that you would recognise:
I'm whiter than new wax,
On matchstick legs that buckle at the knee.
Now don't you go and blame it on the bottle,
As you should know, I never touch the stuff;
Nor do I overeat, take it from me,
Among the Getae there's fat chance of that!
And I don't sleep around, my sex-life's nil,
Venus won't slip between a sad man's sheets.
I blame the land, the water, worst of all,
I blame myself, my self oppresses me.
What would I do without the two of you
To cheer me up? Your brother and yourself
Are steady land beneath a shipwrecked man,
You proffer helping hands the rest refuse:
Reach out to him, I beg of you, to one
Divine Caesar determines to detest,
And pray your God abates his rightful wrath.

It seems to me that the 19th Century English in South Africa tells us more about the flora and fauna of the country than they do about the black man whom they observed only when they want to war with him, or put him to work in the Gold Mines, or tried to save his pagan soul. Understandably so, for the English did not settle in this country as colonials, they came as colonisers. It never occurred to them to tear off the Imperial collar as say the Americans or Algerians did.

The Republic of today is a creation by Afrikaners, for Afrikaners. That's why I see the English-speaking South Africans as being displaced flotsam left high and dry after the tide. If he belongs to this country, nowadays, it is in the same way as the marooned sailor belongs to his island.

Well, I think we both agree that there is a problem community called English-speaking South Africans. How we define this is a difficult problem because it's only now in the last decade or so that people have started to worry about themselves. You see, while you are safe in the envelope of the great empire or vast commonwealth your identity is always looked after by this vast, almost cosmic, thing, you belong to. When that goes for a bender, stage one is a feeling of loss, of anger, of being cut off, as you say, or being marooned, being left simply high and dry. It is at this point in the history of colonial communities all over the world, not merely English-speaking communities, but Spanish, or whatever have you, that people react in a variety of ways. One is to seek re-identification with the mother-country, and get out and go back and try and adjust, and many have attempted this and can't make it and come back again.

I want to refer to that.

You see; in the U.S.A., at the time of the American Independence, thousands streamed across into Canada – British Empire loyalists – so you get that kind of movement. The other movement is the one which interests me is that you say okay, in some sense a whole lot of once valid sources of morale and frameworks for thought, political thought, the Commonwealth structure and all the patterns it provided one, those having disappeared, you have to find alternatives; one is to say you are going into a post-Imperial, Marxist analysis of the situation and you work for the classless society. The other is to look at your own history, and to see if there is anything in it which in point of fact does give you a tradition, a sense of the past, a sense of belonging locally in a way.

Now this is a frightfully difficult adjustment to make, particularly if you've been an Imperial people. What can possibly have happened in one's small-scale local history involving a White

community, in this case, of perhaps a million that can be held to be at all significant in the light of the Battles of Waterloo or Agincourt? There is something alightly ridiculous in taking one's local past seriously.

Yes, and in our case especially.

The Americans, for instance, they had a thing called the Boston Tea Party. Now in terms of global history, what in the hell is the Boston Tea Party? But in terms of American history, the Boston Tea Party is an enormously important event. You see, in terms of the great battles for the freedom of the intellect, what is Pringle's fracas with Lord Charles Somerset over the freedom of the Press? But in terms of South African history, it is a vitally important thing.

So what I'm really saying is that when colonial communities under a variety of pressures and for a variety of reasons break away from the parental stem there has to be a reassessment, a kind of new look, a focussing on the local. You have to suddenly say, look, there were people around here doing various things. Am I really informed about them? What sort of characters they were and what they did? You can have whole batches of people doing things. Well, take writers, who can write in oblivion for their own generation, and then can be discovered; Blake's a case in point. I think this is partly true of the English-speaking South African community. A lot of people did and wrote and said a hell of a lot of things about which most of us are mainly ignorant, and we still have to recover and rediscover what there was. I mean, there's an underground buried stream which we simply have to explore. This is why I'm interested in diaries and things of this sort.

These guys established a relationship with Africa which for them was valid and for their children and their property. The fascinating thing is to be given a set of diaries which goes over three generations; then you can see what is happening. A lot of it is frightening, some of it is pretty inspiring. And I question some of your statements because I simply don't believe you could have said them if you knew a bit more about this nineteenth century, early twentieth century, life of English-speaking people in this country.

I agree with you that what I know about nineteenth and early twentieth century South Africa is comparatively little, but one of the reasons for that is that I grew up in the Transvaal, in Johannesburg and in Pretoria. I'm not a descendant of the 1820 Settlers; I'm of Irish descent. My grandfather came out here because he couldn't exist in Ireland, and that pattern must be repeated very widely in places like the Transvaal where a lot of people were drawn to the mines. I've lived for the last four or

five years in Natal, and there again, a good deal happened in the nineteenth century in Natal – the Imperial power was evident. to say the least. You see, English-speakers have several pasts.

Our history, if one looks at it, and I've looked at a little of it, is not a very impressive history; it's a history which can be repeated anywhere where there's a bonanza and people come in in the hopes of making money. There's some excitement to it, and some colour, but nonetheless the numbers of people who came in are too few, all in all, and the period of time is too short for anything of real value to be found.

One can colour what little history there is, what characters and personalities there are, in such a way as to say, well, we have this, it's the best we have, we must make do with it.

Well, I'd like to make just two points. One is the diverse origin of English-speaking South Africans, that they are several sorts of waves, or groups, that come in. This is exactly the same, even more of, of the United States of America and Australia, yet these communities have managed to create a sense of cohesion and belonging. Now they are in a fortunate position in that they are unilingual and one stock has predominated – a very important factor.

The other great advantage that America and Australia have over the South African English is this: you see, you seem to think that nothing heroic, or exciting, or whatever have you, was done by these people; in point of fact they fought an incredible number of wars and did very brave and adventurous sort of things. Now in the United States you can make a national myth out of this particular bit of pioneering because the Indians are no longer a political factor. It is one of our criticisms of Afrikanerdom that they have made a national myth out of this battle, which is very understandable, but which is of dubious value in terms of the long-term health of the South African community, of the long-term future of the White people.

It's to the credit of the English-speaking South African whose battle honours in this country, believe me, are second to none! Yet they have not harped on this thing, and the great strength, in one sense, of the English-speaking 'tradition' in this country is that it has never chosen to glamourise its fights, either with Blacks or with Boers, into something to be magnified and glorified and handed on as a perpetual source of wonder and amazement and emulation to their children. This is partly due to a number of factors: I think they learnt an enormous lesson as a result of the blunders of the Boer War, and the jingo virus got taken out of their system. The other is, I think, a pretty shrewd idea that this is nonsense in a multilingual country; to harp on this aspect of the past. The other is right from the start when the settlements came in, they came in admittedly as part of expanding Imperial interests; but it was a colonising movement which was tempered

from the start by an enormous educational and missionary emphasis, and not merely among the missionaries themselves, but among the colonisers.

This is what makes it difficult to give a simple or Wild West or Great Trek kind of tradition. You've got to find something more complex than that.

Wouldn't you say though that one of the reasons why the English-speaker in this country has never glorified or vaunted past victories has a lot to do with the fact that ultimately he tends to have lost? In that, where you have a powerful myth, explicitly within that, you have a detailed history of power, and usually power brought to quite a successful conclusion as, say in America, where one of the reasons why we celebrate the Wild West implies virtual extermination of the indigenous population. There have been battles, both against Black and against Boer, and in both cases over the long term, we tend if not to have lost, to have been blanketed over. The Afrikaner tends to think of himself as having won.

Well, you can belong and you can have a profound sense of belonging, when you've lost. The fact that the Boer was ground down and was beaten after the Boer War did not make him feel that he did not belong, and all kinds of political defeat and so on will not make a person who has established any kind of sub-conscious or visceral relationship with his place of birth or the landscape or the people around him: the fact that the Cape Coloured is in a political minority and treated as a sort of second-rate citizen in the only country he knows does not make him feel that he does not belong. Admittedly a certain percentage – this is something we could discuss – migrated to Canada and are a great loss to the country: one can understand that kind of movement; one can't simplify it as it's a very complex thing. But the simple point I want to make is that there are not only myths of victory, there are also myths of survival, there are myths of defeat; there are things which come to birth slowly and painfully, and their strength lies in their weakness.

Now let me put this in another form – the English-speaking community in South Africa can never win at the polls. It has led to a minority status. Does your line of argument say that if we were to import two million English-speaking people and win at the polls then our past would be validated?

No, it doesn't, but there is a grain of truth in that; in that history, politics, divorced from any sense of power, seems to me to be a facile way of looking at things. No, I think winning is important.

It depends what you mean by winning. You see, there are various but vitally important areas in the life of a nation, outside politics, where a minority can be extremely effective and do a great deal,

have a pretty pervasive influence. I think that the mere presence of a large dose of English empiricism and scepticism within the white group, as it were, has had a quite imponderable effect on Afrikaans. It seems to me we're committed, by virtue of our minority status: by virtue of the fact that we have a world language, and we are the firm basis for that language in Southern Africa, which the Afrikaner needs, which the Coloured needs, which the Indian needs, which the Black man needs, and they all need this thing which is our major gift to this continent: it seems to me that we are committed to a sort of open stance all round. Now this is an extraordinarily difficult thing to embody in a myth. It's a very, very sophisticated and complicated rôle.

But there is, over and above that, the fact that as far as the political framework of the country is at the moment, the Whites are seen, in political terms, anyway, as representing a unified whole, a bloc at least, distinguishable by their colour, if nothing else, and the fact that as a whole they are in a considerable minority who nonetheless wield total power. But in fact, as we know, the English-speaker and the Afrikaans-speaker in this country continue if not to fight the Boer War, certainly continue to conduct skirmishes on the side.

Let me make another point. I think quite possibly that you and I are talking largely in ignorance. Because who really knows very much about the English-speaking South African. Nobody has done a series of thorough studies on them, on their attitudes, their origins, their hopes their aspirations, their feelings of alienation, and this kind of thing. We have had no political party who is really concerned with us. The United Party has the English voter more or less a prisoner because there's no other alternative, but its aim and its policy is really directed at the marginal Afrikaner voter, and I think this has been an enormous handicap to the English-speaking community so that today they are virtually a community without an "establishment" of any kind. If you had to choose three dozen people and say these are representative English-speaking South Africans, who the hell would you choose? It's quite a problem. Now that may or may not be a good thing.

What I'm saying is that I detect a growing sense, from signs here and there, and what people say all over the country, things in the papers, letters, odd things, that there is a growing sense of unease among the English-speaking South Africans on a number of scores; that although they could not very clearly define what they meant by an English-speaking South African, they know that it is something distinct from an Afrikaner or anything else in the country.

There is a vague sense that we are a community of some kind. So much so that we are planning for 1974 to have a conference on the English-speaking South African.

I might be expressing a fantasy or a hope which comes out of my particular family, which may be utterly different from somebody coming from the Transvaal or from Natal. This is one of the difficulties. The right kind of historian could do a marvellous job. Now you raise this point that the Americans and the Algerians shook off the colonial yoke; well, it was only after 150 years that they did so.

But it was at least a shaking-off.

The interesting difference, I've always maintained, is this: that the Englishman in South Africa has been kept, both for good and for bad, more closely tied to Britain because of the presence of the Afrikaner. The Afrikaner, by virtue of his history, and having been here a century and a half before the British arrived, was already having his first republican movements then – and due to the polarisation of South African politics the English said, look we mustn't do that, that's what the Afrikaners are doing.

In the diaries of settlers they were no sooner on board the ships than they were quarreling with heads of the parties under whom they came, and one of them says, "We're like a lot of Yankees." The sort of radical independent line was pretty strong, for various reasons, and it kept cropping up. Your notion that there were no signs of independence, of shaking off the yoke, isn't true. They wanted independence from Britain, and they worked very hard, and increasing democratic rights were granted in South Africa.

Yes, political rights. But with the diminution of English power in this country, and the corresponding rise of Afrikaans power, any tendencies towards a declaration of rights or liberties, have had increasingly less chance. Also, unlike the Americans who left the Empire, in South Africa it was very much a case, as far as the English-speakers were concerned, of the Empire leaving us. The feeling, one still gets it, occasionally, surprisingly enough, in Natal, is similar to that which one got in Kenya: we are being sold down the river, we are being left high and dry; and there are a lot of those people, at least descendants of those people, people who didn't come across from England and settle here, but who were part of the Imperial adventure and who remain as descendants of the people who came across in one function or another, and a considerable amount, I think, of alienation.

Perhaps, like you, because it satisfies a fantasy of my own, but it does seem to me that the English-speaker in this country feels increasingly cut off from everything. He has no touchstone, no criteria, nothing with which he can gauge his own position, his own identity. With a rising Black nationalism and a rampant Afrikaans nationalism, he finds his position difficult, to say the least.

Well, there again, I don't think you want to seel the miners and the industrialists short. This is a very great story in terms of mining skill, financial know-how, and things of this kind. That no country or society can really get off the ground until it can produce wealth.

Yes, but it seems to have left many English-speakers today with no sense of a future, only a sense of dividends which will be paid at the end of the year; of investments; of a financial stake in the country, but very little else, and an antagonism towards Afrikaners which has been sublimated or partially sublimated over the past few years in the guise of a 'toenadering', a standing together.

In short terms, obviously the person who is going to write the simple history which satisfies a Zulu or satisfies an Afrikaner has got a simple task. In terms of the future South African community which, whether it's going to be a federation or what, but which involves close neighbour relationships between Black and White the attempt has to be made to take an Olympian view of South African history. I said this years ago, that the kind of attitude of mind that has to be encouraged in South Africa is not the lyrical attitude of mind whereby you sing the agonies and the triumphs and the *Via Dolorosa* of your own little people, whether they are Black or White or this tribe or that tribe. One's got to get to the dramatic view where you look at all characters engaged in the drama and try and make an authentic person out of each of them. And curiously enough, to some extent, English-speaking writers have already done this. The one person they have not given any attention to, one character, is themselves!

Would you not think, in view of what you've said then, that if a South African writer isn't to write lyrics, or not to extol lyrically the past or one's future, if there is a future, that there is scope then for much more satire?

Indeed.

By satire I don't mean comment on the quirks and idiosyncrasies of English-speakers in this country, I mean a hard and abrasive look at the way things are. That's why I'd like to bring up New Coin. It's what, it's nine years' old – I had occasion to do a review for the Sunday Tribune about three years ago, and I went through all the issues to date and there was very, very little in it. There was nothing abrasive, very little that was harsh, very little that was unfair, very little that was crude, very little that was relevant to the English-speaker in this country, I thought. There was a great deal of veld and vlei, there was a great deal of lyricism, there was a great deal of ancestry, but there was very little satire, for want of a better word.

Well, I don't know. We might have a particular image in young writers' minds, but certainly we have never selected stuff on any other criterion but that we think the talent is there, or there's something worth encouraging, you know. Some people have criticised us for not having a line or policy, we have simply taken the stuff as it's come, and we've looked at it, and anything that we've thought, well here's a seed, or this has definitely got something, let's do it.

I agree that there is a shortage of satirical writing, and I'll tell you one of the reasons why I think it is there: the typical satirical stance is of the man who has absolutely no doubt that he is rational and morally right, and that he is chopping up the Philistines to the delectation of other sensible men!

I agree, but that definition of satire which you've given is an Augustan definition, at least a nineteenth century definition; I mean, there are crudities about in this society, and no satirical poetry to reflect them. The only time one's seen it has been with Campbell, and interestingly enough, Alan Paton is writing his biography. Now I heard him lecture, and he extolled the lyrics above the satires, and took the view that, well, the satires were quite amusing and every so often quite cutting, were never meant unfairly or unkindly, which to me is a travesty: they were obviously meant to be unfair and unkind, or could be taken in that way; and a lot of people did take them that way. They're very fine pieces of writing. There's been nothing like it here I don't think, with the possible exception of Delius.

Well, one of the things which you might find of course is that if English-speaking South Africans became a little bit more self-aware, and by that I don't mean self-conscious, but I mean just aware of themselves, they might be encouraged to let rip and be satirical.

Amongst the poets writing at the moment, are there any who interest you particularly?

Yes, we're busy on a new anthology which you know about, **Africa Within Us**. Well, I'm extremely interested in the emergence of Black writers now: Mtshali, Serote, this chap Nortje, the Coloured man who died, chap called Williams down in Cape Town, a protest writer. It seems to me that something I've been hoping for for a long time is beginning to happen, that this unnatural silence, this black silence in the middle of which we Whites live, is being broken and the voices have been heard, and I think this is a very exciting moment. I think it could lead in any of a number of directions. Now that, I think, is the biggest single development.

There are dangers of course, in that with somebody like Mtshali's book; the phenomenal sales are due in a large part to a sort of sympathy market.

Well, quite. It's because nobody's been allowed to hear what a Black man in Soweto is thinking. It is a sympathy market but it's not entirely that by any means, make no mistake, Mtshali is a talented bloke with a capacity for a sharp image which is very exciting. The crucial thing of course is going to be his next volume and the one after that.

The other intriguing thing to me is really considerable body of first-class poems that have been produced since 1958 when I produced that first anthology *A Book of South African Verse*, O.U.P. I just feel that the body of good poems about South Africa or by South Africans has gone up by two-thirds in this last year; that in this last decade or more, if you start picking up the volumes that have appeared since 1958 and looking at them, there's Delius's stuff, there's a lot of Ruth Miller, there's Sydney Clouts, there's Anne Welsh – now some Anne Welsh things I think are absolutely superb – Elias Pater.

One could just go on and on, reeling them off. Douglas Livingstone, for crying out loud, who I think is possibly the most vital influence operating in South Africa today. And it's extraordinarily varied, excitingly varied, with a sort of limitation that we've already discussed, that there's no strong political satire.

And also that there's very little behind it, in the sense of a continuing tradition of poetry. It forces one, as with the history of English-speaking South Africans, to make something of it. Somebody like Livingstone for instance has two books. There is the temptation to look on him as an elder poet, which is silly I think, when, in the English sense he can still be referred to as a young poet.

Clouts, too.

Clouts has one book, and temptation is that because there are some good poems in it, to make more of it.

Well, I would take that point, but I would say that if you list the authors and the volumes that have appeared in last fifteen years or so, it's not unimpressive. They range from, to me, very moving sort of poems of agony of spirit, you know, which aren't particularly South African at all except in the language or an image.

I think the most significant thing in point of fact is that far less of the poems being written are landscape poems; there are figures in a landscape concerned with the scene. This is why we've chosen that title **Africa Within Us**. No matter how alien we may feel politically or socially in this environment in terms of our psyches, when we come to speak about it, the images crop up quite naturally to express our emotional states.

And the landscapes have people in them, more often anyway.

I think that this is a very important shift, that the landscape, the climate, all the geographical data and so on are in a sense taken for granted now, they're coming out of the viscera, they're not **appliqué**, they're just there, and I think this is important. Occasionally, you get a very valuable and exciting bit of what I would call journalism of genius, whereby you get a poetic sensibility just describing the African scene. It that long poem of Douglas Livingstone's where he goes up into the Zululand **August Zulu**; that's, I think, a very fine piece of writing in that it's so beautifully observed and you feel the sensual, abrasive impact on your nervous system. Then you get poems which handle an incident without any sense that this is an African incident that's being handled, it's just an incident; I mean, **Gentling a Wildcat**, I think a very fine poem.

In your new anthology, will you be taking any line?

The stuff is still coming in and we're still reading and rereading and it's still too early to say what sort of shape we will give it, except that our general intention I think would be where one has a choice of poems from an author, to choose something which owes something in its genesis or its expression to the African situation. I feel there has been this watershed.

Something has happened.

The sheer body of good poetry – I've collected South African poetry for twenty years and I never see a volume, it can be the biggest lot of rubbish you can conceivably imagine, but I'll buy it, I'll read one poem and put it on the shelf very often, but it's just a thing of mine and I must have hundreds of these little volumes of verse plus stacks of stuff that's been written in 1910 and 1924 – shelves of it. But you compare that stuff – all right, there's a hell of a lot of rubbish still being produced, but the last fifteen years have seen a clutch of I would say a dozen or more people who are writing bloody good poetry; that's quite a lot you know.

*Obviously the experience must have been yours too, over nine years editing **New Coin**; but I was talking to Lionel Abrahams a little while ago and he thinks that South African poetry writing has become something of an epidemic, he says he's never seen so much stuff being written, a lot of it not good, but more of it than ever he thinks, and not all that much good prose. He battles, in **Purple Renoster**, to get good prose.*

This is true. True of **Contrast**, too. I think mainly due to the fact that the schools have woken up to teaching poetry. The teacher says write a haiku or something.

Yes they have this idea that it is a therapeutic thing, self expression.

BLACK BRONZE BEAUTIFUL

The ten quatrains that follow are from Adam Small's first volume of poems in English to be published shortly under the title: *Black Bronze Beautiful*. 'In it,' says Small, 'Africa speaks to her children, and about herself, about the beauty that is her's; and the quatrains are designed to create a myth – a valid myth – of pride in being Black, Bronze, and African in the truest sense of the word.'

1.

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

2.

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

3.

Anointment, to be true, must nothing lack,
must cover the head, the navel, and the feet,
extremities and centre: a fragrance of flowers and fruit,
a fullness must it be, fullness being always black

4.

My cavities are elemental, black : the caves
of my dark Self – the hollows of my ears
recesses of my eyes, walls of my womb, – carved
over ages by lava, lightning, and the warm sea's waves

5.

*. . . the vital force . . . (of) the
reason of the touch, better still,
the reasoning embrace, the sympathetic
reason . . .*

Léopold Sédar Senghor

My body can fulfil you, for I live
Its pasture, love, is dark : you be the lithe gazelle
Or if you be a youthful god of thought,
my reason, coloured likewise, is intuitive

6.

*. . . this sentient reason, the reason
which comes to grips . . . (is) the
gift of rhythm . . .*

Léopold Sédar Senghor

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

7.

Garnish your meat with herbs, I'll have the fires lit
Then turn the spit over the spacious hearth
and let the dance begin, for dancing is essential :
Rhythm is my one and only rigorous requisite

8.

Despite their weighting of my feet with woe,
despite the bell they've chained upon my grace,
their bolts upon my bearing and locks upon my litheness,
my rhythm is intact : Behold me come and go

9

My mind, pulsating black, throbs : hold my hand
The black drums of my soul beat: hold my waist
The music grows in volume, beautiful, black now
like a black child grows into a tall black man

10

Hoof uplifted, arched neck and quivering black flanks,
a mare of Pharaoh's chariot am I, a dark one :
Wheels follow on my snort, and Kings who speak
as if from thunderclouds above the files and ranks

Song of Solomon 1 : 9

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Mike Kirkwood is in London on a year's leave from the English Dept. of U.N.D.

Guy Butler is professor of English at Rhodes University. He is preparing a new anthology of South African verse, in English, *Africa Within Us*, to be published by Oxford University Press.

Barry O. Higgs now lives in London. His poems have appeared in the *Penguin Book of South African Verse*.

Don MacLennan lives in Grahamstown. His play, *Third Degree*, is to be published by Balkema in the Albany Series.

Adam Small has just published *Black, Bronze, Beautiful*; it is his first book of English poetry.

Oswald Mtshali has been invited to read his work at the Poetry International in London later this year.

BACK NUMBERS OF BOLT STILL AVAILABLE

- BOLT No. 3:** Phil Joffe on *Women in Love*
Kathy Adler on Picasso.
- BOLT No. 4:** Douglas Livingstone – two poems.
Fiction by Fionna Morphet, Christopher Hope,
George Brendon.
- BOLT No. 5:** Poetry by Oswald Mtshali, Christopher Mann,
Ruth Keech, Mike Kirkwood.
- BOLT No. 6:** Fiction by Alan Paton.
A conversation with Adam Small.
John Torres translates Reinaldo Ferreira.
Reviews of new poetry.

Copies obtainable at 50 cents each.

BOLT is the only magazine of its kind produced in Natal. It is due entirely to our subscribers that this current issue has been produced, and that we have to-date published the work of Douglas Livingstone, Oswald Mithall, Jon Stallworthy, Laurence Lerner, Peter Strauss, Mike Kirkwood, Alan Paton and Adam Small.

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