



# BOLT

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60c

New Poems

LÉOPOLD

SENGHOR

Chris Mann

Stephen Gray

Mike Nicol

Katherine Leycester

John Torres on Reinaldo Ferreira

Reviews of Peter Porter · Eva Royston · Roy Campbell · John Fuller

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EDITOR : CHRISTOPHER HOPE

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## LEOPOLD SENGHOR : A NEW NOTE

The fiery thunderbolt of Négritude – that cult of black consciousness in the art of this continent and of black people who relate to this continent – which a few decades ago lit up the African literary scene (particularly in French Africa) has largely disappeared from the African literary landscape. This seems true, especially of poetry. The cult's greatest apostle has always been Léopold Sédar Senghor, President of the West African Republic of Senegal and one of the outstanding statesmen of our time.

It will not be the object of these few introductory lines to essay a new literary evaluation of a man who in so many senses of the word is perhaps one of the most enigmatic persons to have crossed the tumultuous post-War African scene. One of the abiding tragedies of our country is surely that so very few people have cared to read and understand the poetry and the cultural and political writings of this man who has combined in himself an emotional abandonment to the African scene, a profound and equally committed love to France and the French language ('the language of the gods'), a commitment to the cause of the black man of this continent, a keen appreciation of Western political thought and a sympathetic although almost sad understanding of the position of the white man in Africa. In his sixty-seventh year now Senghor's influence, both political and literary, has been waning and there are even consistent rumours at present about his impending disappearance from the political scene. And yet, despite these facts of life which are now also making themselves felt in the political and literary role of Senghor, it remains probably true to say that future generations of African poets and statesmen will see in him perhaps the greatest African to have stepped across the African and world scene; a man who fired the imagination of a generation of poets, who strove to explain the situation of the black man in this world, who worked hard to give the latter an understanding of his mission in a world dominated by the white race. Long after the curious fulminations of the Sekou Tourés, the Kaundas and the Bokassas – not to speak of the white counterparts of these gentlemen in our clime – have been relegated to the oblivion to which they rightly belong, people will still find enjoyment in the verse of a man who believed that poetry had to remain true to its musical origins and whose

verse closely approximated this ideal; they will still consider the strangeness of the rôle of this philosopher and poet at the helm of one of this continent's more enlightened regimes; and they will still marvel at the phenomenon of a man so profoundly committed to the cause of the black world acting as the stylistic draughtsman of the French Constitution while serving as a minister in France.

Senghor's poetic voice has not been heard now since the appearance of his last volume of poems *Nocturnes* in 1961. In a letter to me last year he included a manuscript of thirty poems which were to appear soon in France. This may in the meantime have come about. In what follows I produce translations of extracts from a few poems from this collection which, it should be added, are very much outside the main stream of Senghor's earlier poetry. In his earlier poetry Senghor's social and political commitment, his *engagement*, to the black man's role in the world, permeated (although with some notable exceptions) his poetry. The poems from the present volume are all love poems which lack the extreme *engagé* nature of his early poetry. As such they are no longer geared to the concept of love against the backdrop of blackness or of Africa – although the African milieu is still palpably present – but to love and amorous emotions plain and simple. And yet the reader who is familiar with Senghor's earlier poetry will recognize many of the images – the *dyali* (African troubadour), Joal (Senghor's birthplace which often epitomized Africa and his youth), the *signares* (young girls; a word of Portuguese origin), the *saudades* (plaintive Portuguese songs), the *pirogues* (dug-out canoes), the multitude of African place names etc. Touching perhaps in this respect are several references to his supposedly Portuguese origin (Senghor : *Senhor* = man) to which he had first referred in an earlier poem *Elégie des Saudades*:

I hear in my guts the shadow-voiced lilt  
of the *saudades*.  
Is it the ancestral voice, the touch of Portuguese  
blood which emerges from the mists of the ages?  
My name which returns to its source?

Although his own country has been practically at war with Portugal for about a decade now Senghor still talks with the greatest admiration of the greatness in the Lusitanian spirit. It is not difficult to imagine that in all African countries – including our own – there will be few present day rulers who will vaunt, say, their touch of Portuguese or Afrikaner blood in their veins or, in our case, the blood of the Bushmen, the Hottentots, the Africans . . . It is, albiet in a trivial way, a measure of the greatness and the universality of Senghor that the possibility of having an unknown Portuguese ancestor is a matter of pride, flowing directly from his catholic tolerance and his love for diversity.

The volume from which the poems are taken is called *Lettres d'Hivernage*, a name which Senghor elucidates in a short explanatory preface:

*'Hibernation in the Sudan-Sahara region is the rainy season. In Senegal it starts in June and ends towards the end of October.*

*The word has been coined by the colonial army which, as in the case of the Roman conquest of Gaul, wintered in its castra during the inclement season. Hibernation is thus the period of summer and the beginning of winter. But there is also the wintering of a Woman.'*

And here then we have the key to these poems. They are the poems of a man at the acme of his life with the shadows of eclipse imminent on the horizon. They are obviously highly personal in nature which give them – at least to someone who knows the man behind them – an additional poignancy. Although these poems somehow lack the vitality and the authenticity of Senghor's earlier verse they must nevertheless be welcomed as a rare and precious commitment to beauty by a statesman of our continent, whether black or white.

The translations are literal rather than free with retention of the original punctuation.

## YOUR LETTER MY LETTER . . . .

Your letter my letter, if it were impossible  
 If Hitler if Mussolini, if Rhodesia if  
     South Africa, if the Portuguese cousin  
 If if and if, but we have the white phone  
 No, red phone. Satellites which  
     revolve around Mother Earth.  
 Do they revolve, who cares? Across the  
     dark space garlanded with stars  
 Across the walls the chains the blood, across  
     the mask and death  
 We possess the telephone of the aorta : our  
     dialling code is undecipherable.

## BEFORE NIGHTFALL . . . .

*(EXTRACT)*

Before nightfall, a thought of you for your, before  
     I become ensnared  
 In the white net of anxieties, and the promenade  
     to the limits  
 Of the dream of desire which precedes the twilight, amongst  
     the gazelles of the dunes  
 To revive the poem of the kingdom of Youth.

## YOU PINE . . . .

*(EXTRACT)*

You pine for Dakar its sky its sand,  
     and for the sea  
 I pine for you, with autumnal  
     adolescent bliss  
 I'm singing as I write, like the good artisan  
     shaping a piece of golden jewellery.  
 And then I'll dance, light and serious, the dance  
     of my Lady  
 And for my only Lady!

## TA LETTRE MA LETTRE . . . .

Ta lettre ma lettre, et si c'était impossible  
Si Hitler si Mussolini, si la Rhodésie l'Afrique  
du Sud, le cousin Portugais  
Si si et si, mais nous avons le téléphone blanc  
Non, téléphone rouge. Satellites qui tournent  
alentour de la Terre-Mère.  
Tournent-ils mais qu'importe? A travers les  
espaces noirs fleuris d'étoiles  
A travers les murs les chaînes le sang, à travers  
le masque et la mort  
Nous avons le téléphone de l'aorte : notre code  
est indéchiffrable.

## AVANT LA NUIT . . . .

Avant la nuit, une pensée de toi pour toi, avant que  
je ne tombe  
Dans le filet blanc des angoisses, et la promenade  
aux frontières  
Du rêve du désir avant le crépuscule, parmi les  
gazelles des sables  
Pour ressusciter le poème au royaume d'Enfance.

## TU TE LANGUIS . . . .

Tu te languis de Dakar de son ciel de son sable,  
et de la mer  
Je me languis de toi, comme d'un bonheur adoles-  
cent en automne.  
Je chante en t'écrivant, comme le bon artisan  
qui travaille un bijou d'or.  
Alors je danserai, léger et grave, la danse de  
ma Dame  
Et pour ma seule Dame!

## YOUR LETTER . . . .

Your letter a burst of roses in September  
Precious. I read it in the light of the lamp  
against the rickety railing.

I smell the scent of the park in bloom, the  
leisurely promenades and the undergrowth  
And the fragrant flowers in the shade, the bloom  
of the cyclamens.  
I see the odour of the roses, the aroma of old wines  
which rise  
And from the beach comes the perfume of your skin  
of burnt bread

Your skin of red gold. The perfumes of  
the jujube gush forth, humming with cicadas  
Sometimes I think of you so intensely! that's the splendour  
of grief  
Like the physalium flame in the pit of my  
chest  
My only refuge from despair, the kingdom of Youth.

I'm walking on the beach at Joal-Popenguine  
The sand on the soles of my feet : the embrace  
of my ancestral home.  
Joy of a walk in the blonde sand, which glides  
away silkily  
Pleasure of muscles which play around freely on the  
beaches of Eden  
Joy of a swim in the lukewarm water and the  
primordial placenta  
Joy to swim in the sea water with the mouth ajar.

And then marching on to get lost, where  
the sea grapes and the wild strawberries grow.  
Who will again take me to the plateaux of Ethiopia, where  
on one leg the shepherd  
Rests in the shade of his flute?  
In the distance the reply of a flute.

## TA LETTRE . . . .

Ta lettre floraison de roses en Septembre  
Précieuse. Je la lis sous la lampe et la lisse  
ambiguë.

Je sens le parc en fleurs, les promenades lentes  
et le sous-bois  
Et les douces fleurs d'ombre, la lumière des cyclamens.  
Je vois l'odeur des roses, l'arôme des vins vieux  
qui montent  
Et de la plage monte le parfum de ta peau de  
pain brûlé

Ta peau d'or rouge. Sourdent les senteurs des  
jubarbes, bourdonnant d'abeilles de soleil.  
Parfois je pense à toi si fort! c'est splendeur de  
douleur

Comme flamme de physalis au plein de ma poitrine.  
Contre le désespoir, mon refuge mon seul, le  
royaume d'Enfance.

Je marche sur la plage, à Joal-Popenguine  
Le sable sous la paume de mes pieds : le baiser  
de la terre maternelle.  
Joie de la marche dans le sable blond, qui débou-  
le soyeux  
Plaisir des muscles qui jouent libres aux plages  
de l'Eden  
Joie de la nage dans l'eau tiède et le placenta  
primordial  
Joie de nager, la bouche ouverte à l'eau au sel.

Puis de nouveau marcher me perdre, jusqu'aux  
raisins marins aux cerises sauvages.  
Qui me rendra les plateaux d'Ethiopie, où le pâ-  
tre sur un pied se  
Repose à l'ombre de sa flûte?  
Au loin répond une flûte amébée.

CYCLOPS

Beneath your forehead eyes grow together  
your right breast holds waterways

do not think with your merged eye  
why those frail garments should have to tangle

tie shirt underpants flipflap sandals  
on the swellings of the same eiderdown

we've been through all this before  
yet now I find I'm getting lyrical

buck graze on the ripe green of your armpits  
veldfires rise on the stubble of your thigh

in case that sounds too corny I check your eye  
watching the permission of an eventful hour

the clap of contact's thrashed us round before  
tonight you stare-out the dial of the alarm

usually we have a limb too many too bent  
but now I think we have none at all

we nibble on stars rubber goods sighs  
your iris goes purple with a passion

have my resistance it's all yours  
I've abandoned what used to help me out

as if by some venereal telepathy we hear  
ripples out of you through concrete and highways

till I'm sure the whole of Joburg rocks into  
erotic signalling in helpless alignment

so we're going overtime my tender beauty  
over cracking ribs and 50 watts and tomorrow

anyone who reads this might wonder if  
it's meant to shock and what they're missing

but all I can admit is I never know  
why we keep resorting to such acts

until your palms press down on my kidney  
and my teeth bite your collar like a dog

when we again achieve more agreements  
more concern than any lovers ever before

close your eyes now and scald away from us  
it's you I really wrote this for

and your lash on my ear as your body  
rolls past determined not to lose hold.

## EGGS

O Johnny with a pair of eggs  
shacked up between his legs

what's he gonna do with all that juice  
throw it in hell let heaven loose

O but he's purely white  
cracking his shells in the dead of night

what's he gonna do with all that man  
bleach the sheets with albumen

O he has a dream of his native land  
lying upside down with outstretched hand

Poor Johnny's got the secret of life  
doesn't want to share it with a knife

O Johnny hears the pitch black drum  
breaks in a sweat as the colours run.

## NEGATIVES

my friend I dream he was my friend in need maybe or just a friend somewhere haunted at least misty and dark perhaps dark shrouded he came but I can't easily in my mind's eye recall what was then and just see in the past a drifting in my friend drifting in yes that's it

he was older or maybe younger my friend than me I could never tell the circles shrouding his eyes like sores dark worldly and then I never can tell with those people these or those? Ah a question and swirling ever returning and I feel I never will know those or these people these or those

what's more and answers knowingly after I've knocked on my skull and produces factually and chronologically arranged like the good bookshelf I sometimes all alone and even then blushing call my brain is that my friend he was black you see there was no sign of white at all though I never saw him totally without his clothes and yet he was educated and civilized and that I find not altogether reassuring after my own education until I was seventeen because being black or maybe you'd prefer dark brown or burnt umber say a savage he was supposed to be yet there was no shadow of doubt that savage he was not and without even the use of emphasis for emphasis' sake I feel the need to emphasise his was his once upon a time being as you may have guessed I fear his death is truly past as they say and that he is overturned in some grave somewhere but unknown

they took him one day or early morning it's hard to tell and yet I hear it's more common for extraction to be effected while the victim or perhaps they prefer accused or even patient is firmly in the lap of sleep with little hope or motive to guide himself out of snoring unconsciousness

and really it is all beside the point and all not just this but all yet suffice it to say they took him

and even more towards the wondrous thoughts they will come to repeat the exercise I feel very soon with me and hence I write write and having written who knows what or where the later times will perhaps catch up or if at all and so put an end or stop I write

my friend I will tell about because they took him away and left no-one no no parents or children perhaps because he was young I could not tell no no aunts uncles cousins just me his friend my friend yes they came and no-one knows or even whispers

why it's the fright I feel yes the fear and no-one wants to  
have his brother for denouncer to descend in wrath and all makes  
me mindful of the late lamented Revolution sweeping in its vigour  
across France gathering all accused in its sharp bristles and  
casting them to the guillotine and knitting women  
oh of course I admit we have no guillotine or knitting women  
but we are cursed with bars of soap and perhaps they are worse  
because that's the essence of my friend and his demise at least  
that was the reply sealed official and amptelik that my recurring  
enquiries solicited perhaps just to stop further recurrence  
and if nothing else it did with its terseness just that

but bars of soap are guilty they said and even furnished a  
full description of the accident they said which cruel fate  
they said had cast in the way of my friend I said and they are  
hungry our enemies

he slipped in the shower on one of those bars of soap with  
the RSA stamped on and in falling he collided with a tap  
unfortunately they said in the direct path of his fall so sudden  
and unwilling the tap tended to break his fall as well as his  
cranium they said and the official letter made no attempt whatever  
to distinguish between the fall and the head as if in the domain  
of the antiseptic corridors of old public service establishments  
a fall is as good as a head any time and therein is the crux

and that is why they will come one of these days and I feel  
sure at about 4am to carry me off or at least my body because  
at all times my thoughts remain in my head you see I argued  
about his head and their fall but they weren't so well enamoured  
in those antiseptic corridors to my scorn of their explanations  
it's hard or any other as far as I can tell and simply gave  
out in anger instructions to me to cease forthwith from arguing  
that is

but fight was what I had even in plenty sometimes and fought  
I did in every channel open to me without exception and what's  
worse in some which weren't open to me you see but still they  
were not amused and there's a law I know can keep me away from  
all company forever in an emptiness indivisible

except that of fatal barsofsoap eternally with no-one no  
no friend no cousin even to wonder what and why and it's even  
when I think of that I see the lack of direction in my course  
and I see there never should have been at all because they put  
an end to it with me which is why I fought and that's a circle with  
weak ones on the circumference and them on the outside and I feel  
there's no use or point and desolate is bleakness with reason or rhyme  
and excuse to tender in all humble for an end or just remission to break  
smash and ravage the aimlessness or remorse and scream I need scream  
scream

MIKE NICOL

THREE POEMS

AS PARENTS

They were meant for children and homes  
And the sweaty armpits of his office shirts.  
Her pregnancy (always half-expected)  
Then the marriage in a magistrate's office:

She, in an off white wedding dress.  
Money made them middle-class, afforded  
Her weekly set and rinse, but mannerisms  
Never entirely disappeared. Awkward in company

They spilt drinks, used the wrong language,  
Thankful for middle-age they went out less,  
Retired early to read. Now and again,  
After office parties, stimulated by pretence,

They tried. Sensing impotence gave up  
But not before she, in a last attempt,  
Bought a negligé that wore short  
Above her varicose legs. And so, fraught

With bedrooms they had failed in, they read.  
The underwear crumpled in the chair,  
Now too common to arouse, yellowed  
With washing. On honeymoon her blouse

And bra beneath his trousers had implied  
Intimacy. The thought of soft clothes  
Touching where it mattered had obsessed  
Him, but with routine that soon died.

Photograph album stereotypes, caught nursing  
Children, grandchildren: in life always together  
They saved for a double grave, with hopes  
For memories, perversely recalled, of a younger age.

## from AN EASTER SEQUENCE

### 3. LOOKING FOR EASTER—EGGS

I have never seen the great chocolate hen  
Mother told about. It settles on the Christian  
World once a year: eggs laid how and when  
Not even the Greeks can say. A short reign  
Then it's gone. I walked through town  
Chancing in at every Greek cafe  
Only, again and again, to be turned down:  
No Easter-eggs left by Saturday.  
Christ that was the last straw,  
The old custom slipped us by,  
Even Salimino said he was sure  
The hen had been too quick to lay and die.  
Easter, my love, has sprung its clocks:  
No egg nestles in your tissue-box.

### THE DUSTMEN

There is still a sense of apprehension, even fear  
(A black apparition, nostrils flared  
Suddenly in a childhood yard)  
As rounding the corner chanting  
Songs they may have sung as impis  
Running on Rorkesdrift, five dustmen  
Shirts open, brown chests heaving  
Bear down on me. Somewhere behind  
The municipal lorry grinds in first.  
The dogs keep their distance  
Wary of the double-headed sticks  
That smashed heads and bodies once.  
Then they're passed with a whistle  
And thud of rubber bins  
Like distant guns emptying the rubbish  
In a cloud of ash and eggshells.

Dogs take up the bark from  
Neighbour to neighbour, further away.  
After five years, wind broken  
They're paid off, wheezing and coughing  
To prune someone's garden.

### KATHERINE LEYÇESTER

Ivan Petrovanovitch  
observe — the Kremlin stands  
brooding on the vast expanses  
of the Red Square stones  
where shouting thousands welcome heroes  
where munitions guns  
roll in a glorious angry surge —  
where you my Petrovanovitch  
assume that you are free to walk —  
you who like a flea was shaken  
from the coat of that old lion  
that lost its teeth in nearly mawling  
half the world — bid your goodbyes  
to your own mother — Moscow  
where the Red Square broods  
silent on the multitudes —  
some far forgotten chilly desk  
is what awaits you — Ivan  
Petrovanovitch.

from CAREERS GUIDANCE

III Calling

A cog is prisoner  
Forced to turn a single way  
Is forced to see itself  
The ragged cog  
That it was made to be.  
Cogs turn one way  
And can have no warmth, or softness  
Only the dirty heat of friction  
Or the coldness of disuse.

Blondel!  
I feel her warm and breathing  
And was about to touch  
But a toothy arm thought better.  
I hear a crescendo of your singing  
Urging  
With your warm and meady breath  
What I cannot heed,  
My saviour.  
Blondel! Blondel!  
Just see the bars the bastards forged.

blondel,  
let's spin a ballad  
where we are kings, and we can stroke the grass.

JOHN TORRES

## SOME BRIEF POEMS OF FICTITIOUS LOVES

BY REINALDO FERREIRA

The following eight poems form section 2 of Book 1 of Reinaldo Ferreira's *Poemas*. The original edition was printed by the Government Printer in Lourenco Marques in 1960, and is now out of print. A second edition was due to be published in 1968 but I have not as yet been able to get a copy. The following translations were made from the original edition.

The anonymous editors of this first edition were all, I believe, Reinaldo Ferreira's friends or literary acquaintances. They are only anonymous in the sense that they did not sign the long preface that introduced his poems to the Portuguese reading public. I have met some of them, but it is not for me, as a second-hand interpreter of Ferreira's work, to name them or to attribute any of the remarks made about Ferreira in the preface to any particular persons. The preface is written in a very complex literary style full of allusions to Proust, Valéry and other literary figures.

"Thus his (Ferreira's) work is intelligent and striven for, possibly only provisionally completed, always awaiting a greater degree of perfection. Some may be surprized that his work is considered to be imperfect and incomplete, while others that such perfection could be attained by one, who during his life-time appeared to be so detached from everything. Here we are touching on what we consider to be an essential point. The Poet sees no reasons to believe in the unity of a world that seems to him to be absurd and chaotic. Life is, so he says himself 'a blind flight into nothing'. Having given up hope of faith in a world or a God whose unity would cover and resolve all doubts and contradictions, for the Artist there remains a really terrible liberty: to decide or to choose. If belief in a guiding spirit has no validity, because it is ingenuous, the Artist has the right to choose any convention: this will then serve him as a guiding principle.

The editors suggest that like Paul Valéry and Fernando Pessoa, the famous Portuguese poet who went to Durban Boys' High School and was regarded by Roy Campbell as being probably the most original Western European poet writing in the 20th century, Reinaldo Ferreira combined a disorganized and

unconventional personal life with an almost fanatical search for perfection in his literary work. That is why he put off publishing his poems although these had been circulated amongst his friends and acquaintances, and one or two had appeared in the local newspaper. He felt that they were not ready to appear in a book in their final form. Before his untimely death he had begun to assemble his poems in *some* sort of order, and the editors followed his wishes as far as they could and these eight poems appear in the order Reinaldo Ferreira intended they should.

## REINALDO FERREIRA

---

### FROM POEMAS

#### I

Martha,  
protagonist of an imagined tragedy  
that I did not make,  
from waiting that I should create it,  
in my intention happily she slept.  
There, slept also in that ancient sleep,  
Ilda, Michael,  
the lyrical Rachel,  
and all those  
who feel they are not with me.

Scents only  
and dust before dust.

Now I call her in vain,  
as one who sees a child  
taken away in a coffin,  
but does not understand,  
and absurdly, in the middle of  
the night  
I call to her who hides —  
— Martha! Martha! Where are you?

I don't know if she hears me, only  
that no answer comes.

## II

In the afternoon we wandered  
we, you and I,  
but three.

Discreetly I am silent  
so my good sense  
you'll praise;  
in vain I do not speak  
so that what I think  
you hear —

Better it would be  
that someone else you took  
like this  
and though far away  
you thought only of me.

## III

If I never said that your teeth  
are pearls,  
it is because they are teeth.  
If I never said your lips are corals  
it is because they are lips.  
If I never said your eyes  
are of onyx, or emeralds or sapphires,  
it is because they are eyes.  
Pearls, and onyx and coral are things  
and things do not sublimate things.  
If one day, I should praise you  
with common phrases  
certainly I would seek in poetry  
in landscape and music  
transcendental images  
for eyes lips and teeth.  
**B**ut believe me, sincerely believe  
that all metaphors are too pale  
to say what I see,  
and I see lips, eyes, teeth.

#### IV

That of the two of us  
I am the most sensible,  
— is your delicate way  
of saying that I am the older.  
It is true enough  
that I am older in years  
but to assume therefore  
my good sense  
is to span so great  
an abyss,  
that you certainly must say it  
with irony and no sympathy,  
for the error in which I live,  
the error of having wrinkles  
and never looking at a mirror . . . .  
I never knew,  
that of the two,  
I am the eldest.

#### V

I live in the hope of a gesture  
that you must make.  
A gesture, clearly, is a way of saying  
because what is important is the rest  
that this gesture has to have.  
It has to have sincerity  
and not **appear premeditated**;  
it has to be convincing  
but in a different way  
from prepared speech.  
Without expounding on it,  
I cannot resist  
the temptation to say  
that the gesture is not only this . . . .  
When you, all confused,  
knowing that I am waiting,  
show me that you hesitate  
only because you know not  
where to begin.  
**What a temptation to speak!**  
Because, of course, as you can guess,  
I know this gesture,  
but if I say it, it no longer is . . . .

## VI

I place no hope in anything more  
and if I did  
it would have to be an ambition so measureless  
that it would no longer fit  
into what is left to me of life —  
An ambition, so unreal,  
so paranoid, so great  
like the greatness of Spain  
with Granada and the Escorial.  
Because this hope that I place  
in seeing you one day  
move out of truth into a dream,  
is like being the manager of  
some exhausted estate;  
To the world we give our best,  
but the world gives us nothing,

## VII

From Coppelia I have kept three melancholy letters,  
a ribbon, and the faded bud of a rose  
that took its perfume from her hair.  
Obviously Coppelia does not exist,  
neither do her letters.  
She is only real because I miss her,  
because I did not have her  
I believe in her, and believe  
in the memory of whom she was in my past;  
in the furtive walks we had together;  
in the stars we placed;  
in some kiss we exchanged;  
in the exhalation of a certain soaring dance;  
in the sensation of being by a cloud embraced;  
and in the gentle, pure and well-filtered  
emotion, of some time when her hand  
paused between mine.  
This is Coppelia, to whom, if by chance  
she had been born, or lived,  
a severe father would have denied me,  
and a lyrical illness would have  
torn her from me,  
without having possessed her  
so that from another, or dead, a virgin  
untouched and alive,  
in me she could live forever . . . .

## VIII

From the field of the dead,  
in a strange land  
whence we passed  
absorbed, the two of us —  
We left untouched by melancholy,  
because we went so alive, so free  
and together.  
In vain, over the graves  
of the foreign dead  
a visible oblivion  
in a land with no votive roses  
called to us.  
But we continued going  
happy, happy,  
and the womb of the earth  
dreamt of roots around us.  
But we continued, going  
in the hour that briefly passes,  
living it only.  
And our presence  
in the field of the dead  
in a strange land  
embodied — passed — passed  
The present —

### WHITE POETRY PRIZE

The Department of National Education is once again offering a great deal of money (R750 and R500 first and second prizes) to South African poets.

We would draw the attention of our readers, and in particular the poets amongst them, dizzied as they will be by these enormous sums, to the condition that Whites only may enter this competition. The fact that poets such as Oswald Mtshali, Adam Small and Wally Serote are therefore excluded seems a very good reason for not participating.

CHRISTOPHER MANN

---

OLD PROFESSOR

How she storms  
Reckless as one  
Who never scrounged with a small hand  
But threw herself out  
Wide as a salt pan  
And let the sun  
Beat down the brine  
And squandered  
All for the rough bright crusts.

Books that have not bluffed her  
To serenity  
Block the walls  
And with a high enquiring  
Sweep  
She ridicules them with an arm  
And cackles at the pause.  
“I  
Am English to the marrow” she says,  
“I have sons, sons.”

In rouge and rings  
She banter like a deft coquette,  
And we match the cheeks  
To the red ragged stars of mercurochrome  
Splashed on each shin.

She can yowl down her husband for pitching  
Salt behind his shoulder  
Then whisper to the table,  
“That  
Is the sweetest man in the world you know.”

## GIRL WITH CHILD

She wished upon the thorn trees speech  
Walking barefoot the sunned river.  
I saw her spread her arms to reach  
The greenness crowding in upon her.  
Through her wrists she listened : noisy  
The saps with fire. She like the one  
Cool propulsion within each tree  
Stood between the flame of earth and sun.  
How it hurt, having the wet pain  
Running hot within her, and the press  
Of the whole world there. I saw her  
Standing barefoot in the sunned river  
Her hands against her dark brown dress  
Pressing herself there again and again.

## VALEDICTION

Waves clutter the easy seas royal deeps.  
Kelp riding discolours the swells.  
Wind cuffs the surface but cannot get in.  
The sea takes what it wants, no more.  
So the lonely moon is turned into salt water.  
And your calm tears have something of its dustiness in them.

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MIKE KIRKWOOD

## THE MINOR POET'S AWKWARD AGE

Peter Porter: *Preaching To The Converted* (O.U.P.) £1.00

Most of his readers will rate Porter higher after the new book. Some of them may also find themselves coming to terms with a disappointment which, once recognized, looks to have been inevitable. He has reached the minor poet's awkward age: the better he writes, the more clearly there stands revealed a limited emotional range; or, to give it in fustian, a want of passion. This is a more difficult judgment to reach than it sounds. I will always want to read the poem about Hardy, well worth giving in full:

### Thomas Hardy At Westbourne Park Villas

Not that I know where in this changed district  
He may have walked under unwarming sun  
Through a hedged righteousness already bricked  
Up to the pale sky and the many chimneys clouding it,  
Nor where black steeple, tar-gate, and gun-  
bright anthracite held back the Spring and the exact  
green to bring it.

Though the smoke's gone now, the old frailty shows  
In people coming unexpectedly out of doors  
Hardly renumbered since his time: each house knows  
As many stories as in the iron sublime we call  
Victoria. Suicide, lost love, despair are laws  
of a visiting Nature raging against proof and practice  
and changing all.

Here, rather than in death-filled Dorset, I see him,  
The watchful conspirator against the gods  
Come to the capital of light on his own grim  
Journey into darkness; the dazzle would tell  
Him these were the worst of possible odds —  
ordinary gestures of time working on faces the  
watermark of hell.

Here is a poem that succeeds in conveying the banked-down passion and relentlessly prosaic despair of Hardy in a metric manipulated in a manner learnt from Yeats. (See especially the way the syntax is nursed to launch the long last line in each stanza.) One can see how good this is by comparing it with a familiar poem by Auden, Porter's master in ways that make the comparison helpful. His memorial poem for Yeats, making a much more obvious use, in its last section, of the great poet's metrical gusto, fails to give the apt critical definition, to glimpse and momentarily recreate a unique contribution to the modern spirit — claims which I think can be made for Porter's poem. True, Auden's task is complicated by the job of memorializing: Porter's cooler vantage-point probably suits both poets better. It is still remarkable, and important for the essentially harmonious linking of Porter and Auden, that Auden was able to celebrate Yeats at all.

The qualities we are assessing here are three, though all are inter-related: the almost extreme empathy exercised by this breed of poet-critic towards radically different kinds of art, a finely-tuned but curiously impotent sense of the age, and a great dexterity in the application of form to content. The first and last of these qualities seem self-evident in *T.H. At Westbourne Park Villas*. The second relates to Porter's choice of Hardy as subject at this point in time.

The poem suggests, without any fuss or the 'preaching' of Porter's habitually self-deprecatory and ironical book-titles, that the sensibility evolved by Hardy largely in response to personal experience and as a consequence of his own disposition, is of particular relevance and, perhaps, utility now. We have, as it were, caught up: Hardy's stoicism suddenly seems to confront a more than personal end. Porter's poem is not the only reminder we've had recently of Hardy's claim on the temper of a later age than his own: when, not so long ago, F.R. Leavis reviewed a new translation of the modern Italian poet, Montale, he spelled out, in a manner full of benefit for any young English poet within hearing, the vital connection with Hardy. Of course the truest gratitude to a dead poet is paid by a new poetry

which has felt and transmuted the relevant core : here I think the strain in English 'minimal'-verse represented by Ian Hamilton comes closest.

This is supposed to be a review of Porter, but that he goes under when we start to give the attention to Hardy which, on Porter's own valuable indication, is his due, is the next point. Porter is able to value Hardy without being touched, as a poet, by summoning the ghost so vividly. Or perhaps it's truer to say that he is touched, but only in passing – otherwise the passion of Hardy couldn't flicker as it does in Porter's poem. But elsewhere in this new book he is passionless enough when handling Hardy's own themes. Here are two rough samples which represent the poets in typical vein, both writing near their best. The proportion of lines given to each can stand as a comment in itself:

Nothing but the calm  
of history dying, the beautiful  
vulgarization of decay  
Empire gone, the pensioner  
will ask for a single stick of gladiolus  
in a laughing shop.

I am almost in love  
with the small black Queen in the wind  
and I will not notice that the beach is full  
of mussel shells and crab claws  
and the smell is unimaginable  
yet like your mother's corpse,  
that the torn feather is a terrible  
catastrophe, and I am cold  
and lonely on an unimportant strand.

(Porter: *Seaside Resort* – the poet with Victoria's statue at Eastbourne)

And tomorrow the whole of me disappears,  
The truth should be told, and the fact be faced  
That had best been faced in earlier years:

The fact of life with dependence placed  
On the human heart's resource alone . . . .

(Hardy: *A Complaint To Man* )

One grants Porter, more readily on the strength of the new book than ever before, an ability unmatched in contemporary English (not American) verse to take the pulse of the age, and his books

can be read as a temperature chart covering the progress of his patient (metropolitan Europe) over the last twenty years. "The world's a hospital: we won't get well," he said in an earlier book — hardly an original thought, but he has never left the bedside. Neither is he — what he called another English poet — "the laureate of low spirits", being well acquainted with the excited fantasies of high fever. Since *Once Bitten Twice Bitten* and *Poems Ancient and Modern* he has moved away from satire (though it was never quite that) towards a helpless indentification with the patient: this has been in keeping with his increasingly complex diagnosis of the age, and the accompanying realisation that it cannot be detached from the web of history. He has come to see himself, the Australian "who didn't leave Brisbane in order to take it with me wherever I go", as a latter-day provincial come to Rome in the Decline ("If I can't be Martial or Pliny, at least I can aim at Ausonius or Claudian".) With the expansion of his judgments of contemporary manners into universals has come a style that makes wary flights towards the grand — Yeats has been useful here, but Porter is secure enough as a stylist not to be swept away as Theodore Roethke was.

The conspicuous advance in the latest book is the kind of thing that happens, at the end of the poem *Seaside Resort*, in the lines quoted above. The Emperor is beginning to walk about in a new suit of clothes. People talk glibly about a poet having 'found his voice' as if that was the end of the matter. This book reminds us that there is a further identity to be won. If the reader 'trusts the poem, not the poet', this can also mean trusting — in the sense of accepting a current of feeling as genuine and responding to it — the poet-in-the-poem (to avoid the confusing terminology of 'personality', 'mask', etc. as used by Yeats and others.) In the lines at the end of *Seaside Resort* the poet-in-the-poem is emerging from a Prufrockian role which Porter used to use extensively and still does (see a poem like *Affair Of the Heart* in the new book.) Traces of it linger — the deliberate "and I will not notice" — but this is not self-parody in the cause of emotional passivity in an 'impossible' situation. There is the charm (or is it a little affected?) of being "almost in love/with the small black Queen . . ." that we must decide about; there is the shock line 'yet like your mother's corpse' which seems to create an immediate intimate audience not previously revealed in the poem, and in any case disturbs us by demanding recognition of a deeper layer of feeling; more 'heart-mysteries' around the torn feather, and then the retreat (or is it one?) into a more Prufrockian position in the resonant last line.

I am rather uncertain of the poet-in-the-poem in this instance. At any rate he seems to be *there*. But when one turns to the other

sample, the difference is such that Hardy seems to be feeling at a different gut-level entirely. Different kinds of poem? Yet Hardy seems to reach this seriousness, this passion, quite effortlessly and repeatedly: it's his characteristic note. (For the new, forthcoming Porter see these poems in the new book especially : *Evolution, Notes To A Biographer, In The Giving Vein.* )

Of course poetry need not bare the heart in the 'confessional' sense in order to be serious: no-one requires from Eliot a dozen tell-all lyrics on his first marriage in order to be sure that he really did face up to things. But that Porter is now beginning to speak more directly in his verse spurs the question his most admiring readers may have been deferring: how serious, how good is he really?

As good as Auden: if the poem about Hardy is the one you come back to, the comparison with Auden is equally hard to shake, lying in wait at every page, every too-predictably run-on line. You can't miss it on page one, where another poem about Time has the Audenesque title, *The Old Enemy*, and the lines,

the death of God requires a merchant's dignity  
and so they tip their fingers in an arch  
that runs from Christ's erection  
to a *Landsknecht* leaning on his arquebus.  
Those centuries were twice the men  
that MGM are — God loves music  
and architecture, pain and palm trees,  
anything to get away from time.

Auden in the serviceable hints from art and letters that strew the volume, in the ingenious manufacture of plausible conundrum and fully-fledged epigram, in the carefully flighted elegance anchored by a racy line in home-truths, Auden most of all in the air of tired sagacity and doleful recognition.

Yet: one will go on reading Porter, except when he sends one, by a direct or an indirect route, to a Hardy or a Montale. He is still as indispensable as a good newspaper. Whereas reading the current poetry of Auden can be a bit eerie, unless you were around before the war. Sometime after the turn of the century a careful critic, his sense of the past untroubled by those waves of nostalgia and counter-nostalgia that afflict our relations with five or so decades, will make the fine gradations. Only the great poet gets through a lifetime of verse without discovering that, a few books on, he is "preaching to the converted."

## OLD BIG MOUTH

Clearly, Roy Campbell was more a South African poet by birth than profession. He began by considering himself 'African' in the mystical sense of that word, partly because he believed it, and partly because it suited him as a good approximation of his natural exuberance as well as a useful persona. But he did not believe it for long and after Rowland Smith's book\*, nor should we. Dr Smith is from South Africa himself. He was educated at the University of Natal, and taught there and at Wits before going to Canada where he is an Associate Professor at Dalhousie University.

Campbell was eighteen when he left South Africa for Oxford where he spent a year, in 1919. But his Greek was not good enough and he did not enter the University. Augustus John was to ascribe Campbell's lack of success to his separation from Africa, which John, with some geographical licence, locates on the Zambesi. It was at Oxford that Campbell was given the nickname 'Zulu'. Later, he was to become the model for 'Zulu Blades' in Wyndham Lewis's novel *The Apes Of God*. At Oxford, Campbell read a great deal and met the sort of people he wanted to meet, the Sitwells among them. Simply by evoking these names, it becomes clear that Campbell's social and literary career advanced in England in a way that his academic studies did not.

In 1924, he published *The Flaming Terrapin*. After reading Dr Smith's book it will be impossible to overlook the extent to which the French symbolists were behind Campbell's poetry from *The Flaming Terrapin* onwards. Of course, this has been pointed out before. In a preface to a selection of Campbell's verse published by Maskew Miller in 1960, Uys Krige emphasised the symbolist influence and reminded his readers that Campbell himself acknowledged his French borrowings with a typical flourish, later going so far as to dismiss the whole of *The Flaming Terrapin* as 'bad Rimbaud'.

\* *Lyric And Polemic : The Literary Personality of Roy Campbell*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal \$12.50

The poem was enthusiastically received. Therein lay the beginnings of Campbell's fame and the glimmering of his future problems. For one thing, in the *Terrapin* Campbell reveals his admiration for the implacable doings of absolute power

*a great machine,  
Thoughtless and fearless, governing the clean  
System of active things*

– *The Flaming Terrapin*

– an admiration which was to intensify in his Spanish period. Dr Smith considers, rightly I think, that the poem drew praise for its un-European exuberance; that is to say, its 'African' qualities which have always attracted English intellectuals for romantic reasons: darkness, heat, mystery and so on. And yet, as Dr Smith observes, the *Terrapin* reveals

*an inherent danger in the 'foreign' quality of his  
responses and values. As he grew older it became  
increasingly difficult for him to abandon the role  
of outsider with a down-to-earth heroic answer  
to most problems.*

The chapter to which many readers will turn with anticipation deals with Campbell's return to South Africa, the beginning of *Voorslag* and the poems that went to make *The Wayzgoose* (1928) and *Adamastor* (1930). When, in 1924, Campbell came back to Durban, to the Technical College where he taught briefly, to Plomer and van der Post, and with them, to *Voorslag*, he was in an Africa with which he did not identify himself. Moreover, while the Zulu may evoke rare thrills in the English psyche for complicated reasons, and still does, as witnessed by the national exclamations of delight the Zulu dancers evoked when they visited England with *Umabatha* last year – there are an awful lot of Zulus in Natal. Dr Smith is especially good on the dilemma Campbell faced on his return:

*In London his 'Zulu' mannerisms had stamped him  
as a colourful individual in an intellectual group  
which stressed individualism. In South Africa,  
Africanness was not only out of place, but also  
perilously close to the narrow chauvinism which  
so irritated him.*

*Voorslag* was nothing like a 'little' magazine. It was a business. Besides providing its editors with a platform for their ideas Campbell looked to it for a living. What's more, the magazine had serious pretensions towards art and literature. White South Africa was seen as a provincial, boring creature and Campbell took a whip to its hide.

It is difficult to imagine a more infallible programme for failure. The editors of *Voorslag* got in three good blows before the Durban business man who had sponsored the venture, Lewis Reynolds, moved in to protect his investment and seizing the magazine by its throat helped it to its feet. Though it lingered on, *Voorslag* never recovered from the cure. Perhaps all one can say is that the business man got to it before the lynch mob. Some of the things that Campbell has to say about white racism would be 'unacceptable' today:

*Britons and Boers have found it easy enough in the past to jump over the colour-bar to gratify themselves sensually. But they would never do it to gratify their consciences as by this they would endanger the most sensitive part of human nature – their pockets. It is this fond marsupial consideration that keeps us fenced in so carefully.*

*No policy has ever been productive that has not accepted, encouraged and fertilised the utmost physical and mental resources that it can command: and probably the end will be that we shall break down the colour-fence ourselves out of sheer boredom and starvation of ideas.*

*We shall soon get tired of playing Robinson Crusoe. Nature is a capricious goddess: she loves emulation, competition: she only pays interest on what is invested: she will not be wooed by an old fashioned figure sitting inside a fence and ogling her with rhetoric about white South Africa. We shall merely be putting on fat while the native puts on muscle.*

*(‘Fetish Worship in South Africa’)  
– Voorslag No. 1, June 1926*

Almost half a century has gone by since Campbell wrote this and it is still marvellous, stinging stuff. Unfortunately, it has proved to be quite wrong, as Campbell so often was when he put forward ideas. Sheer boredom and the colour bar remain our traditional way of life. The howls of rage which *Voorslag* provoked were predictable but at least it was left to those who saw themselves attacked to respond. If anything the situation today is worse, as witnessed by the attitude of the Wits authorities towards their own student newspaper. For the meekest boy in the class to challenge the school bully is to risk being beaten up by his friends.

But however sympathetic we may be to Campbell's attack on white South Africa, we should be clear about what we are approving. Dr Smith makes the point that Campbell's impulse was not

liberal revulsion but a wish to assail the unthinking herd. It was an elitist concern which he shared with other writers such as Wyndham Lewis, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound, and it was to develop in a nasty way later on. I think we can detect in Campbell's assaults on the provincialism and racism of Natal not so much anger but a splendid irritation. He told Plomer (as Plomer later reported in an essay entitled '*Voorslag Days*', which appeared in the *London Magazine*)

*The whole of this country has an acid smell and  
all the people have khaki faces.*

*Voorslag* probably drew more flack than *The Wayzgoose* for all that poem's assassinations. The rhyming is unimaginative and the metre galumphing except when he turns on the poetasters, the hymners of veld and vlei and other mysteries:

*I mean that there is something grander, yes,  
About the veld, that I can well express,  
Something more vast – perhaps I don't mean that –  
Something more round, and square, and steep, and flat –  
No, well perhaps it's not quite that I mean  
But something, rather, half-way in between,  
Something more 'nameless' – That's the very word!  
Something that can't be felt, or seen, or heard,  
Or even thought – a kind of mental mist  
That doesn't either matter or exist  
But without which it would go very hard  
With many a local novelist and bard –  
Being the only trick they've ever done,  
To bring in local colour where there's none*

*'A Veld Eclogue : The Pioneers'*

Alas, Campbell is gone but the mystics are still singing in the vlei. Writing in *Contrast* recently Jack Cope declared himself firmly against well-observed, descriptive and (horrors!) political poems while showing his enthusiasm for sappy poems possessed by 'initial juice and life', and other nameless somethings.

Dr Smith is right to single out from *Adamastor* 'The Serf' and 'The Zulu Girl', much anthologised though they have been. For these are poems of an altogether different order. Rimbaud is in the first and Baudelaire in the second, but they are foremost Campbell. He achieves a menacing beauty without straining after effect and perfectly renders the tension between black and white.

Campbell left South Africa in 1927, after spending three years here. He returned once again, in 1954, then briefly, to accept an honorary degree of Doctor of Literature from the University

of Natal. But the spread of liberalism in England offended him as much as the provincialism of South Africa. This is hardly surprising for he saw them as aspects of the same disease which he described in *Voorslag* as 'the sordid drifting of industrialised herds, the obscenity of sham ideals of the crowd, the mental non-existence of the man in the street'. He removed to Provence and flayed the English literary coteries in *The Georgiad* (1931). At its best *The Georgiad* hits hard, the wit is savage, cutting like a rowel:

*Remember how King David spent his leisure,  
Between his deep devotion and his pleasure,  
Leaving at times both muse and concubines  
To hack the foreskins off the philistines.*

Dr Smith points to the vitality of this poetry, and he is surely right to do so. But he does not deal with the technical failure of much of the verse – its thumping rhythm; its lines mangled to make, very often, uninspiring rhymes. While the force of the attack never varies, it grows bombastic; irritation blown up becomes hysteria.

Settling in Spain Campbell took the side of the Falangist Blue Shirts against the Republicans. His authoritarian streak became more pronounced; his verse shriller. Dr Smith has defined his position clearly:

*Campbell continually asserts the superiority of the  
Catholic and authoritarian mystique of the rebels  
over what he interprets as the wholly materialistic,  
communistic ethic of his opponents, or the decadent  
democratic spirit of their allies.*

He is informative and generous in his discussion of Campbell's attachment to Spanish fascism, and scrupulously fair in his scrutiny of the poetry of this period – much of it appearing in *Flowering Rifle* (1939). But it is surprising to find him noting that the fascism of this period was distinguished by its 'chivalric' and Catholic overtones, as if he was offering this in mitigation. It is clear that Campbell felt about Franco in much the same way that Pound felt about Mussolini; and for much the same reasons. In the 'thirties many intellectuals nourished similar phobias; like Campbell they feared what they saw as burgeoning communism, financed by usurious Jews, dope pushers and perverts, and looked for a strong man to stop the rot. Firm government, the argument ran, and it is one with which South Africans will be familiar, far from curtailing individual liberties, actually safeguards them against

*A tyranny far worse than blamed on Hitler  
Whose chief oppression is of the belittler  
The intellectual invert and the Jew*

– Flowering Rifle

The satire written at this time is no better, with an hysterical edge always threatening to break through the strained lines. From a feeling of alienation Campbell moved to an open detestation of the English:

*These Pickoid buffoons will smell you roses  
Where even dunghill rats would hold their noses,  
And though divorce was their first end and source  
Though onanism's now their next resource . . .*

– Flowering Rifle

The lines are forceful and carry much the same conviction as the gesture of those Nationalist Chinese soldiers who, when faced by opposing Red Chinese soldiers carrying portraits of Mao, retaliated by dropping their trousers and presenting their bottoms to the esteemed features. Forceful, even funny – but then orang-utangs are as witty.

In 1941, Campbell had a change of heart. The old British Empire was under attack. He returned to England and enlisted in the British Army. He served in East Africa as a coast watcher in Intelligence until invalided out in 1944 with the rank of sergeant. He thoroughly enjoyed the war in his role of the cheerily cynical sergeant, *Talking Bronco* (1946). On this aspect of Campbell, as elsewhere, Dr Smith is fascinating. His comments on Campbell's prose works of the 'fifties go for much of the polemical verse as well:

*Their charm, panache and lyrical moments provide an interest which still holds readers. The total effect of the books is, however, marred by recurrent tall stories, obsessive personal boasts, and an often scornful insistence on the absurdity of any attitudes which do not conform to Campbell's world view. He is seldom a good theorist, and usually less convincing when communicating ideas rather than emotions.*

Campbell shot first and asked questions later, if at all. And yet, despite it all, his poetry remains marvellously subversive. I think that Mike Kirkwood has taken his measure best in a tribute to his range and accuracy:

*That big mouth of his has blown up more  
Than the echo of his own bullied fame  
Taken the legs off any trick shooter  
Lowering his sights on the vicinity.*

– *Old Big Mouth*

Dr Smith sees polemic finally prevailing over lyric. But by his own account of Campbell's poetic development it is difficult to see how there could have been any other conclusion. Dr Smith has written a good, useful book. Up until now there has been nothing like it. No one who is interested in poetry in South Africa can ignore it. To do so would be to ignore Campbell and thus leave oneself merely White English Speaking South African verse to contemplate – which is something else again.

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## SUFFERING AS POETIC VIRTUE

Ever since Chaucer's weepy bore, Troilus, English poetry has been glutted with sufferers. Some kept it to themselves, like Pope with his hunchback, but others, like Byron with his 'premonitions', made a fairly amusing cult of it. "Out of the quarrel with ourselves we make poetry", wrote Yeats, but my quarrel with Eva Royston\* is that she is not sufficiently outside of herself to quarrel, and is too immersed in her suffering to write poetry. This self-immersed suffering seems to be a characteristic of women poets, but not an exclusive one, for the cult of spontaneity has encouraged male poets and many critics to see suffering as a poetic virtue. The more you suffer, the better your poetry is likely to be; the more you are seen to suffer, the better your poetry is, runs the myth.

Every Portnoy has his complaint; what the poetic self makes of the complaint is the test which Eva Royston fails.

Her 103 poems, as poems, are short and soggy. Her writings are the reflection of a person's psychological terrors, how she escapes from them, fails and, eventually, can overcome them by engaging with the objective world. The poems are a reflection of a mind; that mind is a poet's, but they are not reflection of a poet's mind. Their coherence and force derive from a framework so subjective that one can only guess at it. Because of this personal psychological framework, any writing, however bad, might have done as well as 'One Hundred and Three poems' in reflecting the processes of her mind. Certainly of the earlier poems in the book, one can quote that choleric critic of the 'Waste Land' who said "A grunt would have served as well". Not that the poems are incoherent, but they are acts, rather than poems, which serve, consciously or unconsciously, a specific psychological purpose.

\* *One Hundred and Three Poems* by Eva Royston, published by Renoster Books. Price: R1,75

Like anything else, poetry has a therapeutic function for the poet. The extent and type of this therapy is debatable. But the psychological, subjective function of poems, for the poet, is a secondary purpose of poetry. If it were otherwise, criticism would have to rely on the third opinion of independent case-histories.

But Eva Royston did not choose a grunt or trampolining or modern dance for her therapy: she chose words. But by comparing two of her poems, one can see why her choice was relatively arbitrary, for poetry at least. Her poems are easily and coherently schematized in terms of concern, imagery and, to a lesser extent, in terms of tone, for her tone is uniform. One can distil this schema into a scenario, justifying this because the pressure of what her editor calls "her sense of inner emergency" dominates the imagery of an interior landscape, whose relationship with an exterior world is through the imagination. Again, writing poetry is secondary to the expression of the inner world: this emerges in the imperfection of that world's expression. Royston says little about the world "outside": one is therefore bound to construct the logic of the world "inside" to understand the basis of the poems. In this respect, she differs from Sylvia Plath whose poems are a two-way mirror reflecting both worlds.

Royston's poems are like dreams, linked by verbal puns and symbols. In the first group of five poems, she is burning in fire, then she is "stirring like an embryo" and, on emerging, is a skeleton facing "the pain of light". The skeleton becomes a fossil of stone (the embryo again), crying "hard little pebbles", surrounded by other stones, "my sisters and aunts" and by Fates, also stones. From this "house of plaster" she breaks free – "the fiery head broke free" – and the same process of captivity and escape follows in two more cycles, dealing with water and snow.

At the end of the water cycle, she is "a head of purified bones", called by a woman-figure from the "other side" of a river-bank. The woman develops into a mother and the outer world, from which the poet must suffer birth. Again, the cycle of captivity and painful re-birth. In the cycle dealing with the psychiatrist, who has "made me his ear", there is a more detached tone. There's desperation, but also detachment in the description of killing a lily that becomes a swan:

"The knife isn't strong enough  
For the cords in its throat  
Still the blood gushes out  
And psychiatrist, watch, see how  
things die."



Compare the flatness of that poem with the richness of Poem 99:

“There is blood on the street.  
A man fell from a window.  
We shake red hands.  
At the end of a thought  
Comes a little fullstop of blood  
A simple alphabet,  
Red dot, question marks, a name.  
We exchange looks  
With eyes that have a red streak  
In the corner.”

Here the slackness is functional, for the most part, in emphasizing the horror of this common situation. And the poem is evidence of an aware intelligence absent in the earlier ones. The difference between the two stages, of course, is that the second poem is related to a world which includes the poet; the first poem has only to do with a person's sense of menace, where poet and world are simplified and thereby distorted into that one-dimensional final image. That allows for partial understanding, but hardly for response to the poet's feelings.

Finally, the Renoster publishing venture is a good one, which has resulted in some excellent poems seeing the light of day. But in all three productions – Oswald Mtshali's *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*; Wally Mongane Serote's *Yakhal'inkomo* and this – there should have been rigorous pruning out of poems and rewriting of others. And certainly, the eleven or so poems in *One hundred and three poems* which work do not justify this volume.

At most, they are a preparation for a volume.

## SATIRE APLENTY

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**Cannabals and Missionaries** – by *John Fuller*. Secker & Warburg, £1,50.

John Fuller's impressive new collection *Cannibals and Missionaries* (with James Fenton's *Terminal Moraine*) spearheads Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd's outstanding new poetry list. There is surrealism there, true, but satire aplenty and the wit is wide-ranging and civilised. The nine-page, 'The Art of Love' is perhaps this collection's *tour de force*:

*. . . It's surely wrong to say embraces  
Made in the forbidden places  
Induce in girls unusual fervour :  
They're simply primed by The Observer,  
By Lost Boys chasing frequent thimbles,  
By sears with beards and finger-cymbals,  
By bottom-filmers and adverts,  
By queer designers of short skirts . . .*

Fuller, born in 1937, attracted favourable attention with his *Fairground Music* (1961) and *The Tree that Walked* (1967). He runs the Sycamore Press publishing pamphlets of poetry and music, has lectured in English in America and the U.K. and is a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford.

– DOUGLAS LIVINGSTONE

NO IDEAS BUT IN THINGS

(*The Horizon Forty Miles Away* – by Patrick Cullinan. A limited edition of 200 copies privately printed, and numbered. Polygraph, Johannesburg )

Yet another slim volume added to the pile usually brings out the Savonarola in me. But on closer inspection this one turns out to be one of the most impressive first books of poetry to be published in South Africa. Patrick Cullinan's poems have appeared in various literary magazines and in the *Penguin Book of S.A. Verse*.

But his output has been sparse and it is only in a collection like this that his remarkable originality emerges. He has a deceptively easy, colloquial style which those in search of the merely poetic will call banal and uninspiring.

Mr Cullinan can write a plain, unadorned line which never seems threadbare and accumulates assurance and authority. It is tempting to speculate that William Carlos Williams is behind poems such as *Johannesburg 1902* which have Williams's directness.

*A Kind of Grass* and *Nunc Dimittis* carry Mr Cullinan's hallmarks – simplicity and irony. Of a father dying, he writes:

At times he hated  
Misery so much  
He could not face it  
For a son or brother,  
But smiled then  
At servants or called  
A large black dog  
To jump on the grass  
Outside his window.

– *Nunc Dimittis*

In *Devils*, which carries an appropriately stinging tail, we come to Belmontto

... believing he could walk  
On water  
He drowned one morning

With his usual fuss,  
Gurgling Aramaic  
In a short, last prayer.

*Devils*

He is capable of creating in a few lines very complicated images:

The bird moves from the rock  
And over twisting seas  
Uses the wind, the water,  
The waste and edge of storms  
To find new distance.

– *For G*

What emerges from these poems, astonishingly, considering their economy of means, is real emotion. In what is perhaps the finest poem in the collection Mr Cullinan understands perfectly the dilemma of the exile who cannot quieten the past:

... when we had the power  
And used it; when we had  
It like a handkerchief  
In the corner of our sleeves

and who cannot decide whether his future lies before or behind him:

The worst lie was our hope :  
Perpetual teatime and the colour green  
Fantasies always suffice  
But we returned to the lie,  
The dirty towns, the insensitive people,  
Endless teatime and the colour green.

– *Exiles*

If I have a criticism it is that when Mr Cullinan descends into bathos – and he has a weakness for it – he does so too abruptly:

The heirs of Senzangakhona  
Must have a daily crap.

– *The Horizon Forty Miles Away*

He is least happy when he is using ideas. He might reflect on Williams's dictum: 'No ideas but in things'. There is no need for him to offer comments or strain for effect. The quiet authority of his best work proves this. One closes the book hoping for more. Mr Cullinan is a poet.

## WOPKO A GO GO!

(*Sing for our Execution – Poems and Woodcuts by Wopko Jensma. Published by Ravan Press and Ophir : R2,50. Distributed by Spro-Cas Publications, Johannesburg. A limited edition of 200 copies, numbered and autographed, with woodcuts printed on handmade paper, is available at R5,00*)

Mr Jensma invites us to sing for our execution. For ours I think a stiff upper lip would be more in order. But for Mr Jensma's I'll sing.

DAVE TULLY

### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Barend Van Niekerk** is a Professor Law at the University of Natal, Durban. He is a friend of President Senghor's and has visited Senegal on several occasions.

**Christopher Mann** is a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford where he has just won the Newdigate Prize for Poetry.

**M.A. Cox** is a 21 year old Pretoria student.

**Mike Nicol** is a student at the University of the Witwatersrand where he edits *Critique*.

**Dave Tully** lives in Cape Town where he works for a firm of demolishers.

**Charles Leftwich** is a student at the University of Natal, Durban.

**Robert Greig** is a journalist on the staff of a Johannesburg magazine.

