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# Staffrider

Vol. 2 No. 2 April/May 1979



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A LETTER TO THE PUBLISHERS FROM THE PUBLICATIONS DIRECTORATE

Dear Sirs,

PUBLICATIONS ACT, 1974: PUBLICATION: 'STAFFRIDER' – VOL. 2, NO. 1, MARCH 1979

In reply to your letter dated 4 April 1979, I have to inform you that the committee's reasons for declaring that the above-mentioned publication is undesirable within the meaning of section 47 (2) (e) of the Publications Act, 1974, were as follows:

1. *Introductory remarks:* The publication is a literary magazine providing writers and poets (mostly Black) with a medium of expression. It is published by Ravan Press, Braamfontein, and printed by Zenith Press of the same address. The quality of the paper and the printing is high, and the publication is probably heavily subsidized. These factors, of course, do not in themselves add up to undesirability. This is the fifth consecutive issue to come before the committee. The first one was found to be undesirable under *section 47 (2) (a), (d) and (e)*. Several of the subsequent issues were found to contain material of a doubtful nature, but the committee decided that, on balance, they could be let through. The present issue, however, does not fall into this category, and the committee has found it to be undesirable under *section 47 (2) (e)*. This does not, however, imply that every article, poem or illustration is necessarily undesirable, and does not prohibit them being published separately or in another publication.

2. In assessing the present publication the committee took into consideration favourable factors such as – that protest literature is an acknowledged literary genre; that the publication is not without literary merit and could, divested of its undesirable aspects, be an acceptable medium of literary expression for, particularly, Black writers; that the threshold of undesirability is less easily crossed in the case of Blacks who do not have the same avenues of public protest as Whites; that poetic licence generally applies to publications of this nature; and, finally, that the probable reader in South Africa would mainly include persons interested in the development of Black literature.

The committee found, however, that the factors mentioned do not outweigh the undesirable material present in this particular issue.

3. The undesirable material is mostly confined to unfair, one-sided and offensive portrayals of police actions and methods, calculated to evoke hatred and contempt of them. The Appeal Board has on several occasions pointed out that the police have been authorized by the State to maintain law and order, and that material calculated to bring them into contempt and to undermine their authority as a body is prejudicial to the safety of the State under *section 47 (2) (e)*.

4. Material which is particularly calculated to promote the undesirable results mentioned in the previous paragraph includes the following:

(a) The article *Awakening* by Amelia House (p.8), whose address is given as Kentucky, USA. (It is not improbable that this may be a pseudonym for someone more closely connected to South Africa and, should this decision become the subject of appeal, the committee may call on the Appellant to identify this person more clearly. She (or he) is conversant with Afrikaans, as can be judged from the phrases 'kaffir', 'geleerde Hotnot', 'dronklap' and 'Hou jou bek, hotnot' in the article).

The undesirability of the article consists mainly in the scene in which the policeman indirectly encourages other arrested persons to urinate on Eric, a Black student; the scene where the 'good' Sergeant De Vos cannot force himself to protect Eric; the reference to the police shooting students in the back; the scenes of the brutal treatment of Dr. Jay and Eric; and the knife fight during the urinating incident.

(b) The poem *Tribute to Mapetla* by Bafana Buthelezi/Botswana on p. 49. Two persons with that name are known – one a member of SASO and the other a member of the ANC. The committee has no conclusive proof that the writer of this poem is one of the two. Mapetla Mohapi who had been detained under the Terrorism Act, had been found hanged in his cell in the Kei Road jail in King William's Town. Unsubstantiated allegations that he had been killed by the police were subsequently made. The inquest magistrate found that Mohapi's death was due to anoxia and suffocation as a result of hanging, and was not brought about by any act of commission or omission by any living person. The poem appears to regard Mohapi as a revolutionary, and he is lauded as such. His blood supposedly would have nourished the Black Power fist after he had been 'murdered'. The people, as in Vietnam and Cuba, would also have been more powerful than the guns of Azania. ('Azania', incidentally, is the PAC/Poqo term for South Africa). The poem is calculated to approve of subversive deeds; and to present Communist victories as laudable, as well as being a foretaste of what is to come in South Africa. The poet also accuses the police of murder. These factors taken together make the poem prejudicial to the safety of the State under *section 47 (2) (e)*.

The undesirability of these two poems also makes the whole of the publication undesirable. An aggravating factor is that *Staffrider* is also offering a medium of expression for virulent attacks on South Africa's institutions by hostile persons living abroad.

5. Other poems or articles which contain undesirable matter under *section 47 (2) (e)* but which, on their own, could have been balanced by the favourable factors mentioned in par. 2, are the following: They are 'Why, Tumelo My Son?' on p. 11 (Tumelo is found hanged in his cell. He had been beaten up by the police); 'Staffrider' on p. 12; 'Silence in Jail' on p.17 (by Peter Horn); 'An African Woman' on p. 36; 'A Son

of the First Generation' (a story of a transgression of the Immorality Act) (p.24); and 'Notes on the Steps' on p. 42. Taken collectively, these poems and article add up to material which is definitely undesirable.

Mention should also be made of the sour attitude of Sheila Fugard in her poem 'The Voortrekkers' against the Afrikaners - the latter should return to the countries of their origin lest the Blacks shoot them. Such racist attacks are of course most deplorable, but the committee believes that the average Afrikaner can absorb and adapt this particular piece of incentive coming from the indicated source (p.48), and it does accordingly not fall within the meaning of section 47 (2) (c) and (d).'

Yours faithfully,  
(SIGNED) DIRECTOR OF PUBLICATIONS

#### AN OPEN LETTER TO THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLICATIONS

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter giving us reasons for the committee's banning\* of *Staffrider Vol. 2 No. 1*. Once again we have delayed an issue in order to publish your letter and our reply, since we regard this as an important dialogue which we are anxious to sustain in the hope that it may lead to something yet more important: the freedom and security of a debate within South Africa in which all may participate. It is our belief that art may prove to be the catalyst for such a debate, the chief topic of which would be the reconciliation of all South Africans within a society which would heal the bitterness presently felt - and so amply testified by black writers in particular.

We welcome the fullness of your letter: when you list the 'favourable factors' taken into consideration by the committee it is clear that a genuine inclination towards tolerance exists, on excellent grounds. The survival of *Staffrider* during 1978 (after the first banning and our exchange of views at that time) was already evidence of this, which is now confirmed. However we know that you will expect us, in the spirit of dialogue, to challenge your reasons with our own: here goes.

We feel that the brunt of your objection to Vol. 2 No. 1 is carried in point four of your letter, which relates to *The Awakening* and *Tribute to Mapetla*. That this story and this poem have been singled out and pointedly described as 'virulent attacks on South Africa's institutions by hostile persons living abroad' highlights, in our view, an absolutely central issue: is the debate in South Africa, in which art may lead the way, to exclude South Africans in exile? Whether Amelia House is Amelia House, whether Bafana Buthelezi is a member of SASO or the ANC (we are inviting them to write and tell us, if they wish to, in the pages of *Staffrider*; and asking Amelia, too, whether she regards your interest in whether she's male or female as an instance of sexism) - these, you may agree, are not the vital points.

What is really at stake is whether South Africans in exile (and, at the final count, will they be less South Africans for that?) are to be included in the internal debate if they wish to participate, or not? We must expect their contributions to be critical, but can we equate 'hostility' to what they perceive as the injustice of certain institutions and events, with hostility to their motherland itself?

We believe very strongly that the exclusion of exiled South Africans - of whatever political persuasion in our increasingly wide spectrum - from the practice of art in our country, and the ongoing debate on our future which art can stimulate, will be fatal to the already vulnerable hope of our writers and black countrymen for a peaceful future society enriched and nourished by a truly South African art. It is an 'aggravating factor' that to rule in favour of such an exclusion now will make it doubtful whether the response to any future invitation would be positive. It is an aggravating factor that, deprived of the significant exile voices, our internal art and dialogue through art will lack credibility. It must be acknowledged too that a high proportion of established black South African writers are exiles. We had hoped that in time their voices would be heard in *Staffrider*; your letter is, to say the least, a blow to that hope.

The other main point in your letter (para. 3) we answered in our open letter in reply to the banning of Vol. 1 No. 1. To this defence we still hold: the perception of the police as brutal by black writers, who are in rapport with the black community at large, is a sad fact of South African life which cannot be wished away. To disguise it by censorship can only exacerbate, not alleviate the problem. We accept that this perception must be deeply galling to some fine officers and men, but we believe that they would be the last to advocate sweeping the problem under the carpet.

Your objection (para. 5) to *Why Turnelo My Son?*, *Staffrider* (the poem), *An African Woman* and *Notes on the Steps* is answered above: in these cases your objection is based on the perceptions of the police displayed. We can only say that the story and three poems all convey fresh and genuine feelings: the impression they make is not one of cynical propaganda. They are clearly not intended as thorough and factual reports on reality: they are *perceptions* of reality, about which the reader can say, 'This is honestly felt' or 'I am not convinced that these feelings are genuine.' When honestly felt perceptions of reality are not permitted a hearing, we argue that the peaceful future of our society is endangered.

Your objection to *Silence in Jail* emphasizes the crucial nature of the representations we have made above on the question of exile writers: at present, indeed, their 'music crosses the border' only:

*'on waves of ether  
through every crack  
between the heavily armed border posts.'*

Your objection to *The Son of the First Generation* is particularly disheartening, since this is such a fresh and humane approach to the ancient theme of the Immorality Act. The controversial nature of the Act - the necessity of which has been disputed recently even by prominent members of the ruling party - surely makes it an obvious theme for fictional treatment.

Your closing remarks on Sheila Fugard's poem *The Voortrekkers*, in which you find a 'sour attitude' and a 'racist attack' seem to us to have mistaken the tone of her poem entirely. We are asking her to answer you in our next issue.

Yours sincerely,  
THE PUBLISHERS

\*banned only for distribution



## Soweto Speaking

to Miriam Tlali

*Annanias Ndaba, a Soweto self-employed plumber, sat on the kitchen chair, took out a cigarette packet and match-box from his shirt pocket, lit one cigarette, drawing long puffs from it.*

'Yes, my sister; so you have come back safely from *pbesbeya* (abroad).'

'Yes, Ndaba.'

'How was it? I'm sure you enjoyed it very much. What is the name of the place you went to?'

'Iowa.'

'Where's that now, England?'

'No, America.'

'Yes? Iowa.' (He said, smiling, and showing some of his nicotine-stained teeth.)

'Yes.'

'I understand you went to many other countries. What are they?'

'England, Germany, France, Italy, Egypt, Kenya . . .'

'What, Egypt? Did you see the Arabs?' (He asked, twisting his arms above his head as if he was wearing a turban. We both laughed.)

'Yes, many. Oh there are many, many of them. Cairo is a big, big city; and crowded.'

'Yes, Egypt. Makes one remember Hitler's war . . . How is it, *pbesbeya*? I understand there are no passes. Everybody is free.'

'Yes, there are no passes.'

'Hm . . . Now why did you come back? If I were to go there I would never think of coming back. My family and children would never see me again.'

(I laugh.)

'Hm . . . (Ndaba shakes his head and looks at me smiling) So you've seen most of the whole world!'

'I suppose one could say that, yes.'

'Hm . . . Even if you should drop dead now, you wouldn't care, my sister; you would die in peace eh?'

(I laugh.)

'Are you happy you're back now? Back to the passes; everything here?'

'Yes I *am* happy that I'm back. But not happy to be back to the passes and

*everything here like you say.'*

'You don't seem to be very happy, though.'

'It's because I'm thinking about something that happened this morning. About the quarrel I had with one of the white workmen: these who are busy here in Soweto changing these telephone lines.'

'Oh. So you've already "collided" with this thing here, right at the entrance? (*Ushayise nent'emnyango*).'

*I went on to relate how I thought I was alone in the house, when all of a sudden, I heard a white man's voice answering the telephone in my lounge, when . . .*

'You need not say much more, my sister. I know all about that. You see, they regard us like small kids. What *he* knows and has been taught is that when he enters a black's house, he is really going into a small child's house. At the firm where I used to work before I decided to leave and be my own boss, we had one exactly like that one. He was just as spiteful and uncouth as that one. He was also a Boer. I wonder why they always behave like that. He did the same thing at the house of another madam who was from overseas. He ignored the black worker and got what he wanted.'

'How?'

'We were sent out from the firm to go to a certain house in Edenvale. There were two of us blacks and, of course, this Boer was in charge. We waited outside the house and he went in. He entered through the open kitchen door where there was an African man standing near the kitchen sink washing dishes. We were supposed to fix up a leaking tap in the toilet. That madam's house is nearly like this one of yours . . .'

(I raise my eyebrows, surprised.)

'I mean the *plan*, my sister, the plan. There is a passage leading from the kitchen to the bedrooms; and the bathroom and toilet. To go to the toilet, you pass the bathroom door first. This Boer just ignored the African man, passed in-

to the passage without even asking and went straight through into the toilet! The madam was in the bathroom having a bath. Then she just heard footsteps in the passage. She must have been surprised because I don't think it would be a usual practice for the African servant to go into *their* toilet, especially while *she* was having a bath. She shouted: "Is that you William? What do you want?" Then the Boer shouted from the toilet next door: "It's me; the plumber!" The woman got such a shock, she stormed out of the bathroom in her robe and when she saw the plumber she screamed: "What the hell are you doing in my house? How did you come in here without even knocking or asking any questions?" He wanted to say something about seeing *only a boy* when the woman grabbed his shirt here (*he points at his neck*) by the collar, and pushed him through the passage, out through the kitchen door. We were standing on either side of the door looking on, surprised at what was happening. *Awu, madoda!* It was a sight, my sister; I tell you it was a sight! We had to really control ourselves not to burst out laughing. She was *furious*: "C'mon, get out. Get out of my house!" she shouted, pushing him hard. "I don't want to see you in my house. C'mon, go!" *Awu!* We were astonished.'

'What did he do; go back to the firm?'

'No. He stood there like a rain-drenched cock, his face turned down, shaking his head.' (We laugh.) 'We just looked at him and said nothing.'

(Ndaba, smiling, crushed the cigarette stump on the ashtray and lighted another one.)

'And then?'

'We heard the woman's loud voice on the telephone. She was speaking to our big boss at the firm. She said: "Why do you send me a dog instead of a plumber?" They must have asked why she called him a dog because she shouted back: "I say *dog* because he can't speak.

He came into my house without knocking or asking any questions. He just went past my servant in the kitchen, let himself into the passage to the toilet without saying anything; just like that. Next time you must send me a person, not a dog!" She banged the 'phone (receiver) down, came to the kitchen door and banged it in our faces.'

'Then?'

'Then he asked us: "Wat sal ons maak nou? Die missus is kwaad. Ons kannie werk nie". Umsila was 'upantsi manje — the tail was down now. (We laugh.) He now spoke with a soft voice like a young girl. (We laugh.) Then we went back to the firm.'

'Was he chased away from the firm?'

'No. But from that time we had to have another white man when we went out. He was no more in charge; he was

put under another one. Oh, that one was very good. He was from *pbesbeya* (abroad). He used to laugh with us and make jokes about all these things these white people here do to us. He told us a lot of stories. Then the Boer would also smile a little. He sort of softened up a little. What's the use of sulking around when everybody else is smiling and joking? This other one from overseas didn't care. He used to treat us like people, not dogs. I remember when we went to another house one day. You know, when we came to a house and he wanted to make tea, he never used to say: "You go and make tea for us," to the black workers, no. He used to stand up, put enough cups and saucers for all of us on the table, make tea or coffee and pour it; put a packet of biscuits there on the table, and ask us all to sit down and

drink together. He said where he came from, *pbesbeya*, everybody did the same work as everybody. Nothing like "you are black, and must do dirty work." No. You know what, then the poor Boer would not even *drink* the tea or coffee because we were there. Then the one from overseas would ask him: "What do you want me to do, chase these blacks away; ask them to go and get jam tins and stand far away and drink their tea? I can't do that."'

(*Annaias shakes his head in despair, I smile.*)

'I used to tell this Boer sometimes: "All you white people of this land hasn't got God." Then he asks: "What do you mean, Annaias? What do you mean we got no God?" Then I tell him: "You all got bad hearts!"'

### THE SOWETO 'NOT-SO-MERRY-GO-ROUND' ... An Interview

Mrs. Flora Mooketsane lives in Jabavu. Her husband died on 17 December 1976. This is her story, as she told it to Miriam Tlali.

*I have run around. I have run around and I have almost lost hope. Every time after moving from one place to another, I am sent back to the Bantu Commissioner's offices where, instead of getting aid, I end up with nothing. Life is hebbie (heavy).*

*First I went to the Bantu Commissioner's office for the Death Certificate so that I may collect his money from his employers. After getting the certificate, I went to the WRAB offices where he was employed.*

*(The following is a precis of what happened):*

WRAB OFFICES (Employer):

'Go to the Labour office and collect your husband's E & F Cards. We do not have your husband's cards here. You said your husband was a Botswana national. No cards are issued here for Botswana people.'

*I then went to Labour.*

LABOUR OFFICES:

'They are refusing to give me my husband's cards at the WRAB. They say they don't have his cards.'

'Oh, do they say that? They're mad. Alright, take this letter to Pretoria and they will give you his cards.'

*The following day I travelled to Pretoria.*

PRETORIA:

'At the Labour office in Johannesburg they gave me this letter to bring here and collect my husband's cards.'

*They immediately looked at the papers and without much fuss handed me the cards.*

*I later took these to WRAB.*

WRAB OFFICES:

'I have brought the cards. May I please have what was due to him.'

'Where did you get these cards from?'

'Don't ask me many questions. Just let me have what you are supposed to give me. Fill in what is required.'

*They filled in the cards, and at the same time, gave me a cheque for R16,00 which, they said, was my husband's pay*

*for the week which they had not paid him for AND his holiday pay which was due at the time of his death.*

'Is this all I must get?'

'Yes.'

'How can it be? My husband has been working all along. His 'unemployment' (U.I.F.) has been withdrawn from his pay all these years; he has never drawn it.'

'It's your fault. You said your husband was a Botswana person.'

'I never said that. How can I say that? My husband was born in Zeerust in the Transvaal. He only changed his pass and took a Botswana passport. He has been working here all along and he lived here all along.'

'There's nothing we can do for you.'

*After a few days I decided to go to the Labour offices again.*

LABOUR OFFICES:

'At my husband's place of work, they say I cannot draw unemployment benefits because my husband was a Botswana person.'

'Go to the Bantu Commissioner's offices and tell them about your claim.'

*I had moved around so much, and I had spent so much money that I felt discouraged. After some time I became restless again and decided to try once more. I went back to the Bantu Commissioner's office.*

BANTU COMMISSIONER:

'You say your husband was born in Zeerust?'

'Yes.'

'Go and bring proof that he was born there.'

*I went back home. I had stood in so many queues, and moved around so much that I felt helpless. After some time, I decided to go and present the matter to his elder brother who was willing to give evidence that my husband was born in the Transvaal. We both went to the Bantu Commissioner's office. There, they gave me a letter to take to the Labour*

## SOWETO SPEAKING

offices.

LABOUR OFFICES:

'We shall take these documents of yours and send them to Pretoria. It is true that there is *some* money your husband must get, but it's *only a few shillings*. Anyway, it is right that it should be paid out to you. Take this letter to the Bantu Commissioner and they will tell you what to do.'

BANTU COMMISSIONER:

'Go home and wait. We shall send you a letter and tell you when to come. Your husband's money is not much but you are entitled to it.'

*I went home and waited. After some time, a letter arrived from the Bantu Commissioner's office. It said: 'Come on such and such a day and bring your eldest son with you.'*

BANTU COMMISSIONER:

*When we got there, they let my son sign some documents and handed me a cheque. Do you know how much it was? R4-70 – Four Rand Seventy!*

*Then just the other day, I was called to our local WRAB office.*

JABAVU WRAB OFFICE:

*When a lady clerk there looked at my documents, she said:*

*'Poor woman, you have been thrown about like this and all this time, nothing of yours is right. This Death Certificate*

*you have isn't even right. This is only a "duplicate" and not the certificate itself. Go back to the Bantu Affairs office and ask for the real Death Certificate.'*

*Then I went back to the Bantu Commissioner's for the real Death Certificate and only then did they give it to me. I had been moving around with a thing and all the time no one told me that it was not the right thing.*

*Then they said I must go and try to get my husband's pension money. They said perhaps, perhaps they might give it to me.*

*At the Bantu Commissioner's office, they said I must go to the WRAB Head Office and ask for it. They said it's near Faraday Station. I have travelled so much. Throughout all the mourning period, I moved around in black like a lost person. (She shakes her head and buries her face in her hands.)*

*And to think that my husband never stayed home. He worked for the Municipality for seventeen years. When he was about to draw his pension, they said he was still too young and they laid him off because he was supposed to get an increase and they did not want 'old' workers. So he left and worked for these last employers WRAB. He worked only for the Government. He always chose the "maropane" (cheats, robbers).*

*Someone advised me to go to Black Sash. They say they sometimes help people.*

Miriam Tlali's 'Soweto Speaking' column has been a feature of *Staffrider* since the first issue. Her novel, *Muriel At Metropolitan*, has now been published internationally and a Dutch translation is in preparation. Two stories, 'Soweto Hijack' and 'The Point of No Return' have appeared in *Staffrider*. A third, 'Just The Two of Us' recently enjoyed the rare fate of being banned before it was published.

## KHAULEZA – ALEXANDRA

### 'CIVILIZATION'

What is this civilization,  
that knows differences between races?  
Why do I need to be civilized?  
Please tell me, who is not civilized?

They say I belong to the homelands  
Because I am not civilized.  
I am paid less, for more work  
Because I am not civilized.

Tell me then, why do you give me Independence,  
knowing that I am not civilized?  
How can I rule uncivilized people?  
What will I achieve?

Civilization I don't need you.  
You are a poison to me.  
You are a thorn in my heart.  
I will not rest till you are no more.

Civilization leave Our Country,  
Leave Our People.  
Maybe your brothers and sisters need you.  
We have suffered enough because of you.

Sibusiso Bafana J. Damoyi

### HAMBA KAHLE CASEY

you have worn the blanket  
of this earth  
bugs bugging you up  
worms disintegrating your frame  
to feed this earth  
we owed  
i spoke to you  
you neither spoke nor laughed  
but stared at me  
your empty eye sockets  
planted fear into my soul  
casey i eyed you alive . . .  
alive in a dream  
covered with laughter  
to the world of no return  
the world of the unknown  
todd mashikiza  
can themba  
nat nakasa  
casey motsisi . . .  
our world is drained . . .

Mmaphuti wa Mailula

*KHAULEZA is an association of writers and other artists based in Alexandria. Writers wishing to join can contact the committee through Staffrider or P.E.N.*



DOBSONVILLE/SOWETO

ZAMANI  
ART  
ASSOCIATION

CUNNING BROTHER SERPENT

Cunning poisonous brother serpent  
I see you walking through the long grass  
to get a clear view of me.  
Side by side  
you walk with me smiling  
to bite my heel.  
I mistook you for a friend  
and freely I talked  
about the felling of unwanted trees.  
Cunningly you went to your gardeners  
and behind bars I landed.  
Far in the deserted land I'm banished  
where loneliness will haunt my shadow.  
But, thick-bellied serpent, I'm here.

Maswabi a'Legwale

I WONDERED

I looked through the window  
to see the first rays of dawn  
chasing the last trace of darkness.  
I stood there  
surprised and amazed  
I wondered.

I was looking at the poor souls  
that passed.  
Biting pain struck me  
like rusty chains  
eating slave flesh  
I looked down in pathos  
I wondered.

I looked down to see my shadow  
it was there, black like me;  
Hundreds of feet stampeding on it  
depriving it of its image and dignity  
I looked away  
I wondered.

I was crying at the nakedness  
of my shadow  
tears from my eyes falling down my cheeks  
like a river flowing down a steep hill.  
I looked away  
I wondered.

Batlang wa Pule

KLIPSPRUIT/SOWETO

SOARTA  
Soweto Art Association

WHY THE PAIN

from this wind whistling  
thick news on charred planes  
climbing barricaded mountains  
tragic as the grass nourishes  
on human blood in times of war

as the mountains descend  
onto rivers overflowing  
with blood of resistance  
and puke at the corridors  
bordering distances where  
we cannot see each other  
our time glorying in unspent  
moments as we long for each  
other's lands

i have come to listen  
to your heart beat and,  
brother, when i touch  
yours i feel mine

why the pain in us, brother?

Themba ka Miya

I AM

Sometimes I gaze defiantly  
back at this blinking soulless  
City of many eyes

I even refuse to come near  
its parks for I've never  
smelt the fragrance of its  
roses  
My blood boils in my veins

Then there's this voice  
that keeps telling me  
the sun never sets  
It's the earth turning

When I go back to my reality  
I see my Soweto  
Its scared soul lying helplessly  
Beneath tabernacles of the law

Beloved  
Every time I rise to fight  
Defending what remains  
The ruins I treasure  
Yours, mine, ours  
I feel I can kill  
War without terms

But then — here I am  
I come to you as I am:  
Hopeless

Themba ka Miya



**THIS DROOPY-OUT**

Yet another dropsy  
 He's been drooping out  
 Almost all his life  
 Told that his education  
 Is the forte of life  
 He never said lousy  
 This droopy-out!

Here today,  
 At gate number three  
 Grinders (Pty) Limited  
 Here he meets Obed  
 Droopy Standard Three friend  
 A just-been-fired  
 For having much in his pocket.

Here this morning  
 All stranded before the gate  
 All branded by the sun  
 Uncompromisingly so.

Applications?  
 He did to the not-so-corrupt  
 Personnel factotums,  
 Who with non-remunerated considerations  
 Regretted his inexperienced labour.

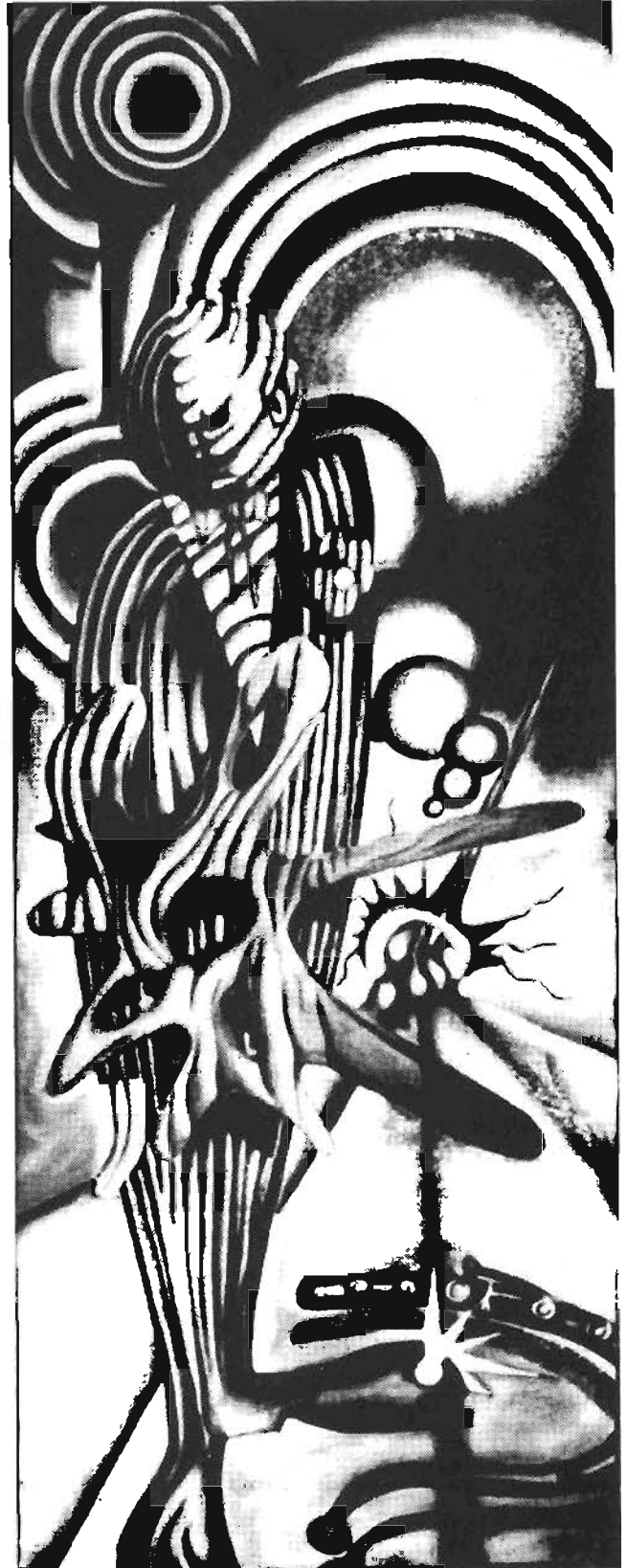
He had read in the *Mail*  
 About his kind in Plural;  
 Of their Idle Bill and  
 How it will savour  
 He never wanted to be ill  
 So he came this morning.

From the college in the bush  
 Perhaps frustrated by 'courses'  
 Or the Rhyme Odds of life –  
 Or is it the riots of fire?  
 On and off he flickers  
 This flim-flam droopy-out!

Industries he cannot tolerate  
 'cause he is 'aware'  
 Beware! Flipperty-flopperty he goes again  
 for he is not rare.

*Indeed that is why they attend cool-edge his granny gaped  
 So as not to work – they are not like us, his father yawned  
 How uneven even himself  
 This dreary droopy-out!*

Tim Dladla



Madi Phala/Splash

*Bayajula's artists are now well known to Staffrider readers.  
 The good news is that their work will be shown in Germany  
 later this year.*



Sam Nhlengethwa/*My Strange Dream*

DEAD END STREET MAMA

Somebody loved you,  
Sheltered you from drenching rains;  
You once knew the cosiness  
of a satin-bound blanket  
in times of the setting winter;  
though it now retires round your waist  
held by a super size safety pin.

Familiar with every crossroad,  
You stand cautioned  
at an amber-coloured robot,  
carrying your hobo-physique  
a safe distance from the 'betters'.  
Yet extend a hand for anything.  
I saw how you smiled back to a grin,  
Hoping to receive  
Nothing, absolutely nothing  
Since yesterday's 'two-iron'  
And a basketful of shame,  
And sympathies galore!

Zakhel' Amandla Mtsweni

THE DUSTMAN'S MORNING

His mid-day face bears no resemblance  
To his morning appearance:  
This dirt  
His feeding fund,  
This baggage his living,  
Wasting the day  
To raise the pay.  
He's heard them say  
'Someday he'll bear his sins as he does the bin.'  
He claims they will prove lighter.  
Like all men,  
He has gone a step higher with experience;  
Emptying bins down three streets is an hour's trick.  
To him dirt specks stick  
As the morning glory to the wall.  
He gets up early and goes to toil —  
He doesn't think much of the job,  
But it's sure better than his pass.  
Like all men,  
He's had the worst moments of his working days:  
In the bin's refuge he's found the articles refused  
By the refuse-rich suburbs.  
He has blessed himself a mortician of the dead:  
Animals that have ended their lives of service,  
The abandoned baby's lost life  
Grinning,  
smiling,  
gritting,  
screaming  
And telling pain.  
Like all men,  
He says he is doing his best.

Zakhel' Amandla Mtsweni



## A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana

A story by Mtutuzeli Matshoba, illustrated by Mzwakhe.

The day it arrived, the brown official envelope with a red Prisons Department stamp had set my heart at a gallop, and my hands shook like an alcoholic's as I started to open it.

According to an admittedly blurred memory I had never in my life even dreamt of making penpals with anybody to do with prisons. What could it be? It was addressed by hand, an arrogant-seeming scrawl which probably reflected the writer's indifference as to whether the missive reached its destination or not. My name without the bare courtesy of a 'Mr.' . . .

Forgive me, friends, if I happen to sound prejudiced, or attach importance to small matters. After all, which of you can tell me with a straight face that he regards prisons without any bias? Especially when someone is trying to involve him in prison affairs?

When I had opened it my heart beat still faster, but with sudden relief now, and a new excitement.

They came back to me, those days when they had come to my beloved kennel to make sure that I was the man who had applied.

Twice they had come, both times scaring me out of my wits. The first time they had not found me in. A white man and a black man had come looking for me: the kind of news that goes straight to my bladder. The second time I was cornered, in the room I share with my two brothers when they are both at home. You know how it is: you want to crash out of the window and run for your life when you hear a white man's voice in the other room — asking for you in Afrikaans!

I went out to meet my fate. There were two of them. One white and one sellout, black and burly.

They asked me if I responded to my name. Who could deny it? Their eyes told me that they already knew. Perhaps from a mugshot they had picked up from the pass department. Had I applied

for a visit? I answered, 'Yes,' and to my huge relief they left without another word.

Now the letter in the brown envelope told me when my pilgrimage had been set for, the departure time of the boat from the Cape Town docks, the time of its return. The rest, I presumed, was left to me.

Another memory floated across the screen of my mind — the day they took him away. It was a bolt out of the blue for everyone, his colleagues at work and the folks at home. For me it was not, because I have long since accepted arbitrary arrest as part and parcel of the South African lifestyle. They took him from work, after assuring the people there that it was only for half an hour in their car outside. His employers suggested that the interview could take place inside their building. While a room was being prepared for them, they slipped out with him to the car, and that was the last time anyone at work saw him.

## ORLANDO WEST

A friend — can't remember who it was, there being always a guy hanging around with me (I reckon I hate loneliness) — this guy, he brought my mind back to the Prisons Department epistle. 'What is it, Chuck?' Guys'll always have a better tag than the original for you.

I told him. Ja, I remember now. It was Joe. I gave him the letter to read in case he should think I was lying about getting permission to embark on a pilgrimage to the holiest of holies.

Over the next few days everyone who happened to get wind of my destination wanted to talk of nothing else. What I found interesting was how the talk always embraced all the people at 'the shrine'.

'Will you see *him* too?'

'What do you actually want to know, *ndoda*? In any prison you only see the person you've visited. Or would you expect everyone to be paraded before you?'

'Naw — I mean you might see him by chance.'

'Well, I don't know.'

Another one: 'How many people are kept there?' Another: 'Do they do hard labour?' And another: 'Do they wear the same uniform as ordinary convicts? And how many to one cell? They eat well? Sleep on beds?'

'I'll find out,' I would say although I had no idea how.

'Greet all those you'll see.' Plural. Not only him, but the others too.

The preparations were not anywhere near exhausting, thanks to the mother of one of the inhabitants of the Isle (for six years he must remain there). She introduced us to a practical, humane association of people who care, called the Dependants Conference. I had never heard of these people and the first time that I made myself known to them I was greeted with a helping hand. They provided me with the fare. Eighty-four rand for a second class ticket and three rand for provisions!

The little that one gives grows manifold in the heart of the recipient. The recipient, not me, but the man incarcerated. The Christian saying goes something like: when I was in prison you visited me. It may be hard for those whom the imprisoned man desires to see most, his folks. But because the Conference is there, there is no need to go without or even steal (that's possible, you know?) in order to travel more than one thousand and five hundred kilometres to give strength to those removed from life, and with your smile, if you can still manage one, show them that life goes on in spite of all the injustices that drove them out of it.

### A JOURNEY THROUGH SOUTH AFRICAN LIFE

The fourteenth of December had come and there I was, setting out on a journey that was to open the eye of my mind to truths I'd never pondered before.

I had discovered that people bound for my destination, either as prisoners or visitors, carry with them the wishes and desires of many others. It was good to know that so many people cared. My friends, their folks and friends, the friends of the incarcerated man, their folks and friends. It was good to be going there for everybody.

I had this small black bag, a blanket and a paper bag of food prepared for me by the old lady, all ready, and I sat on the stoep counting the minutes before the actual take-off. You see, I prefer to travel with my hands in my pockets because, in the first place, I'm scared of long distances. More so if I am going to be confined by two parallel rails. I get this eerie feeling: I'm a stiff in a coffin, en route for the grave and the unknown.

It was my first visit to Cape Town and there'd be time, soon, to compare those images of the city stored in my imagination with the real place.

Were it not for the Conference people I would not even know what to do with myself when I got there. I felt like a *goduka* going to the city for the first time in his life, afraid the city might swallow him, afraid he might not return from the dark earth's entrails of gold. Up to that day I had never known the fear of being lost in a city: after all, I was born and bred in one.

Was it a fear of Cape Town, the unknown city, or was it a fear of something else? I tried to analyse my feelings. That was where they landed, back in the seventeenth century. That was where it all started. This life of endless warring; of massacres; of detentions without access to the law; of maiming and death in detention; this railroad to prison; this denial of millions of people, guilty of only one 'crime' — the pigmentation of their skins.

That must have been what was rattling me. It had to be more intense in the Western Cape, at its intensest in the Peninsula, the westernmost Cape. Only recently the papers (not the papers, the laws reported in the papers) had been declaring that blacks would not be tolerated there. They were to be excluded from even the minor concessions granted to urban blacks. *Crossroads* . . . where was I going? To the holiest of holies.

We would see. The spirit of adventure relieved some of the tension in me.

I guess we all have a bit of this, and I guess most of us need all we have. The train would leave at ten thirty from Platform Fourteen.

'Over the next few days, everyone who happened to get wind of my destination wanted to talk of nothing else.'

My friend arrived in his little blue van to take me on the first leg of my pilgrimage. I could have gone to Park Station by commuter train, but because this was a pilgrimage and not just a jolly trip, he had offered to burn a few litres of invaluable petrol to take me there. At least that's how I thought he saw it.

Joe accompanied us, folding his Herculean figure in behind until he could scarcely breathe. As the little van zoomed away, taking the 'Soweto highway', I felt as if I were leaving my dear location, dear old Mzimhlope forever. I thought with a weight on my diaphragm: they say it is rough in there. They fear to go there. They call it 'Slagpan'. Yet I do not see what they fear — to me it is home, and no place is better than home. There have been stabbings, tragic 'factions', *inkunzi* (muggings) and rape, I concede. But where else, in a land of hate, haven't these things happened?

Orlando East. My friend, 'Chicken'. Wonder why they gave him that one? Noordgesig on my left. So-called Coloured township. So-called because I bet you my skin to flay, they never gave themselves that one but somebody else did. And I'm positive they would have preferred to be known only as human beings, South Africans, nothing more, nothing less, further details to be kept in the file of life: if you get what I mean. In case you don't, let me try to explain my words: one thing that goes a long way towards impairing human relations in our fatherland is the fact that South Africans have had it deeply ingrained in their characters to place emphasis on physical features (race) in the evaluation of human nature. Even a moron will tell you that this is a negative and destructive attitude which feeds the flame of many antagonistic nationalisms within the borders of one country, which the moron will also tell you is not healthy. . . . *kodwa ithemba alibulali*. Yes, it is hope that keeps us going, that makes the difference between the will to survive and despair. This living hope that one day we shall all overcome these divisions and live as South Africans. No! As Azanians, because South Africans have been divided for three centuries. This living hope is the driving force.



The freeway is also the physical division between Orlando East — 'Plurals' — and Noordgesig — 'Coloureds'. Ridiculous!

Diepkloof. 'Eyi sonny!' And were it not for his many years' experience behind a wheel we would have crashed. Because that cry came from my friend the wheelman who, instead of fixing his eyes on the road ahead, had them pasted on some delicately contoured creature thumbing a lift on the roadside. Joe was wriggling his huge frame to peep through the rear window. One right no one can take away from you — to appreciate the beautiful things with which the world is adorned.

Past an old mine compound, the gum trees and mine dumps, towards Booyens with its rusty factories, ahead.

'Seems we're going to wait nearly an hour at the station,' said my driving friend after glancing at his watch.

'If there's one thing I hate, it's waiting for a train. You don't mind if we cross over to Braamfontein? Some guys I'd like to say good-bye to there,' I returned, feeling ashamed of taking ad-

vantage of a friendly offer to get more out of the giver.

'Naw, I don't mind. How can you say that when I'm at your service, *ndoda?*' He had always been a generous fella, that one; so much so that at times you just felt like refusing because you were always the recipient and seldom the giver. But to refuse generosity is to kill an endangered virtue on earth. So seldom did I refuse.

The city was bustling with mothers who reminded me of hens with newly hatched chickens, leading the little chicks all over the fowl-run, scratching up the dirt, pecking here and there as if showing the young crowd what to pick out of the rubbish, to subsist.

'Christmas shopping has already started, huh. Only the fourteenth and the scramble is on,' observed one of my friends.

'By the time Christmas arrives they'll all be penniless. Better if they waited until the last week,' the other one said. 'Rather take the peak of the rush than face the big day with nothing. The food's got to be used immediately. Not every house has a freezer, *phela.*'

'Ya, sonny, say it again. The whole year's sweat squandered in a single week,' I added. 'No. One day. Few can afford a double shopping spree. Christmas ought to be renamed "commercial season" instead of festive season, or season of joy. Or, even more frankly, "spending spree season", the time when the owners of the means of production rake back the pittance that they've been paying the workers for running the means.'

We found that tickling. Different visual stimuli divided our attention. Mine hung onto the Christmas plunder. One single swoop and the thing is done — by taking advantage of the suckers' superstitious instincts. The extra lights, the artificial Christmas trees hanging all over the commercial heart of the Rand. The Christmas carols blaring all over the Golden City. All the trimmings. Because Jesus is coming you must buy, sucker. If you don't celebrate the anniversary of his birth you stand a chance of frying in hell. So the suckers go all out on their 'savings' and 'backpays' for Thanksgiving. Thanks for what? For mass exploitation, for brutalization, evictions, forced bantustan citizenship, unemployment, bannings, Tabalaza's death, hostel life, mine deaths, the wars in progress and those looming over us. Thanks for the great cause of racism euphemised as apartheid, separate development. Thanks for Damien and Lucifer's presence in Africa. Never! That cannot be. Thanks for survival — maybe!

May be something to it, however. Those young ones are sure worth a little candy after a laborious year, a taste of the crumbs that have been scraped together, plus a new set of clothes to last them through the coming trial. 'Back-pay' time is the only chance to buy more than just mieliemeal. But apart from this, it's all an unreasonable fuss. Hire-purchase — bedroom suites, dining-room suites, hi-fi sets and instalments the whole year round, repossessions, smooth talk and psychological anaesthetics. *Nxa!* Pawns, but pawns in an international chess game. Don't fall for the hypocrite who assures you that he will argue your case fruitfully with your exploiter. They're all in the conspiracy against you. It's your baby, black boy. All the hollering is just to ease their consciences. Your hard toil is an American magnate's investment. The rape is as subtle as seduction . . .

'Give me the directions, *mfowethu.*'

'You know where Race Relations is?'

'*Awu.* I know this city like the back of my hand, boy.'

'Okay, you go just there.'

Having forgotten that I had already told them that I wanted to salute friends, I expected him to ask what I had to do with Race Relations. If he had, I would have answered: 'I am concerned! They gotta improve in a positive direction. Otherwise the whole country is in danger of sinking to an animal degree of savagery!'

Mark and Motsamai bade me farewell and I could tell it was not the kind of parting salutation that you make to someone going on vacation. No 'have-a-good-time', or that sort of stuff.

At the station we walked down the platform past many white people going on holiday to the coast or seeing others off. A maudlin scene, fifteen coaches long, down to the first three 'non-white' second-class coaches. A few farewell-bidders there. I was glad to note that 'our' part of the train was relatively empty. I had travelled hundreds of kilometres in 'third class' coaches with two people to a compartment bunk, one or two on the floor and people as well as baggage in the corridors.

The reservations list said Mrs. Myself, among five other matrons and misses. Call my reaction chauvinism or sexism, whatever you like: but one thing you must know is that I don't like silly mistakes which provide my friends with hilarious entertainment at my expense. I did not like this mistake at all.

I decided to ask the guys working on the train what to do, seeing I was not a Mrs. but a Mr. This bushy-haired guy in a blue denim uniform, sitting on a

trolley on the platform, was sorry that he could not help. *'Gaan maar net in die trein in, my bro. As die inspekteur kom vertel hom jou moeilikheid.'* I took his advice. Rather than stand in the corridor with my little baggage, I thought it better to keep it in another compartment, also full of aunties and a 'coloured' lass who made me wish I were one of those guys who fall in love instantly.

My two friends bade me farewell. Again, not the sort of farewell you bid a holiday maker. 'What now?' I thought when they left. Stand in the passage and watch the guys offloading mailbags out of a mail coach onto a Railways truck. Tireless brutes, they are. Remind me of anti-aircraft gunners in the heat of battle, although I've never seen, nor do I wish to see the said gunners at work.

Another man boarded the train. A big man in a grey suit who might have aroused my wariness were his face not familiar. Sellouts seldom go around with familiar faces. Not that he looked like one; not by any means. But wisdom says that any stranger may be a sell-out.

**'Soweto sprawled to the horizons like a reposing giant. I could not help feeling something like awe, a clutch at the heart of my being.'**

The man stood a few paces to my left down the corridor, his travelling bags in both hands as if he did not know what to do with them. Just then Bushy Hair came in dragging a mailbag.

Almost the same problem as mine. Booked, but his name did not appear on the list. So what was he supposed to do? Same advice. The single compartment was empty. Why couldn't he park there while waiting for the inspector to solve the problem? Bushy Hair obliged without question, although he might have to explain later who had empowered him, a black worker, to allocate space on the train.

He dragged his mailbag past me. Then something struck his mind. He turned to me with an angelic grin. *'Hoekom wag jy maar ook nie daar binne?'* He did not wait for me to say thanks.

The familiar man came out into the corridor and wedged himself between the two walls, looking outside like me. He turned his eyes towards me. They remained on me just too long to be those of someone who had never seen me before.

I ambled over to him as the train ground into motion.

If you've been to school long enough

to master 'the language' to a communicative level but have none of the hallmarks which place you on the rung of the gentleman, you know enough to compensate for the latter with the former: so you use 'the language', when the person addressed happens to be wearing a suit.

'Say, mister, haven't I met you somewhere?'

'Oh, Mtutu. Were we not together eDikeni?' That's Alice in the Eastern Cape.

'Ho, ja! Now I remember.' That place. That hell of my mental strife. My refusal to conform to a training aimed at raising me above the grass-roots level of life, to pioneer a 'middle-class' or help make the Bantustans viable. Seventy Six, and my loss of interest in academic pursuits that had come to seem selfish. The many others who wanted to go on with 'their studies' as if the nation was not undergoing an upheaval. Death did not mean anything, as long as they lived in dreams of 'comfortable futures'.

Soweto sprawled to the horizons like a reposing giant. I could not help feeling something like awe, a clutch at the heart of my being. With due respect, the train decelerated to a crawl as it left New Canada station behind and crossed Noordgesig towards Mlamlankunzi station, below Orlando Stadium.

There, near that high building which is Mzimhlope station, is where I stay. This is Phomolong, beyond is Killarney. Further up is the hostel — the one that engaged in the faction of Seventy Six. The horizon is Meadowlands. The school with a green roof to the right of that ridge, is Orlando West High where the first bullet of Seventy Six snuffed out thirteen-year-old Hector Peterson's life.' I pointed it out to my companion, thinking that perhaps one day when Bantu Education and all the black man's other ogres have been defeated I shall suggest that the school be named after Hector Peterson, for reasons well understood.

My friend looked attentively at the living map I pointed at, like a determined school child in a geography class. Trouble was, our class was moving and we missed some landmarks. 'And that there should be Dube,' he said, pointing. 'Ya,' I agreed, stopping short of patting him on the back, 'Nancefield hostel: didn't know they were still enlarging those human sties.'

'And this?'

'Kliptown . . . Lenz, for the Indians. And on this side a military camp or base or something.' The lesson ended as I took a last glance at Chiawelo, as if to

absorb a last snapshot of my home. Chiawelo, Dlamini, the two locations I had traversed so many times to Avalon to bury the faithful departed.

Having seen what we could of Soweto we went into the compartment.

'A long journey ahead of us, huh?' I prodded for information which would help me to estimate how long we would spend together in the coffin.

'Ya. Cape Town is faraway. But fortunately this is a fast train. Otherwise we would be bored stiff by the time we got there.'

'How many days on the rail?'

'We get there tomorrow afternoon.'

I felt some relief at that, because I had braced myself for three days' continuous motion. And, as I have said, I am not an easy traveller.

Then I could settle down and allow my mind to drift with the motion.

'Why don't you bring your parcels in here,' the man offered before I asked him if he would not mind.

'Ya. I think that's better. You know . . .' I told him my reservation joke. A common plight united us.

We had hardly warmed our seats when the inspector showed up grunting his 'Tickets, gou, jong, gou.'

We took them out.

'Naam?' and his fat lungs expelled a gust that would have blown out all his birthday candles at one go. It went 'hiss-s-s' out of his thin nostrils, with a jelly-like motion of his neck — I could not tell where the face started. Where it was supposed to start was a blue patch on his pink flesh, which made me wonder why his friends, if he had any, never told him to leave the beard on. His eyes directed an indifferent blue stare into my face. 'Mrs. (Myself),' I told him.

A gust of wind and a look which told me that jokes from our kind didn't tickle his humour, if he had any.

'Mrs. (Myself),' I repeated — seriously this time. He studied me, seemingly to discover if I were really a Mrs., or what. 'Look it up on the list.'

The stare wandered over the paper as if nothing was written on it. I rose to help him find it. Life sprang into the blue pebbles. *'O ja, nou sien ek wat is jou probleem. Hoekom sê jy nie?'*

*'Hoekom* is because I wanted you to see the humorous side of life, fatty, and you failed to do so. You're surely a disappointing specimen, you are,' is what went through my mind at that question, but I let him be.

My ancestors! This penguin. Exactly! This seabird complete with white shirt, black epaulettes and ellipsoid shape. Good old penguin. His left paddle reached out for the ticket which he



clipped and handed back. All the time sending down jets of hot wind out of his lungs, he scribbled on the list and grunted: 'Kompartment B' and stood there waiting for me to grab my baggage and light out to crowd the 'coloured' youths and an old man I had seen down the coach.

'Later. I'll go later. *Ek sit nog so 'n bietjie en gesels.*'

The last part got him where it counted. He melted like ice-cream on a hot day into a sweet fat Afrikaner boy: 'Ja. *Jy kan maar sit en gesels, jong.*'

My companion explained that he had reserved a first-class compartment, but his name did not appear.

'Why did you come on this train then, if your name was not on the booking list, huh?' Penguin left his little red beak open in what ought to have represented a sneer and was nothing but a little red 'o'.

My black mate seated himself firmly and launched his counter-attack: 'Look,' he said, 'I confirmed my booking at both stations, Pretoria and Johannesburg, and was told that I was on this train— the ten thirty a.m. to Cape Town from Platform Fourteen at Jo-

hannesburg station. Whose mistake? Mine or the S.A.R.'s?'

Penguin rested his obesity on the doorframe: 'You want to say it's mine now?'

'You are the Railways' official in charge of this train and, I believe, your duties include seeing to the well-being of passengers, black and white alike.'

At the mention of 'black and white' Penguin fluttered his eyes incredulously. He sucked air with effort before saying: 'The trouble with you people is you don't want to understand. I am not the one who allocates the bookings . . .'

'But you are here to see to it that passengers travel comfortably. That's why you're called inspector — to inspect and ensure the passengers' welfare.'

Penguin was angry, the way fat people get angry: 'You want to tell me what to do with my work? I've worked for the Railways . . .'

'I don't care how long you've worked!' Two workers flinging their frustrations at each other across the colour line. 'All I'm doing is presenting you with my problem, and as highest representative of the Railways on this train I expect a solution from you and not your biography. This train is empty. All

the compartments are used by the staff. Where should the passengers travel? In the corridor?'

'Listen; I don't allocate places on the train. That is done at the office where you booked. Those people give the staff these *kompartemente*. I only . . .'

'What do I do then? Because I want to get to Cape Town and I've paid for it.' He had been to Pretoria to mark external examination papers and I bet he was missing his family.

'The trouble with you people is you don't want to understand . . .'

'That you have no initiative *neb?* Instead of clearing space for passengers who've paid their money, you tell me you don't allocate. You can stop the train at the next station and phone back to headquarters to find out if I'm on this train or not, if that'll suit you,' said my companion.

'Okay, give me your ticket,' and the paddle shot out to receive the white piece of paper which served the same purpose: 'But this is a rail warrant. You didn't pay anything. Your case is just paperwork. You didn't pay a cent!'

'My department has paid all my expenses! If other means of service exchange are a miracle to you, I'm not a-



bout to start explaining them.' My friend was losing patience.

'Okay, then. I try to explain things to you and you don't want to understand. I leave you just as you are,' said Penguin, sensing it. He clipped the ticket and left.

'This was getting interesting, you know? It's a pity it ended so abruptly,' I remarked to my mate.

'The whole trouble in this land turns on the question of attitudes. There can never be any inter-racial personal communication without hostility becoming the medium. And always they start it.'

'It is because they believe hate and contempt to be their salvation. How? I can't tell. All I can say of them is that it's a strenuous effort to strike reasonable contact with them.'

While my friend's tension diffused, I tried to find the logic of hate, but my mind failed me. I could only deduce one negative aspect of it, namely: that it was a self-destructive life philosophy. If I hate another human being, being human myself, it means that I hate my own image. I hate myself. The same applies to contempt. And oppression; if I despise or oppress my own image, it means I despise and oppress myself also. Practically, I see it this way: when I start hating I do not expect the reaction to be love. I expect a reaction equal to my action, a relationship of hate for hate. So if I hate, the same hatred boomerangs on me with the same intensity.

Now, hatred breeds distrust and consequently insecurity. I hate someone else. Therefore, I know that he hates me too. And because he hates me I do not trust him. I do not feel secure against the one I hate. What shall I do to feel secure? There are two alternatives. One: replace the hatred with love and receive love in return, then trust, then security. Two: remove these objects of my hatred who try to resist hate with hate, and railroad them to the Isle of Makana.

Which of the two is the more lasting? The first, obviously: replacing hatred with love, learning to trust and feel secure. The second is a futile attempt at establishing security because, for every object of hate who responds with hate, and whom I remove either by termination of life or incarceration on the Isle of Makana, ten more arise to cry out the injustice of my second alternative. They rise and overwhelm me with their call for justice and in the fury of their call I

hear my name. Shivers through my nerve tree render me a raving wholesale slaughterer. Power has rendered me insane. There must be some means, some power to counter this crushing power. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, the physicist states undeniably. I can't stretch a spring infinitely. Somewhere it has to break. I think this applies to people too. Yet I go on hating and feeling insecure. There is no turning back for fear that the ghosts who lie on the roadside behind may rise in retribution. To reverse things is to bring the ghosts back to life, for it is like reversing time to a time before they died at my hands, my chains and my guns. Yet there shall be no retribution on the backward road if it is a road to love. For in the way of love one finds only love.'

Plains to the right and left of our train. Fertile farmland for the chosen to grow sunflowers, potatoes and maize. Acres of it that stretched to infinity. Convicts, (black of course) at labour, who greeted us. Little insignificant stations I hardly had time to read the names of before we swept past. A tractor droning far away and raising a dust column to the blue heavens.

And a revolution!

Three lovely little white fairies peeped into our compartment down one side of the door, one head above the other in order of their ages and heights. Three most innocent pairs of questioning blue eyes, most sincere little smiles, most melodious child voice from the tallest toothless one: 'Excuse us, please mister. Haven't you seen Angie?'

'Oh no girlie. Try next door,' I said.

'Thank you.'

Two little boys, apparently their brothers, followed. They looked at us with the indifference of little boys to old people, busy discovering the train.

'Innocent little ones,' said my companion with a paternal voice.

'Ya,' I agreed, ashamed of myself for thinking, 'Innocent little whites growing into guilty big whites. *Nxa!* This racism is infectious.'

'They know no other mother but Angie.'

I peered around the doorframe. They had found her and she was uttering maternal sounds, ruffling hair, kissing and fondling. I pulled myself back, relaxed and felt good. It made me feel good to come across rare innocence.

'Mother gave them permission to go

over and see Angie on the black side,' I said, 'gave them permission while varnishing her nails.' Damned sceptic, I thought.

My mate chuckled: 'Even the innocent cannot cross the line without permission.'

'Which goes to show that racial prejudice is an acquired and not a natural attitude. All racists must know that they're nothing but a bunch of brain-washed zombies.'

We laughed at that.

'The worst part of it is that these are fanatics that no one can simply ignore — the common fate of other cultists. Maybe it is because should they attain power over others, the lives of millions are placed in jeopardy. They are in danger of a racial catastrophe. A separatist cannot be tolerated in any position of power because he is a divisive force against the unity of the subjects over whom he wields authority, obsessed as he is with colour and ethnicity. A flame of destruction burns him and threatens to burn everybody. What can one say on his behalf?'

The penguin tried to play hawk but the chickens might not have known anything about hawks as yet, because they did not scatter or crawl under the nanny's wings. '*Wat soek julle hierso?*' came his growl.

The kids continued playfully with the black ladies, apparently because they did not see anything amiss. They thought the growl was directed elsewhere.

'They have just paid their mother a visit from their other mother, *oubasie*,' replied Angie with a smile by way of explanation. I could feel that she was praying against an outburst that would embarrass her before the children. But because those were white kids in the midst of blacks they loved, there was none. They were not harried out of there as black kids would have been if found on white premises. The scene closed with a gentle reprimand: 'They need a special permit to come here.'

Whites can go anywhere blacks can go. But blacks cannot go everywhere whites can go. The law of the country I was traversing in my train.

I went down the coach to the toilet, past that compartment I was supposed to cram myself into. The 'coloured' youths looked at me with such open friendliness that I found myself obliged to greet, and ask for matches although I

'When I start hating I do not expect the reaction to be love. I expect a reaction equal to my action, a relationship of hate for hate. So if I hate, the same hatred boomerangs on me with the same intensity.'

had mine. While I shared a smoke with the only one who was hooked on the habit of lung-busting we chatted about life in general — where we came from, what it was like, where we were going, until I forgot about the excess water in my body.

Judging by the angle of the sun it was now about three hours past the meridian. I'd rather have a hazy idea of the time when I'm travelling, because I don't want to know how much longer I'm going to be confined. 'Damn!' I thought, 'They ought to show movies in long distance trains, or at least allow blacks into the saloon so's everybody can while away the time making friends. It's not like we were prisoners, *mos*.'

Klerksdorp. No one left or boarded the train. Nothing to that small town. Unlike what a friend wanted me believe. Each time he went there you'd think he was going to Wonderland. But maybe in the location there was life. Never a dull moment in a location if you stay awake. I was beginning to long for home, I guess.

When the train pulled slowly out, as if disappointed by the vain wait, I felt better. More rich and flat lands. I wondered if they were flattened at the beginning of time or by man. 'Part of the eighty seven percent that belongs to the chosen.' So it did not matter whether I solved that one or not. I did not care who had flattened the land.

One good thing about that pilgrimage was that it took me out of the quicksand of location life for a while, to open plains which allowed me to think about just anything which entered my mind. For even the liveliness of a location turns inwards, is of itself and no other place, chaining the mind.

Warrenton. Plains cut up into fields, thornbushes. Riverton. Both moss-growing stations reminded me of old western movies we saw at Mahala bioscope on Mondays when we were kids. So dead there was no need for the train to stop.

The little white girls (the boys having left long before on an adventure) promised us they would see us again at Kimberley. The emptiness of the plains again filled me with a deep longing for the city. The women next door sang church hymns and, after a lengthy wailing, paused to laugh like banshees. The sun slipped behind dark rain clouds. Sunbeams shafted through to illuminate patches on faraway plains. Iron wheels skated on iron rails as we hurtled into infinity. A man with a bicycle next to him knelt by the side of the railway clasping his hands in supplication over a pile of stone — his shrine or the grave of

a loved one.

A greyish patch of dried marshland towards sunset. Plants, shrubs, crying out to deaf and blind heavens for rain. A golf course. White golfers and black caddies. A human habitat looming ahead. Kimberley: life and relief from loneliness. Tin shacks. A civilized 'coloured' residence. The light skinned family men sat barebreasted on the shades of their verandahs. Matrons watering gardens.

Platform One. Kimberley, Kimberley, Kimberley, confirmed the luminous station signs. Strange faces looked at passing strangers.

An old 'coloured' man, accompanied on the platform by his son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren, was the only passenger to join the train. One grandchild stood out among them with her arresting beauty draped in a white frock, her black hair reaching down to the middle of her back. I thought of a friend who used to say: 'When God makes a woman he's in real earnest.' I thought he had been right. Nature knows that without beautiful things to admire life would not be worth living.



It made me feel quite sore to think that by the decree of the powerful I was supposed to look upon her only as different, not as beautiful. Blast it! Was I going to conform to that sort of lowly thinking? What was beautiful was beautiful, black, white, 'coloured', Indian or whatever. To hell with all differing opinions!

The train was jolted. Goodbye kisses and handshakes for the old man. A few minutes and the locomotive was into its stride.

Carboniferous mine dumps — charcoal-coloured compared to the gold mine dunes — moved slowly back towards Kimberley.

It became unexpectedly dark. The

locomotive was making a fuss of it. Pounding with such enthusiasm one would have thought we were going at over a few hundred kilometres an hour, when all we were doing was dragging with jerks and jolts across an ink black Karoo.

The little white children paid us another visit as promised, and this time they brought their mother along. The ladies next door had run out of hymns and hilarity.

A full moon materialized and hung up there like an ominous silver ball. A station, its name has slipped my mind. Three 'coloured' youths who might never have been out of the Karoo in all their lives, went up and down the platform greeting everybody who was peering out of the windows for the duration of our stop.

Our neighbours came to our compartment and asked why we did not make travelling friends. We told them we were shy and that tickled them. We talked about this and that until we arrived at the reasons for our journeys.

'I'm going to Cape Town with my master and madam,' said one.

'Oh? All expenses paid by them?'

'Of course. They are going on holiday, not me. I had asked my madam to give me the money instead, so that I could also go and spend Christmas with my people, but her husband would not hear of it. Said he was not prepared to eat tinned stuff.'

I thought: 'Because you're black, you shall not do those things which it is in your heart to do.'

'So the wife can't cook?'

'Awwuwa! What else can a white woman do? I'm her physical extension. Her housewifely chores end in bed.' We laughed at the joke.

'Wena? Where are you going?'

'Also Cape Town.'

'To spend Christmas?'

'No. To visit someone at Robben Island.'

A hush fell over the compartment. The locomotive gave a shrill whistle in the night.

'Was he one of the 'Power' lot?'

'Meaning by that that he has some areas of disagreement with the government, or what?'

'Mh.'

'Well, yes. Otherwise he would not be there.'

'Do they allow you to visit them?'

'Yes.'

'So he's there with boMandela le boSisulu le boMbeki? Tell him to say *bayetbe* for us to all the great men there who have sacrificed themselves for us. Molimo! I remember the days of the

Congress. I was this small then.'

'For the sake of justice,' I corrected. 'And justice is not only for black people. There are also whites on the Island for similar reasons as the blacks there.'

'Awu?'

'Ya.'

We talked for a while and they said goodnight.

Out of the blue the war in Zimbabwe came into my mind. Up there Africans were carrying their homes on their heads and moving away. The sky was burning.

It was late and we decided to sleep. I went out like a lightbulb and in spite of the braggart dragging us I slept like the dead till dawn.

I woke up to ragged and uninhabited country. It seemed that God had forgotten that part of the earth, for he had apparently sent no rain to it for centuries. The shrubs were widely spaced like the hair on the head of a black child suffering from malnutrition. Perhaps they survived on mist and frost — where from I did not know, because the rivers had dried up long ago and on some river beds I could make out car tracks.

The scrub began to undulate and I guessed we must be nearing mountainous country.

I was right. The mountains rose high to shoulder the heavens. Clouds formed halos around the peaks and the majesty of the whole sight gave me an impression of holiness although, truly speaking, I've never known what holiness is, having been caught up in evil since I was born.

Touwsriver. While the coaches were being shunted everyone left the train to stretch legs on the platform. Blatant apartheid! The station bridge was divided in the middle with another wall for obvious reasons. 'This is it,' I thought. 'You're getting closer to what you feared. This was where it started.'

Vineyards, acres of them stretching towards where we were crawling precariously on the mountainside. Damn engineers! There was the valley down there where we could be travelling safely, and they chose a railway on precipices, if only to show off their building skills. A great boulder diminished the train to a toy and the other mountains to mere anthills. De Doring, I saw no ebony-skinned people like myself but golden men who smiled and greeted us welcomingly.

After dusty Worcester I could feel it in the atmosphere that I was nearing the end of that part of my journey. Anxiety was building up as the distance to Cape Town shortened. It was my travelling

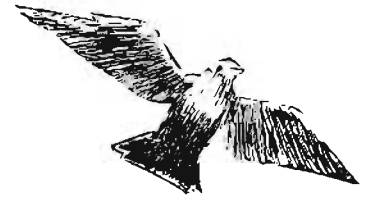
companion's turn to give me a geography lesson, in a voice that told me he was happy to be home again. While he pointed out the landmarks and I appeared to be listening, my mind tried to conjure up what it was like to be him. To be told that you do not belong to where you were born and bred. Obviously his mind or his very being did not believe a single word of that. So I thought he did not pain himself thinking about that aspect of his existence. Which is one main shortcoming of the black man. We are concerned only with the immediate, as if we believed in *manana* — never doing today what we can do tomorrow — while the conspiracy against our human rights goes on: or, we simply lack foresight. Yet tomorrow the fact of our uprooting may grow to true proportions and we may find it's too late to voice our protestations against laws that nullify us.

In the other cities blacks may at most be tolerated, on leasehold, or for ninety nine years — ag, that sort of stuff, maan. But why should these people here be counted out? Are they not urban blacks? Or simply South Africans worthy a stake in their fatherland?

Ho-o-o . . . I see. The labour. It's the labour that counts. In the Western Cape there is enough of it in the so called 'coloured' form, so that 'blacks' are not needed except as reserves; which deal has been fixed with the bantustan puppets. So you see how it is the labour that counts more than a black person's being? The 'coloured' blacks can stay in the Western Cape because they provide enough labour. Nothing but units in the apartheid machine. I just wonder how my dear brothers see themselves. In the other cities, too, they can stay and work because they are so few, relatively, they pose no threat to white property. It is not because they are 'related' to the white man, as some maintain. If they are anything to the white man they are rejected 'relatives'.

We were moving in some kind of natural trough — jagged grey mountains faraway, rising unexpectedly out of flat land all around the horizon.

The avalanche of impressions entering my mind made me feel a bit faint. I decided that the best thing to do was just to look and not register anything for a while. But one thing I could not ignore as we passed many crowded little stations were the railway labour gangs composed totally of 'coloureds' and the railway constables on the beat: set one 'coloured' to catch another. Where I came from and in other places I had been in all four provinces, workmen and



policemen were mostly black.

Acres of graveyard with skyscraper tombstones. One sweep of the eye tells you thousands of the faithful departed are spending their eternity there. Would be really interesting to wake each one and ask what they did with their lives. Wonder how many would confess to racial prejudice.

Cranes rose into the sky like giant steel claws. 'That's where the docks are,' my mate said. 'On the other side of the train, Table Mountain. You can see the Island very well from up there.'

'The top?'

'Yes, but not necessarily. You can also see it from other vantage points uptown.'

The top of the Table was covered in clouds. 'They call that cloud the tablecloth.'

A dome-shaped concrete monster stooped to our left. 'Good Hope Centre.'

'Where they have the big fights?'

'Ya. It's on permit.'

I lost interest in the Centre as soon as I heard that.

Table Mountain was green. The cranes clawed at the sky. A shade. Cape Town station. A cave of more than twenty platforms supported on a forest of concrete pillars. We went into the last platform. The anxiety was back with me. Would those people be waiting? I had expected the journey to last three days, which would have meant arriving the following day, Saturday, and that's when they expected me. How were we going to make each other out? Not that I feared getting lost, or that I might have nowhere to sleep. If there is one thing black people can give, it is a roof over a stranger's head. I thanked whatever Power was behind my being born black. A taxi to the nearest location and the rest would happen naturally. Even my travelling companion, from what I could gather from his disposition, was not going to part with me until he was sure I was not stranded.

When the train stopped I got out on the platform to receive baggage through



'I have always been that way — I feel good in the company of good people, and have an instinct which warms me or warns me when it comes to picking the good from the bad. Not that I'm good myself but neither do I consider myself a hellish villain.'

the windows. In no time everybody was down and I stood there not knowing which way to go, waiting to follow my friend, at least to the taxis. At the same time my eyes were scanning all the faces on the platform, looking for two people I had never seen. I shall call the man Martin after Luther King Jnr. for the love of people I was to discover in him once we had met. S'Monde was the woman I was looking for.

Two 'coloured' porters pulled a trolley, loading all the baggage. I wanted to stop them taking mine. You see, I did not trust having anything of mine out of sight. I would carry my own load.

'No, never mind. They are safe,' my companion tried to assure me.

'Is it an apparition or what?' I asked myself. 'In Cape Town there are porters for everybody. Even blacks don't have to carry their own baggage out of the station.' That might have been nothing to you but to me it was quite striking. Not that I enjoy having someone else carrying my load for me; that is a privilege of the rich, to have others do everything for them while they do nothing for anyone . . .

I wouldn't mistake a black man and a black woman anywhere in the world. I mean a black woman and a black man, not 'non-whites'. There is something about a black person which tells you at a distance what he or she is. Something about the 'auras' of those two people drew me towards them in a way I could not resist. Maybe it was the way they appeared to be looking for people just arrived in the train that made me notice them. Anyway I approached the tiny woman. So tiny in a very feminine way that I immediately felt like offering her some kind of protection.

'Er, sorry, sisi,' I said to her.

I was not so sure about the protection anymore. Little serene eyes which made me wish for her protection in a strange city looked into mine. She looked no more than a teenager. You may have your laugh at a guy wishing for a girl's protection, but that was what I felt and I was not going to suppress my feelings.

'Sister, are you looking for people who have come to visit, er . . . the Island? My name is . . . ' and I told her.

'Oh! We were only expecting you tomorrow.'

That was how I got to know Nomonde in person. Our friend, the mo-

ther of the man incarcerated for six years on the Isle of Makana, had said: 'And I hope you meet that girl and all the others.' So I had known all along that it was not an ordinary skirt-dangling girl I was going to meet. I was glad that that was confirmed. I would not have liked to meet a disappointment first thing in Cape Town.

Martin came closer. His head was crowned with brownish curly hair, neatly combed into the shape stylists call Afro, that set off clearly what I thought to be a dauntless face. Strong cleft chin, unwavering eyes and a golden brown complexion that reminded me of a Red Indian brave. A man I could trust with my very life.

S'Monde acquainted us in a woman's voice that did not need to sing for one to listen to it.

I shook hands with Martin.

'Mtutu is the first name.' I don't like being called Mister as if I were some member of a community council or something.

'Good, Mtutu. Aren't there other people who came down with you?' S'Monde asked.

'If there are I didn't meet them.'

My travelling companion came over. 'So you've found your people Mtutu? That's great,' he said, as pleased as I was about it.

No other new arrival was on a pilgrimage. My two parcels and a blanket were on the trolley. When I wanted to follow the porter I was told not to worry, we would find them outside.

I followed my people to the staircases past ticket examiners who did not ask for any tickets. Three or four entrances to platforms. Neat architecture, nearly the same as the black section of Park Station. Packed with people coming and going for Christmas festivities. Light brown people mostly.

Near the main entrance with a U-shaped car park just outside we found the porters waiting with the trolley. I removed the parcels. Martin took the small bag and I took the paperbag and the blanket. We said goodbye to my travelling mate and left.

The Kombi was parked on the far side of the U. My people went in front and I behind, and we drove away. We turned to face the docks and the clawing cranes, the city to our left and behind, then right onto a highway.

'There's the Island,' said Nomonde,

suddenly turning in her seat and pointing above the docks. 'That black patch on the sea's horizon.'

Everything else melted out of sight as my vision transmitted my mind's whole attention onto that isolated little country surrounded by a natural moat of lapping green waters. 'There they are,' I thought and something happened deep down in my soul. All those men of clear conscience imprisoned for intolerance of injustice. I was about to take off in my imagination to the Isle, when it dipped out of sight.

'Quite near — heh? I always thought it was a bit further out in the sea.'

'The ferry takes about fifteen to twenty minutes to get there. Comes to the mainland three times a day, morning, midday and evening. Fifty cents a return trip.'

All the anxiety that I had had in me up to that stage of my pilgrimage was fast seeping away. I have always been that way — I feel good in the company of good people, and have an instinct which warms me or warns me when it comes to picking the good from the bad. Not that I'm good myself but neither do I consider myself a hellish villain. It's just that in my life I have experienced more evil than good, that being the state of affairs in the world into which I was born. Good being a rarity, I find myself naturally searching for it in both other people and myself: it needs to be shared, and if one is on the lookout for it and prepared to give one cannot miss it.

'Groote Schuur,' said Nomonde, pointing.

We turned left and went down a suburban street. The greenery, trees, hedges and creepers overshadowed the dwellings. It's the same in all white residential areas, anyway. Nothing new to it. We crossed a busy street. A bus terminus. 'Buses to the black townships,' said S'Monde and I believe her 'blacks' embraced all but the whites, because I saw mostly light brown people. 'That's Mowbray station.' A train was just pulling out, as packed as ever, township-bound.

Martin swung the Kombi into the last street and about half-way down it we stopped. 'Institute of Race Relations.' I prefer 'Institute of Human Relations' to the present title. Anyway, Martin told me to leave my parcels in the car.

We went in, down a passage past a

door open on a room with books and African crafts, across another room and out into a small square with walls on which were painted black figures — mothers carrying babies, children clinging to their long skirts against the background of a dog-kennel house. On one wall of the square one saw rows of dog-kennels on both sides of a street, with a group of men being herded into a kwelakwela. The office door was diagonally opposite the back entrance to the small yard, in a corner. Another door in the same wall, with a young white woman working seriously at her desk in the office.

Our office was very small. Too small for the immeasurable work that was done there. Martin and Nomonde shared a single medium-sized desk, working on opposite sides. An automatic telephone that looked out of place in the simple room rested on the table. The rest of the space was taken up by a filing cabinet behind the door, a small table in the remaining corner and two chairs on adjacent sides of the table, one between the table and the cabinet and the other in front of the table on Nomonde's side of the desk.

By way of decoration there was a picture with portraits of the peoples of the different continents. Some young and jubilant, others pensive and one striking age-wrinkled face. 'Togetherness irrespective of race and creed, and the burden of life feels lighter: the message in some of those faces,' I thought.

We all took seats; they at their respective places across the desk, and I on the chair in front of the table and facing the door.

It was hot.

After my arrival was confirmed and the time of my visit noted, we left the way we had come, to the Kombi and god knew where — if it were not for Nomonde who told me: 'We're going to kwaLanga now.' I nodded as if I knew where that was. We descended onto a freeway that ran under the railway-line from Mowbray, towards a power-station, past it, turned left: and it needed no one to tell me that we had arrived kwaLanga. 'You prick up your ears when you come to your own kind of environment, bastard,' I said to myself when I got the same sinking feeling that I always experience after being out of a location environment for some time. Nothing attractive but the human inhabitants. 'Administration Board offices.' Nomonde pointed to our right, turned left and pointed again to a prefabricated structure: 'Pass Offence Court.'

'May the permit to the shrine save me from them,' I thought. 'If they don't

want Cape Town-born blacks in Cape Town what will they say about others coming in from outside?'

We turned and went into a narrow street lined by continuous 'houses' which reminded me of Meadowlands, only they were delicate-looking. As everywhere, people try to enliven their environs; even if it means growing flowers in sand. We stopped outside two adjoining houses, behind a simple cream-white car. I could not make out exactly which one of the two doors with a common doorpost was ours. It was the one on the right.

**'I reckon that I am most concerned with what I call the character of life, the impressions that life leaves on my mind. Names, though I do honour them once I have grasped them, do not come first in my consideration of life.'**

And whom did I find there, if not a lady from Mzimhlope! One of those women who have had to face life without their husbands; mothers of fatherless children; fathers crushed under the juggernaut of racism. Her husband is on the island in perpetuity, by decree never to return, and it was this that had brought her more than a thousand kilometres to Kwa Langa. And with her a much younger woman, a girl by comparison, who had also come to visit her husband — on the Island for I don't know how long.

They were sitting on a very small and gloomy verandah, the younger lady spinning a plastic ball in her hands, perhaps still nostalgic for the days of play, the other one knitting pensively. Mother and child facing the same plight silently.

Most probably there was still hope in the younger heart, in the elder only a prayer for a miracle. Many people in this world, but very few to cry to. Woman and child who could cry no more. What would it help, because tears would melt neither prison walls nor their makers.

A fresh tot of about two came bounding over to Nomonde with unrestrained gaiety. They had a short chat while I hesitantly took a seat, trying to avoid a visual exploration of the new surroundings, and Martin crossed into the kitchen to greet the people there. The little girl was now through with Nomonde and trying to pull Martin down to her little height; 'Martin, Martin ndiph'icent,' which the latter would not have understood but for the last word. Nomonde lovingly reproved the little one for the root of evil.

The people of the house came out of

the other two rooms to greet. The owner of the house, his young matron and the two women on the verandah. I'm ashamed of my memory when it comes to names. When I came to the one who was from Mzimhlope I noted recognition in her eyes but she did not know exactly where to place me or who I might be. The generation gap. I bridged it by telling her exactly where I stay in Mzimhlope and who my people are. She knew me then through her contemporaries and neighbours. The young woman also came from Soweto.

Everyone was smiling. Somehow the common purpose of our meeting so far away from home brought us closer together, and bound us to the people who cared and helped. And our confidence in each other's trust was reflected in our smiles which vanquished all the sadness that might have been in our souls.

The matron of the house offered us cool drink. She had sent a child to buy it from the shops. But we had to rush off, with due apologies for turning down her generosity.

We transferred my two parcels from the Kombi to the cream-white car, said so long to Martin and then the three of us — the owner of the house we had just visited, Nomonde and I — got into the small car.

As our new friend started the car someone came out of the door that shared a doorpost with his. Our driver peered out of his side window.

'Let's go man,' he shouted amicably.

One good thing about friendship is: a friend seldom asks 'where to' before he has joined you. It was only when he had got into the back seat next to me and greeted everybody, giving me a handshake and his name, that he asked where we were off to.

I reckon that I am most concerned with what I call the character of life, the impressions that life leaves on my mind. Names, though I do honour them once I have grasped them, do not come first in my consideration of life. I mean life would still be interesting even if everything were not known by name. I believe in discovery and then naming rather than memorizing and applying names already given.

We had hardly driven fifteen minutes before I had discovered that the man sitting next to me was the kind of person that is good to have in company irrespective of how long you've known him: his soul overflowed with conversation and mirth.

The only snag was that we were on different wavelengths. Same humour, but his mind was filled with the information scandal and mine with Smith's

## ORLANDO WEST

burning skyline. He talked about 'Info': 'It has proved to everybody, including the staunchest supporters of the government, that we're all a flock of sheep that cannot do anything about being sheared.'

'Awu, thank you Judge Mostert!' grunted the driver.

'Yes,' I said. 'It shows one cannot give one's support blindly. Look at Smith right now. I wonder what all those who backed him when he led that country on its first steps to disaster are saying now. *Pbela*, the destruction of Rhodesia's biggest fuel dump is the greatest setback yet for his side's already futile war effort. Man, fuel is life.'

'Ya, too much power in the hands of a few is dangerous.'

It was Nomonde who brought our attention back to something closer to

our souls. '*Ilele phaya i first victim yethu ka Seventy Six.*' The graveyard consisted of sand mounds with dust wreaths.

A brief pause in our thoughts to pay homage to the memory of that year of repression. No black man who survived that indiscriminate massacre will ever forget it. I can still hear the bullets whizzing past my ears, and smell the gas.

We stopped at a butchery that did not look like one because it was a township butchery. Nomonde pointed out to me where she lives. No different from other locations I had been to on the Rand and elsewhere, except that this was another place. Boys with nothing to do lay on the grass patches on the sides of the street. Others were dribbling a flat plastic ball. 'Black child, nothing to

do but await your calling to labour,' I thought.

A minute later we were on the way again. Two ragged young soccer teams were kicking it out on an equally ragged pitch opposite the police station on our right. I could not have missed the police station for the kwela-kwela that was parked in front and the tattered 'vierkleur'. We stopped and Nomonde got out to deliver a Christmas wrap to a destitute family.

After that I noticed that we were moving out of kwaLanga. Who was I to ask where to? We drove on a highway full of buzzing vehicles on a late Friday afternoon. We followed a maze of roads. I saw many light brown people. Suddenly we stopped in front of an old Dutch-style house and everybody got out and went in.

*This is the first part of a new work of short fiction by the author of 'My Friend the Outcast', 'Call Me Not A Man,' 'A Glimpse of Slavery' and 'A Son of the First Generation'. Look out for Matshoba's first collection of stories, to be published by Ravan soon.*

## KWANZA/MABOPANE



### PROFILE OF THE HISTORIAN WALTER BENSON RUBUSANE

BY RISIMATI JAMATHONSI

Very few in this country know about the black historians who recorded and participated in Africa's awesome saga. Among the unknown historians are Jonas Ntsiko alias Uhadi Wa Se Luhlangeni, Everitt Lechesa Segoete, Zwelinzime A. Ngani, Walter Benson Rubusane and others.

The bug bit Rubusane at an early age, sending him around collecting proverbs and traditional praise poems. While his one hand was immersed in studies he never let go what his other ink-itching hand was scribbling. He satisfied the journalism monkey which was sitting on his shoulders with his book *Zem'Inkomo Magwalandini* (Cattle Are Going Away You Cowards)

He realised that he must stand firm on the moment when the country was about to 'vomit blood', as an East African proverb says. Even during his studies under McKinley University (U.S.A.) he could foresee his black society being dragged to a life of drudgery.

Representing the Tembus of Somerset East in 1910 he became the first African candidate on the provincial council in the Cape. Showing realism and courage he was among the founder members of the South African Native National Congress in 1912. With the backing of the Congress he protested against the German occupation of South West Africa. Again, when apartheid emerged in the form of the 1913 Land

Act, he and his fellow leaders John Tengo Jabavu and W.P. Schreiner flew to London to express their disgust with it. With flames in their eyes they told the British that the Act was leading to segregation.

Rubusane was by then immune to the detention which he had suffered in 1905, 1908 and 1913 for his political activities. He returned to his pen to write his masterpiece *History of South Africa from the Native Standpoint*.

In 1858 Mbonjana Rubusane never thought his baby would grow into a man who would dig beneath the skin of South African history.

*Risimati jaMathonsi is the secretary of Kwanza, an arts group based in Mabopane East and Pretoria.*



# Malopoets

*(On the 17th of July 1967 John Coltrane passed from before our closed eyes with the heavy weight of song. On the 17th of July 1978 the souls of Malopoets were totally imbued with the energizing spirit of this bard of sound. For this timely birth we have the unity of life to humbly thank.) In the next issue, Malopoet Mafika P. Mbuli's poem, 'In Memoriam: Speak Like A Child' will appear.*

## BIRTH OF MALOPOETS

In the temporal margin  
of night and light  
In the spacial flight  
between birth and death  
we await our souls

Who am I

Who am I  
Standing amid  
the harmattan's disarray

Who am I  
the elephant-skinned drum  
echoing the dawn of creation

Who am I  
the memories in songs  
of supple maidens  
balancing embellished catabashes  
on their plaited heads

Who am I  
with ivory beads in my eyes  
straining under the kingly weight  
of the child of human time  
Yet in my bearing  
my mirth is echoed in universal thunder

Who am I  
whose tears of timeless wails  
have quenched the world's lustful thirst  
whose sweat anoints  
the stone and steel  
of her every tower

Who am I . . .

Strung taut between my zenith  
and the weaning earth-mother  
what plaintive melody  
I carve into the mysterious night

Attend warily my mahogany silence  
embracing the drum  
the oracular quivering  
to the dance of shades  
With my tempered blood-surge  
the dismembered horn  
must cry the cow to life

Hear my portentous timbre  
for I am the Gwababa  
perched on a wrinkled twig  
of the mortar tree  
singing dissonant sonnets  
above the raucous glee

I am the midnight sough  
the light of day  
is the unfolding of my song

My son is the sigh of Gods  
Listen high and low  
for my voice is far-reaching

Eugene Skeef

## THE DIVIDING LINE

Life of perpetual separation --  
Group Areas, Migrant Labour,  
Race Classification etc.,  
Keeps us apart all the time.  
And each time I crawl to my kraal,  
I feel, in the deep recesses of my soul,  
The agonies of happiness  
The sores eternally festering in the heat of my passion.

I long for the blanket of darkness  
To crawl out of my pained heart  
To reach out for the sourness of joy  
Yet knowing that the dark night is a refuge  
Protecting me from the pain of unfulfilled promises.

In the deep recesses of my heart,  
Countless hours of pain and hurt,  
Fill the cavities left by fleeting tenderness.

Across the dividing line  
Let me live earnestly, love painlessly  
Balm the scalds on my burnt body  
To live to love love,  
Painlessly.

Ben Langa





Eugene Skeef/*For Bantu Steve Biko*

**PRAYER FOR STEVE BIKO**

Fragments of people  
to string  
as blessed beads

You are the  
bead  
by which  
the mother's head  
is finally borne noble

Eugene Skeef

**FOR THE TRUE WOMAN**

Woman —  
stern mother to child  
tender friend of man  
firm comrade of the withered soul  
sworn chamber of the fallen creature  
I too have been held  
in the comfort of your swollen shrine . . .

Woman —  
warm threshold of the sunken comer  
fresh field for the silver flesh  
of the stiff snake  
slain lame to sire  
not hewers of mahogany  
but sensitive sculptors  
of tomorrow's history . . .

Woman —  
these cries you hear  
elicit crimson tears . . .

Eugene Skeef

**TWO POEMS**

**BY**

**DERRO MAPHUMULO**

**SCULPTOR**

Stone you are my father.  
Your behaviour is giving  
Me more enjoyment.  
Food I eat seems to be you.

Stone you are wonderful,  
To be so kind to me.  
Your kindness is forgotten  
In our days.

Stone you are so hard  
To be understood,  
But the world is you,  
The earth was you before.

Stone I trust you,  
Because you are stable.  
Nobody can chase you away.  
I thank you lovely stone.

**CHAMELEON**

That is wonderful,  
To see a creature  
Seeming to understand,  
But not yet.

That is marvellous,  
To look at a tiny chameleon moving.  
It seems as if it is afraid,  
But not yet.

That is impossible,  
To watch the clothes of the chameleon.  
It seems as if somebody  
Always cleans it.  
But not yet.

That is impossible,  
To see the chameleon  
Taking off its clothes.  
But it seems as if  
It has got many clothes.  
But not yet.

You can buy yours,  
But the chameleon not.  
You can change yours,  
But the chameleon not.

Colours you have.  
Chameleon has got it.  
Where does it come from?  
No one knows.  
God knows.

**MPUMALANGA ARTS – HAMMARSDALE, NATAL**

**TWO POEMS**

**BY**

**MAFIKA PASCAL GWALA**

**STORY OF THE TRACTOR**

We walk down  
tractored streets  
turn round  
tractored corners  
enter  
tractored buildings  
ride up  
tractored stairs  
into  
tractored rooms  
occupied by people  
with tractored minds

**TIME OF THE HERO**

Time of the hero  
is when blacks start  
pissing on Mankuku's lament  
refusing to bemoan their blackness  
– is when music fans  
drop out of pancake blues  
and appletart classics  
– is when Mannenberg's untoothed mamas  
chew 'druwe by die tros'  
– is when Ngoye students  
blow Graffiti Blues on the System  
– is when the ghetto goes  
for imbuya herbs & butterbeans chitterlings.  
Time of the hero  
is when leftovers give blacks constipation  
– is when ghetto trains  
spill out racecards thru the windows  
– with blacks refusing to bet on their poverty  
anymore.  
Time of the hero  
is when Durban's Golden Mile  
stops being golden  
– is when Jo'burg The Big Apple turns fluffy  
– not with Soweto massing the streets.  
Time of the hero  
is when the struggle weeds out  
alcoholic glances & syphilitic frowns.  
The moment of the times shall have come.



## The Patriot

A story by **Mothobi Mutloatse**, illustrated by **Mzwakhe**

Indeed, Kefentse Morumi was a veritable lover, a lover of his own country. A die-hard patriot, to the degree that his young and shapely wife and childhood sweetheart had reason to object. His love for her and their eight-year-old son, Mandla, seemed to be flickering towards extinction.

This happened soon after Kefentse had come across a magazine, probably government-owned, in which all young and able bodied men 'of all races' were invited to join the army and 'fight for your country'.

Kefentse was totally hypnotized by the article, and decided on the spur of the moment to do, as he was requested. That is, to do his patriotic thing!

He knew something about warfare, as he was the history master at the local high school — and an enthusiast, at that.

He had come across the magazine while answering nature's call at a public toilet in town, amid the unpleasant

stench that seemed to characterize the dilapidated loo in which empty bottles of booze were strewn all over the place.

As soon as he left the loo, he headed straight for the nearest police station where he duly presented himself as a potential army recruit! Right there on the spot.

He was willing; he was raring to have a go at the bloody communists, he told the sergeant at the counter. And he wanted so much to show the terrorists, as he called them, a thing or two.

'They just cannot come here and take our country like that,' he snapped his fingers demonstratively.

And the sergeant was impressed.

'The country needs more young men like you, who are not power-mad', he told the grinning teacher. 'Do you think you can offer your services in two weeks' time?'

'There is no question about that. I can hand in my resignation at school

today as there is no-one to teach because of these troublesome students. And there is no point any more in my going to school to empty classes. Secondly, I don't anticipate any problems with the department because of my decision to go to the border.'

Said the sergeant: 'Don't worry about that: we will take care of that aspect right away. Be here in two weeks, right?'

Kefentse thanked the sergeant for his help, walking out of the police station as proud as a peacock.

From there, he popped in at the department's regional office where he had no hassles in getting his 24 hours resignation, plus three months bonus. Thereafter he took a dark train homeward bound, but on the way, he decided to visit his boss — the principal — at his home and tell him the good news.

But the principal was unimpressed. In fact, he and Kefentse had never got

When the big day came, Mmabatho packed her belongings and those of Mandla and left for her in-laws' place even before her husband left for the border. Without as much as wishing him bon voyage.'

along well since the principal's two-week detention after he had lectured Kefentse's class on human rights in the country, and how they were non-existent.

All that the principal said to his visitor was: 'I shall be having important visitors in a short while, will you please excuse me?'

Kefentse got the cue and quietly went out, almost cursing his ex-boss.

When he reached home, he found his wife, Mmabatho, reading a newspaper in the small dining-room-cum-lounge, and Mandla playing with his train-set at her feet.

He put up a smile: 'Hello, everybody.'

Mandla got up from the floor and ran towards his father who eagerly scooped him into his arms.

'Papa, what have you brought from town for me?' Mandla asked as Kefentse ambled towards his wife.

And he blushed suddenly. The thought had never entered his mind. To buy something for his son, that is. He looked so apologetic that it hurt.

The best thing left for him to do then was to lie.

'Oh son,' he mumbled, 'I think I left your bananas on my table at school.

Don't worry, I'll buy some more tomorrow. Now, be a good boy and go and play with your toys.'

He said to his wife: 'Darling, something great; something of value has happened to me...'

Without taking her eyes off the paper, Mmabatho replied: 'Can you let us into the secret?'

'It's no longer a secret. Even the department knows about it.'

'What are you talking about, then?'

'I'm going to join the army.'

She was startled.

'You are going to join what?'

'Now, now, don't get emotional.'

'What have you been up to this time?'

'I only said I have signed up to go to the border and fight for our country.'

'And who gave you permission to do so?'

'The department.'

'The department you say, always the department, which you seem to respect more than your own family.'

'Now, Mmabatho, don't let's argue in front of the child.'

'I don't care,' Mmabatho answered in a raised voice.

Kefentse ordered Mandla to go and

play outside.

'I'm warning you,' said Mmabatho, 'if you walk out of this house to go and defend your so-called country, don't expect to find us here.'

'Cool off,' he pleaded with her and tried to touch her.

She almost shrieked at him.

'Don't you dare touch me... don't you dare touch me... I have lost friends because of your stance at school. And now this!'

She almost spat on the floor.

'Don't you understand, I'll be doing all this for the good of the country. Something must be done about these communists... they won't let us sleep in a few months. We must do all we can to prevent them from making us slaves.'

But Mmabatho, who had by now become so agitated that she was left speechless, suddenly stormed towards their bedroom, banging the door behind her.

Kefentse just stood there, shaking his head in confusion, as if to say, 'Oh, this difficult woman...'

But still, that did not move him to rescind his decision.

For the next few days, there was no dialogue between them or sharing of the marital bed.

She went to tell her in-laws as a last resort, in a bid to make her husband change his mind.

Nix. He was still as stubborn.

He told his parents the die had been cast.

At this, his father almost jumped at him.

'What do you know about war?' he asked. 'Do you think they care for you? I know what I am talking about. I, too, was in the army... I was in North Africa. I saw Tobruk fall with my own eyes. I was not told about it - I escaped twice from German captivity, fighting for what I believed was my country. And after all that sacrifice, in which I almost lost this right leg of mine - look I've got this scar on my knee' - he lifted his trousers to reveal an ugly-looking long scar around the right knee - '... all that I got for my services in North Africa, is a second class citizenship.'

'But, father,' Kefentse charged, 'times have changed. We are now faced with a greater risk. Communists. They want to rule the whole world. We cannot just sit back and let our riches be taken away from us.'

'Don't give me any of that rubbish, you hear,' Kefentse's father retorted. 'I

drank my own urine to stay alive in the desert, and I'm still drinking my own urine to survive in my own country!'

The sarcasm was strong.

Kefentse's mother also entered the arena.

'But son, how can you leave your wife and child in these troubled times?'

'Once the communists are defeated, Ma, then everything will be well again,' said Kefentse.

'Like when?' yelled his father.

Mmabatho intervened: 'There is no use in trying to dissuade him from going. He has made up his mind, and that's that with him.'

'If that is the case,' said Kefentse's father in a threatening tone, 'then I don't think Kefentse is welcome in this house any more.'

Kefentse, shaken a bit, replied: 'You don't really mean that, dad, it's only the nerves -'

His father shouted back: 'Give me that nerves rubbish again and you'll end up with a broken neck... just you disappear from my sight.'

When the big day came, Mmabatho packed her belongings and those of Mandla and left for her in-laws' place even before her husband left for the border. Without as much as wishing him bon voyage.

And yet, Kefentse was adamant about serving on the border. He eventually left that evening with the hope that his wife would recover from her slumber and endorse his stand.

After six letters home, which were never answered or acknowledged, Kefentse began to feel uneasy. He sent telegrams to his parents, but they too, refused to answer him.

And this gradually affected his morale so that he was unable to sleep comfortably. Three months later, just before Christmas, Kefentse asked for two weeks' leave which he got immediately, but with the friendly warning that he could be recalled before the leave had expired.

When he and the other border freshmen arrived at their destination, which was the local township police station, it was about 11 p.m. And there was no police van to take them to their various homes.

All that was left for them to do was either to foot it home or hire cars.

Nervously, Kefentse footed it alone to the main tar road, where he thought he could hire 'special delivery' home. He had been waiting there for half an hour

when he spotted a car approaching.

Frantically, without realising he was laying himself open to a hit-and-run motorist, Kefentse ran into the middle of the street, waving at the oncoming car to stop.

The car screeched to a dead halt a few paces in front of him and he quickly ran to the driver's side, together with his suitcase, heavy with presents for his wife and son.

'Please, driver, take me home and I'll pay you well,' Kefentse begged.

There were four people inside. Three men and a tipsy woman who could not stop giggling. She remarked: 'Oh, he's a soldier. Let's take him and charge the bill to the state.'

Kefentse did not wait for a reply and got in next to the giggling woman on the front seat.

The driver said: 'I think I'll only charge you a bottle of whisky, brother. How about that?'

'That's fine by me,' Kefentse quickly replied. He didn't want them to change their mind all too soon.

The next thing, two hours later, he woke up to find himself lying in a ditch, bleeding from the back of the head just wearing his underpants.

His assailants were nowhere to be seen. He was in another township. Another city.

He heaved his heavy body up after a struggle that seemed a century, and cast his eyes on the surroundings. It was an open field, a football ground probably, overlooking a row of houses that looked drab, and with similar and monotonous designs.

Just then, he saw a police patrol van passing and he darted like a springbok over thorns, towards it.

'Please help me, I've just been robbed.'

The driver, who looked stinkingly drunk, laughed at Kefentse: 'Look here I can't help you. Unfortunately I've just been having sex. Good night.'

And with that, he drove off, bumping against the mini-pavement while trying to drive in a straight line that was as straight as hell.

Kefentse found himself in a strange house whose occupants were still awake at that time of night: because it was an illegal all-night drinking den!

He got in at the back, and luckily, he bumped into the queen of the den, and because she'd handled all types of township cases with expertise, as if she was a psychiatrist, she immediately took pity on Kefentse and in no time had him clothed with her roving husband's clothes. Fed sufficiently as well as accommodated for the night in the store-

room with a nip of whisky!

The next morning, he was given a lift to his home by a guest at the den. At his gate, Kefentse was confronted by a mean-looking bull-dog he had never seen previously.

And he had to bear a hasty retreat just in the nick of time, or else the mongrel would have bitten a chunk off his calf.

He was shocked and confused.

But Mmabatho was one who never liked dogs, he thought to himself.

Just then, a man came out of the house with hostility written clearly in his face.

'What the hell do you want here?'



Kefentse could not believe his ears.

'I said what do you want here? I don't like visitors; don't you see the sign on the gate?'

The sign read: 'No visitors are allowed except by appointment.'

Protested Kefentse: 'But this is MY house . . .'

'You're bloody mad . . . one more noise from you and I'll set my dog loose on you to make mincemeat out of you. Just clear off from here.'

As he said this, the man slightly opened the gate and Kefentse, smelling defeat and possible injury, quickly sprinted three houses away where he stood in the street.

He could not get head or tail of what was happening.

He was still pondering when a police van stopped next to him, and two policemen came out. One of the men barked at him: 'Where's your book of life?' And the stunned Kefentse, with his mouth wide open in bewilderment, was bundled into the van packed with

victims of the pass raid.

Not a sound nor a whisper would come out of his mouth.

It was as if he had been frozen.

Having travelled the whole township for full two hours snapping up more casualties of the vicious laws, the police then dumped their load at the dumping court.

There the men spent the night huddled in a small cell that could only safely accommodate twelve men, whereas its occupants exceeded twenty.

Early the next morning, the group was kicked out of the cell into a gaping magistrate's court in which sixteen men were found guilty and fined, in just under fifteen minutes.

Kefentse was the seventeenth accused.

He was asked by the interpreter, who was reeking of liquor, what his plea was.

To what?

'I'm not guilty of anything,' protested Kefentse, though he didn't know what the charge or charges were.

'Look here,' whispered the interpreter to him, 'don't come here and waste your time. Just plead guilty and we'll make fast-move for you.'

'But, but,' said Kefentse, 'I don't -'

'Not guilty, your worship,' the impatient interpreter intercepted, giving Kefentse a mean look. And so did the prosecutor, who muttered under his breath.

The prosecutor leaned out: 'Mr. Interpreter, ask the accused whether he does not wish to change his mind.'

Kefentse got hold of himself suddenly, and blurted out: 'I'm not guilty, your worship. I mean, I am just from the border where I defended my country . . . I killed thirteen terrorists . . . I was robbed on my way home, your worship.'

The magistrate, who appeared to have been dozing, raised his head: 'Mr. Interpreter, warn the accused that this is a court of law and not a theatre for actors. And tell him also that I've heard that cock and bull story all too frequently in this court.'

Mr. Interpreter sheepishly muttered, 'Yes, your worship, Yes, your worship,' and turned around to face Kefentse who was shivering in the witness box, anxiously.

The magistrate went on: 'And, Mr. Interpreter, tell the accused that the fine is eight days' farm labour, seeing he has not got money to pay the fine.'

On hearing this, Kefentse nearly went berserk and shouted: 'I'm innocent. I'm a soldier . . . I've done nothing, as the army will be able to . . .'

The court orderly rushed to him and clubbed him several times on the head

PIMVILLE, SOWETO

until Kefentse stopped his court antics.

He was then pushed down the stairs into the cell where he rejoined his group, which had been allocated to a farm 200 km away.

And the owner was notorious for his cracking whip on naked backs and his fondness and preference for dogs over dark human beings.

But the first night as a farm labourer happened to be Kefentse's last. Among the labourers was one jail-bird who staged an escape — he had in fact done it a dozen times at different farm-jails. Kefentse wasted no time in joining the group that escaped that cold moonlit night.

He was missing his family terribly.

Along the way, the convicts split up and went their different ways.

Kefentse footed it home, without bothering even to hike.

He reached home, whatever that was, at sunrise, heading straight for his father's place. He could not risk his, as it had a bad omen.

At the gate of his parents' home, he found people loading furniture onto a huge truck. A removal underway.

Smelling a rat, Kefentse ran into the house. And found his parents and his wife packing some clothes in the bedroom.

A few seconds' silence ensued until Kefentse said in a shaky voice: 'Wh-what is going on? Oh, hello Ma, hello

Mmabatho; hello Pa . . . '

It then struck him that something WAS greatly wrong. Somebody special was missing. Someone dear.

He then ran back towards his wife, dressed all in black, grabbed her roughly by the shoulders and half-shouted: 'Where is he . . . where is he . . . where's my son?'

Mmabatho, unmoved, glanced across her shoulder at her father-in-law for help.

And he did offer it gladly, sadly:

'He's gone . . . '

'Gone where to?'

'He's dead . . . '

'He's what?'

'Dead . . . killed by a stray bullet at school. And take your paws off Mmabatho,' Kefentse's father suddenly shouted.

Kefentse did so reluctantly, momentarily paralyzed.

'And there's nothing more that can be done about it,' added Kefentse's mother.

After he had recovered from his initial shock, Kefentse said: 'It can't be true . . . my Mandla can't be dead it's a great big joke . . . he didn't do anything wrong . . . he couldn't fight anybody . . . being so little and so fragile . . . '

Suppressing anger, Kefentse's father said: 'Will you now leave us in peace, son?'

'Please,' added Mmabatho.

Tears unwillingly started rolling down Kefentse's cheeks, but he appeared not to have been aware of them.

His father said: 'By the way, we are now going to where we know nobody and have never been before: because we also lost even our second class citizenship following the independence of what is said to be our country. And son, you have not been excluded from this ruling.'

Kefentse looked sour: 'What do you mean by that?'

'Don't be daft,' said Mmabatho, 'we've just been made pariahs and outcasts in our own motherland by some political trick while you were fighting your communists! And my son was being shot accidentally several times.'

Kefentse was still not convinced: 'But they know me well at the capital; they wouldn't do such a thing to me. They know I'm a soldier . . . '

'They may well know you son,' said the old veteran, 'but they don't damn care about your family!'

'I'm going to do something about this', insisted Kefentse.

And Mmabatho had the final crushing word: 'Like bringing my son back from the grave!'

This time, Kefentse knew it: he was trapped. It was too tall an order — even for a patriot.

MOROPA ARTS ASSOCIATION, RANDFONTEIN

OH, DISTANCE!

Oh, distance!  
the mighty gossip  
the mighty destroyer  
oh, distance  
the adamant initiator.

My head is big  
empty and hot  
like fire.

My soul is troubled  
my heart is pounding painfully  
inside me  
I am mad, mad, mad.

I am troubled  
I am nowhere  
I am in darkness  
oh, distance  
have mercy.

you were polite, authentic and cool  
you were innocent  
you left me alone  
in the arena of confusion  
I am nowhere  
I am in darkness  
oh, distance  
have mercy.

I hate your sweet tongue  
I hate your soft touch,  
Lovely words pouring from your  
mouth — venom:  
oh distance  
have mercy.

A sight of her! I don't know  
her countenance; it's faded away  
since you claimed her.

Lovely words I hear no more —  
she kept a low profile.  
Oh, distance  
have mercy and return her.  
I'll regard you as a good initiator,  
I'll worship the ground on which you stand.

I hate your strategy  
Stillness!  
It's plunged me mute  
I am desolated, deflated,  
I am cold, dead without her  
distance, oh, distance  
return her, I'll worship  
the ground on which you stand  
oh, distance  
Have mercy.

Victor Sello

**BLACK JESUS CHRIST**

All over the world  
Christians are waiting  
For the coming of Jesus Christ.  
Jesus is in South Africa  
As a blackman at Crossroads  
He is suffering more than  
He suffered on the cross.

He was woken up at night by cops,  
Arrested for permit and pass,  
He was kicked out of a white church (he's black),  
He could not eat in whites-only restaurants,  
He had an accident with his white boss  
But couldn't be taken to hospital with his boss  
In a whites-only ambulance.

He was detained by the security cops  
Under section six,  
The law of the Nazis.  
Like some of the detainees under that Act  
He took his sweet life.  
He shot himself with a Russian-made gun –  
How? When? Where did he get the gun?  
Was he not searched before by security cops?  
Who is next, and how will he die?

Abia Ramalebo Diutloileng

**MY MOTHER'S SON**

Walking to and fro  
In the streets of Evaton  
Patience be with me  
For I am searching  
For the soul I destroyed  
The soul of my maimed mother  
Who brought me into this sinful world  
Stomaching all the pains of pregnancy  
Waiting for so long for me to be born –  
Yet I could not wait for her  
When she took a night tour.

I regret chasing her away –  
Come back mother,  
Your son's heart is slipping away  
In self-pity,  
Death is gradually taking me away.  
Come to me, mama  
I am for you:  
I am for Evaton, mama  
I am what I am.

Richard Thutloe

**POOR ME**

I began to doubt my doubt,  
Questioned life and death  
Lost in a labyrinth of complexities,  
Living in a climate of stress,  
Believing in my own judgement  
in a twilight zone between  
consciousness and unconsciousness:  
This was just the beginning –  
Poor me!

Day by day I knew  
I had been fooled:  
Living in an era of compulsion,  
Erecting schools and  
deprived of an education:  
Poor me!

Pardon me, yeah, I beg your pardon,  
I lived in a climate of tension  
Accepting distasteful deals  
of the so-called Barter Trade,  
changing my true identity  
into how-do-you-do Mr. Richard:  
This was just the beginning –  
Poor me!

A voice emerged from nowhere  
speaking vague words of encouragement  
To you in person:  
'Son of Tophet  
. . . . You deserve death  
But  
There is, a room for reconciliation' –  
Poor me!

You created prisons  
To imprison your esteem:  
You taught me not to be afraid of myself,  
Urging me to savoir-faire –  
Yet you cry over oozing blood!  
This was just the beginning:  
Poor me!

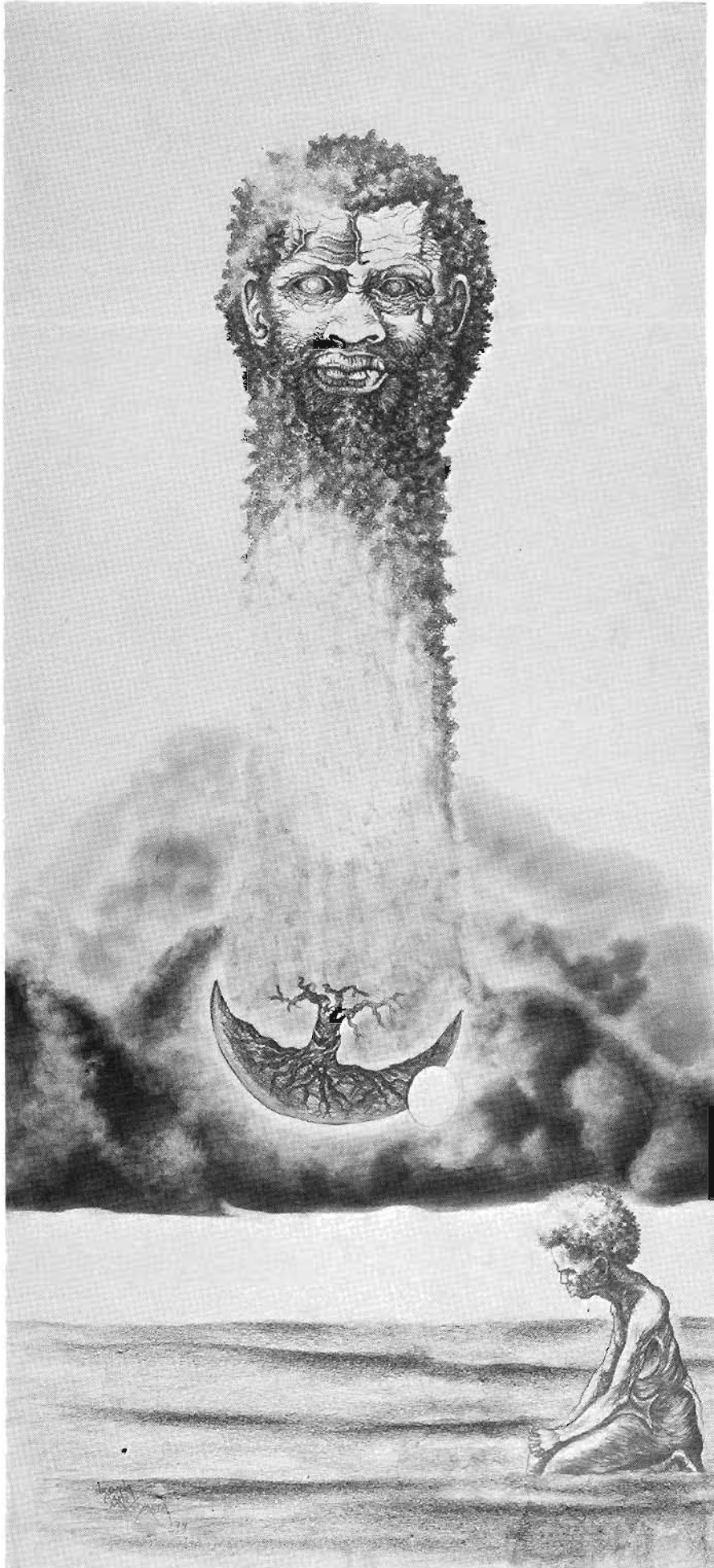
You said you are a fusion  
of two parties in love:  
You made me cut  
my ties of friendship and my parents;  
my final destination  
was a world of your own –  
Poor me!

Stand up, you are fortunate,  
forget about travelling in style –  
Look into tomorrow . . .  
You've got the responsibility,  
You applied for the adoption,  
taking the burdens of my parents  
onto your broad well-shaped shoulders.  
This is just the beginning –  
I am Pregnant:  
Poor me!

Begin!

Richard Thutloe

*The Mbakasima writers' group, based in Sebokeng and Evaton, can be contacted through Staffrider or P.E.N.*



Harry Nkoane Moyaga/ *Untitled*. (Work by the same artist appeared on the covers of *Staffrider* Vol 2 No. 1 March 1979).



THREE POEMS AND A LETTER

ZWO N̄WALWA MURAHU HA DULU

(kha Duma kaNdlovu na Risimati j'Matbonsi)

Naho nda funzea lune ndi si tsha p̄fesesa  
Thi nga tendi u Matshili o vhuya-vho a nwala phondiri,  
Zwe a nwala na u ro andesa  
Ho sokou vha u tambisa mabambiri.

E kha lihanya la u dobedza zwe vhanwe vha lata  
U ndi hone ndi khou f̄hululedza;  
Ri tshi amba nga F̄bululedzani a songo kwata  
Vhunga u ralo ndi u mu nea-vho tshedza.

Ra fhumula u mu eletshedza  
Vhuvhava hawe vhu do tou andesa,  
O tanganya na raimi yawe ya u kombetshedza  
U do di ri tshirendo tsho fanela u lapfesa.

Zwirendi zwihulu ri tenda ene Sigwavhulimu  
Na livhanda Euclid Tshisaphungo,  
Ndi one mavhanda a u thoma u pfuka musengavhadzimu,  
He a kanda hothe hu pfala nga muungo.

U ngafhi mukalaha Nenzhelele?  
Zwo kunda a nga si tsha engedza,  
Arali ndo guda u zwifha a mpfarele  
Nga a rume Nemukovhani u do nkhevhedza.

Tshindane Mashuwa na Maumela vho didina,  
Ngavhe vha tshi di dovha u engedza  
Naho ri si nga vhuvi ra vha vhambedza na Madima.

D.M. Ngwana ndi ene khotsi a zwirendi  
Vhatsila vho veta-veta vha fhedza nga u posa peni kule,  
Hhuvha hu a fhisa shangoni la vhurendi  
A zwi divhaho na u sasaladzwa a nga si gungule

Naho nda funzea lune ndi si tsha p̄fesesa  
Nga u tevhela milayo nda do hanedza na vhpfi hanga,  
Madima na Ratshifanga vha do divha vha u konesa.  
Ndi vhone vhane vha vha midzimu yanga.

Maano Dzeani Tuwani

Dear Fellowrider,

Our group feels that perhaps Staffrider could run some short story and poetry competitions during the course of this year. Although book reviews are going very well. Staffrider could from time to time give us some papers on African literature and related topics. Essays like 'What do African Intellectuals Read?', 'The African Writer and the English Language', 'The Novelist as Teacher' — all by Chinua Achebe. And some other critics like Richard Rive, Mbulelo Visikungo Mzamane, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Misere Mugo etc.

We vow to be part of the struggle — the struggle of creating and promoting African literature, and we wish and hope to end this decade with a high literary development in this part of the continent.

Your fellowriders,

GUYO BOOK CLUB

P.S.

We have noticed that in the March 1979 issue, one of our pages reads: Guyo Sibasa/Venda. This is incorrect and very embarrassing as it made us appear tribalist and the other jive, as Mafika Gwala would say.

THE SONG SAID

the song said  
of pasadena  
of massachussetts  
and  
of california

never about  
folsom  
soledad  
and  
san quentin

azanians are told to sing  
of sibasa  
seshego  
mmabatho  
and  
umtata

never about  
the fort  
modderbee  
and  
robben island

Maano Dzeani Tuwani

WE GATHER

Why such a shameful nature we cherish  
Always ill with the desire to gather  
When God wants us to live together?  
Always gathering for ourselves  
What God gave us to share.

While my family for a fortnight  
On half a score pounds can thrive  
Why at the expense of my fellow brother —  
Against the norm of our corrupt society —  
Should I strive for luxury?

Tshilidzi Shonisani

**ANOTHER KING GONE**

Another king gone  
 who from his mother's womb  
 prowled the music scene  
 sounds and rhythms rivering  
 from the mountain of his heart  
 spirits of Africa converging  
 our black heritage bulging  
 within ourselves

This epileptic fit  
 depriving him of his  
 heartbeat will never  
 engulf the sounds  
 and rhythms of Africa

Naked he wriggled out  
 of his mother's womb  
 silent he dripped into  
 his mother's tomb  
 sounds that were not wounds  
 lived in his motherland

The tomb is trembling  
 a turmoil within our hearts  
 relatives and friends roof  
 the soiled coffin with wreaths  
 as he flowers the grave of his son  
 and is gone, but done  
 done, but gone

Your life is done but gone  
 graveward lies your body  
 soundward lifts your spirit  
 the roof of traditional  
 afro rock is Harari

Harari will live with africa  
 (lone wandering is inane)  
 as you lived with africa  
 black heritage the norm of your sounds  
 the creative skulls of our ancestors unscuttled

We perished in the scalding thoughts  
 of your death, but africa  
 is pregnant with the sounds of our grief  
 the african baby is about to be born  
 and the womb drumming into the ears of africa

So sleep well, Selby  
 sleep well soulking of Africa.

Matsemela Manaka

**FOR YOUR DEFENCE**

Afrika!  
 Grow a big head  
 And  
 Sharpen your elbow.

Makhulu waLedwaba

**FREEDOM**

If the freedom I cry for  
 is beneath the big Marula tree  
 I'll use my hands to dig it free.

Makhulu waLedwaba



Peter Mashishi/Malombo at Newport

**DESTITUTES IN THE CITY**

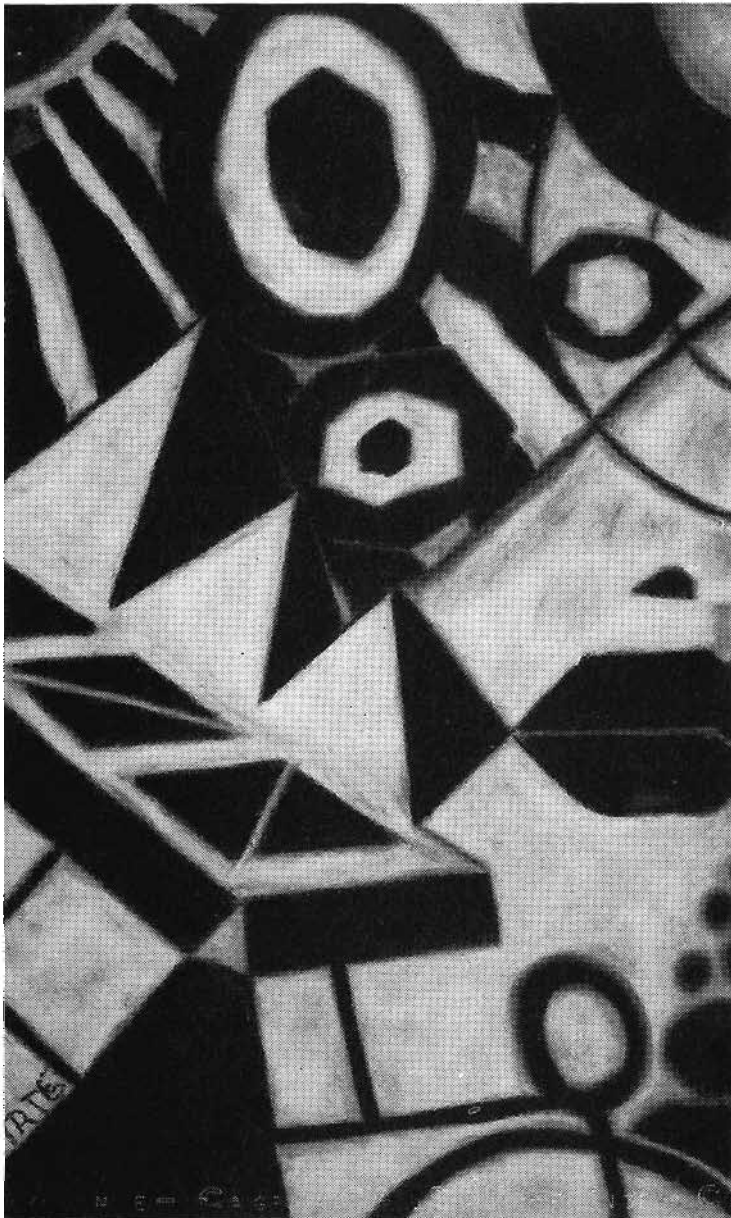
Our brothers, owned by the city parks  
 hopes of bright life lopping  
 Their longevity accommodated by comfort of death  
 When the sun hides its softly prickling rays  
 to recharge them  
 gloomy faces are left in solitude  
 as mist of dusk descends  
 escorted by cold wind sticking on their  
 bodies like glue on paper

They are allergic to penicillin,  
 the conspicuous aluminium metal around  
 their wrists  
 to warn ignorant 'doctors'

Bodies harbouring lice to keep them company  
 Lying on their 'beds'  
 attentive to a choir of flies  
 humming a lullaby with drums of a  
 groaning stomach

Oh! Brothers your dignity and pride  
 is excoriated by the relentless hand of misery.

Rakau Mphulo



Tate Mmuso Koelle/Untitled.

## SOWETO IS . . .

A hundred thousand tiny factories  
Patched in similarity on the ground  
Uniform and stable in produce,  
Harbours of crime and forced merriment  
Enslaved by ailments and darkness.

And here's the yield of my patch, my factory:  
The smog frustrates my lung's wish.  
My eyes tearful and painful,  
My years stolen away from me  
I'm driven back to infancy.

Smog-smell burns in my eye  
Like the sneeze of the 1976 teargas,  
It pricks my brain to ask  
The darkened factories the same again:  
Why, Soweto, why you, tell me  
Why shower my eyes with tormentors' gases,  
Why bring blindness to my eyes  
That I may not see your pains?  
Should I stand back and pretend bliss?

Masilo Rabothata

## LOST IN THE DESERT OF LIFE

Keep your ears to the ground  
And ignore my sorrows.  
I clamour for happiness not sadness  
But the deaf lord and blind, dumb land  
Brought on copious sorrows.

I cry the iron tears  
My tears are full of salt  
My body is losing hope of life  
My life is like a long lonely load  
Which is roughly conveyed by angry lions.

Maybe I am lost in the desert of life  
My feelings of life are galloping and despairing  
While the frozen heart is tired of life  
And my impregnable body wants to die  
For I am tired of living in the pool of sorrows.

Graves are shivering,  
The soulless body is on its way to death.  
My family is out of pity  
They don't want to satisfy my needs  
Surely I am lost in the desert of life.

Great forests are weeping  
Tall grasses are marching  
My mother is no more my mother  
But my great enemy  
So, there's no happiness in my life.

I lay on my broken bed  
I lay on my bloodied sheets  
I took my sorrowful book to read  
But in vain: sorrows are playing in my mind.

Girls have become my enemies  
They are my love disasters  
I tried, they refused.  
I tried, they promised.  
They kept empty promises in my full heart.

They turned me into a dog in slums  
I cried to the merciless land, but just wasted my tears  
I left my tears on the notorious land  
I watched them dissolving in dark soil  
Which seems to sympathise with me.

I am not good to live  
I am useless to die  
Now where should I go?  
Maybe somewhere to the sunless land  
Slowly I am lost in the desert of life.

Frank Mashigo

## NEED I

Need I  
Convince anybody  
That beneath  
This black skin of mine  
There flows blood  
Human blood?

Mabuse A. Lethage

THE MEETING *work in progress by* Nadine Gordimer

Gordimer in the Seventies: *A Guest of Honour* (1970), *Livingstone's Companions* (1972), *The Conservationist* (1974, in Penguin 1978), *Selected Stories* (1975, in Penguin as *No Place Like*, 1978), *Some Monday for Sure* (stories, 1976).

I skirted Flora's assembly and sat down at the back. The meeting had just begun. After the cube of courtyard sun, dark breathing splotches furred with light transformed the big livingroom. Everyone — I began to see them properly — bunched together in the middle and back seats, the black women out of old habit of finding themselves allotted secondary status and the white ones out of anxiety not to assume first place. Flora's gay and jostling objections started a screech of chairs, general forward-shuffle and talk; I was all right where I was — her quick attention took me in, a bird alert from the height of a telephone pole. After the addresses of the white woman lawyer and a black social welfare officer, a pretty, syrup-eyed Indian with a soft roll of midriff flesh showing in her seductive version of the dress of eastern female subjection, spoke about uplift and sisterhood. Flora kept calling upon people — masterly at pronouncing African names — to speak from the floor. Some were trapped hares in headlights but there were others who sat forward on the hired chairs straining to attract attention. A white-haired dame with the queenly coy patience of an old charity chairwoman kept holding up a gilt ballpoint. Along my half-empty row a black woman urged between the whispers of two friends could not be got to speak.

In respectful silences for the weakness of our sex, the flesh that can come upon any of us as women, black matrons were handed slowly, backside and belly, along past knees to the table where Flora had a microphone rigged up. Others spoke from where they sat or stood, suddenly set apart by the gift of tongues, while the faces wheeled to see. The old white woman's crusade turned out to be road safety, a campaign in which 'our Bantu women must pull together with us' — she trembled on in the sweet, chuckly voice of a deaf upper-class Englishwoman while Flora tried to

bring the discourse to an end with flourishing nods. A redhead whose expression was blurred by freckles floral as her dress asked passionately that the meeting launch a Courtesy Year to promote understanding between races. She had her slogan ready, SMILE AND SAY THANKS. There was a soft splutter of tittering crossed by a groan of approval like some half-hearted response in church, but a young white woman jumped up with fists at her hips — Thank you for what? Maybe the lady has plenty to thank for. But was the object of action for women to make black women 'thankful' for the hovels they lived in, the menial jobs their men did, the inferior education their children got? Thankful for the humiliation dealt out to them by white women living privileged, protected lives, who had the vote and made the laws — And so on and so on. I saw her falter, lose concentration as three black girls in jeans who had only just come in got up and walked out as if they had come to the wrong place. A white woman had thrust up an arm for permission to speak — We don't need to bring politics into the fellowship of women. — Applause from the group with whom she sat. Black matrons ignored both the white girl and black girls, busily briefing each other in the sussurations and gutturals, clicks and quiet exclamations of their own languages. They responded only to the sort of housewives' league white ladies who stuck to health services and 'commodity price rises in the family budget' as practical problems that were women's lot, like menstruation, and did not relate them to any other circumstances. The black ladies' fear of drawing attention as 'agitators' and the white ladies' determination to have 'nothing to do' with the politics that determined the problems they were talking about, made a warmth that would last until the teacups cooled. Dressed in their best, one after another, black women in wigs and

two-piece dresses pleaded, were complaining, opportuning for the crèches, orphans, blind, crippled or aged of their 'place'. They asked for 'old' cots, 'old' school primers, 'old' toys and furniture, 'old' braille typewriters, 'old' building material. They had come through the front door but the logic was still of the back door. They didn't believe they'd get anything but what was cast-off; they didn't, any of them, believe there was anything else to be had from white women, it was all they were good for.

And all the time those blacks like the elderly one near me, in her doek with Thursday church badges pinned to it, a piece cut out of her left shoe to ease a bunion, a cardigan smelling of coal-smoke and a shopping bag stuffed with newspaper parcels, listened to no one; were there; offered only their existence, as acknowledgement of speakers, listeners and the meaning of the gathering. It was enough. They didn't know why they were there, but as cross-purpose and unimaginable digressions grew louder with each half-audible, rambling or dignified or unconsciously funny discourse, clearer with each voluble inarticulacy, each clumsy, pathetic or pompous formulation of need in a life none of us white women (careful not to smile at broken English) live or would know how to live, no matter how much Flora protests the common possession of vaginas, wombs and breasts, the bearing of children and awful compulsive love of them — the silent old blacks still dressed like respectable servants on a day off, although they were sitting in Flora's room, these were everything Flora's meeting was not succeeding to be about. The cosmetic perfumes of the middle-class white and black ladies and the coal-smoke and vaginal odours of old poor black women — I shifted on the hard chair, a deep breath in Flora's livingroom took this draught inside me.

THE LOCAL GAMES

Fog is turning everything cold and white.  
Nevertheless, they're playing mixed doubles  
at the Wynberg Lawn Tennis Club tonight.

It's a peculiar kind of tennis, you'll agree.  
The men can't find partners to join the sport  
simply by strolling round the edge of a court.

They must choose on a corner one block away  
and, whether handsome or not, they must pay  
for those ladies who often show overmuch

of a brown or black thigh, think that for tennis  
a non-white skirt and cheap plastic boots are fine,  
and even elect to serve yards from the base-line,

bent over the bonnet of a car. And there're no  
rackets or shouts, though sometimes a false moan.  
Then the men take their balls and drive off home.

The angry club members in big houses nearby  
say all this on their daughters' daytime wicket  
is really not what anyone could call cricket.

But I am one who would remind them of patriotism.  
Let our sports critics rant in Tel-Aviv or Bonn.  
All's obviously well here while our local games go on.

Jeremy Gordin

AUBADE

In my dream

I was crossing town in a bus when I saw him  
trussed on the back seat of a long black car.  
He said he'd finally found someone stronger  
for when someone slapped him back his teeth  
and palate fell out and cracked on the floor.

He said

he couldn't face walking a dark street anymore.

I tell you

I'd never seen such sadness in my father before.

My reply, my sympathy was a cynical white smile.  
And from my forehead, where I generate so many  
fine thoughts and words for the black and poor,  
oozed one pus-coloured tear shaped like a crocodile.

Father, I forgive you for teaching me so well  
the lesson you learnt from the camp inmates  
when you helped in the relief work over there:  
that it is not in the homes of we who can go  
with at least some teeth, in a long black car,  
that charity has to begin, it is elsewhere.

Jeremy Gordin

from FALSE BAY NOTEBOOK

when your ma full of caution & konfyrt  
& your pa with the bugle call  
of blood arrive from your past  
determined that all else  
would go right if only your friends

(the kaffers) would not come to dinner  
& you'd straighten like a door-  
frame & borded fruit & the secret  
society would hold you  
to your schooldays when you knew

the only music was Beethoven & the  
only gun a roer  
the only earth a Boer se troos  
& grace before meals & weeding  
out to the fence all rotten undergrowth

Stephen Gray

from FALSE BAY NOTEBOOK

there's no way you can understand  
how deeply I envy  
your legal right to walk with her  
through the harbour  
holding her legalised hand

for us behind your back there is  
the furtive planning on  
vacant flats to occupy for  
an hour of illicit  
loving fit to kill us both

and after that we retreat side  
by side in public  
unable to show that in the air  
between our warm bodies  
ghostly fingers try to hold on

Stephen Gray

from FALSE BAY NOTEBOOK

the snoek are running now in False Bay  
that we know from the catchers  
presumably they run in alignment  
not just silver waywardness  
but an organized drift on the graze

they're forward built for the lower jaw  
claps over a chromium lip  
streamlined for speed and cumbered  
with headlamp eyes  
& packed arranged strips of flesh

why one despises them is they all  
look like the next  
& once you've knifed up from the dorsal  
through the bipartite cranium  
they all fillet out in the same style

Stephen Gray

## JOHANNESBURG/DUBE

### THRESHOLDS OF IDENTITY

Visitors, indignant, didactic, pronounce  
their solutions or dooms.  
A home poet comments: 'They speak and go back.  
In this place it is you and me.'  
I apprehend the challenge in his thought:  
Inhabitants, we are alone  
and the difference that still lies between us  
may shatter the land.  
Yet he and I agree enough  
to discount the old divides  
of pigmentation, culture, class;  
nor would he or I endorse  
the use of blood spilt on the street  
or silence of the blackened cell.  
In this we are joined. So far have we come.  
But as I calmly sorrow  
over acts of years that grind  
his feeling small and his thought narrow  
or sputter anger over days  
that smash him into terror, grief and rage,  
so he would deplore, merely deplore  
the ferocity that in its turn  
could make the children of my race bleed.

Lionel Abrahams/Johannesburg

### I AM NOT A FLY

Please look at me  
I'm not a fly  
  
you can't wish me away  
by the flick of a hand  
I'm not a fly  
  
I drink milk  
but never vomit in my crucible  
for I'm not a fly  
  
I move from place to place  
sometimes in my capacity as a beggar  
yet I'm not a fly

Nakedi waPhosa/Dube

## ALBERTON

### WELL IN ALL FAIRNESS, IT MUST BE SAID . . .

We met at the corner of Eloff and Fox  
in a Saturday morning crush,  
me feeling secure with my handbag that locks  
and you in an indecent rush.  
  
I felt the light touch as you brushed past my arm  
to pass on my unguarded side;  
I gripped my handbag with a sense of alarm  
and thanked God for the pistol inside.  
  
But you were not quite past me before all my fear  
had taken command of my brain;  
I say in defence that you did not appear  
to be merely in haste for your train.  
  
So the next thing I know was the pistol went off  
(As you, of course, heard, felt and saw)  
And the police had to rush to our side of Eloff  
to execute justice and law.  
  
Our devotion to fairness can only impress  
and we'll file a report without fail:  
'A white woman was treated for shock and distress  
and a wounded black taken to gaol.'

Duncan Foster

### THE THIRD MAN

*(Spoken on Calvary)*

'It's a long time to wait,  
where the shade is slender, coming only from the pale itself,  
though I don't feel the sweat on my face so much now,  
for this wind is drying my brow;  
I feel it drying.

I'm the last, I think, of us three:  
Him I never knew, nor the other one either, but he  
— the other one, I mean — was a mocker,  
and worse than a robber, he was:  
And I never said that I was a king or a god,  
or may God himself strike me as I be here now:  
yes, may He strike me:  
And I wish that I had said it too,  
that He might strike me, swiftly.

I'll not be waiting much longer now. I'll not have to.  
It's not allowed:  
I break the law even now, by waiting too long:  
And for that they break your legs: it's agony, it must be.  
He's well safe, anyway, him that's dead  
(As for the other, I don't know, I can't be sure)  
But him that's dead — he's well safe:  
they'll not break his legs:  
though they'll break mine . . .'

Duncan Foster

**IN MY SLEEP**

I see faces  
white faces and black faces  
wearing police hats  
in my sleep  
and I come to

I sleep again  
I hear a white voice shouting loud  
'Attention' to a silent obedient group  
of blacks in rust uniforms and brown boots  
stampeding the ground  
in my sleep  
and I come to

I sleep once again  
I hear dogs barking, grunting and chasing  
children and mothers crying  
in my sleep  
and I come to

I continue to sleep  
I feel teargas in my eyes  
in my sleep I cannot see  
I rub them with my fingers  
in my sleep they get swollen  
I feel pain in my sleep  
and I come to

I sleep for the fifth time  
I see fingers  
holding machine guns and revolver triggers  
about to press or pull or whatever,  
in my sleep  
and I come to

I tell myself I sleep for the last time  
I hear a bullet shot from close range  
piercing my skin through  
into my heart to explode in it  
in my sleep  
trembling from fear and pain once more  
I wake up, set my sights  
I am still awake – forever.

Lehlohonolo Tshabalala/Bloemfontein

**LAMENT OF A FORMER DETAINEE**

Here fades one of these sad days.  
Oh, how I wish I could hide my face and cry.  
I should enjoy the prosperity of S.A. in many ways.  
I want to be employed and give life yet another try.

Work-givers are not happy to offer,  
No matter how I plead.  
To bed I go on empty stomach because of the dry coffer  
And I cannot steal to make ends meet.

Bulara Diphoto/Kroonstad

**THE GREAT LONELINESS**

It drives us together into pairs and odds  
It binds us together like beans in pods.  
It congregates like dirty chaff into nooks and corners  
Why should sons leave their mothers with empty hands  
And wander far off among strangers and unknown lands?

It drives us apart like frightened small birds  
It makes us fall like tossed pence, into tails and heads  
It makes us feel lost in the dreary lifeless desert  
It blows the distance between lovers like an expert  
It drowns words of love and sympathy completely.  
Is it the son of destiny or messenger apparent?

Cities are full of people  
But more with loneliness congested.  
Community is more of a cripple  
But more numerous churches are constructed.  
Some choose the noose of the rope  
Some prefer the cloak of dope  
Some prefer to walk the street  
Some choose no signs to heed.

Oh I would this loneliness would let me be  
But like a shadow yielding, tenacious it clings to me.  
Could I be better off befriending this loneliness?  
Could I be better seeking refuge in emptiness?  
Perhaps loneliness too is seeking a friend after all.  
Sages befriended him and gave a nobler name – solitude:  
Perhaps by lending a heart to him we would be a better  
multitude.

David Maotwana/Bloemfontein

**HE PASSED AWAY**

Somewhere smoke curls  
And whirls haphazardly but sure  
Above a house from  
Dawn till dusk  
Signifying a departed soul.

People walk in and out  
In groups and singles  
In silent and singing sympathy  
With the bereaved.

He passed away in the morning  
Leaving his children mourning  
In the morning of their lives

The silent sobs, the hysteric weeping  
Sweeps the home  
The grief-stricken family is  
Tear spilling in shock disbelief  
– a fatherless future?

Lechesa Tšenoli/Kroonstad

IT DOES NOT HELP/ *A story by Letshaba Thubela*

The neon lights flashed outside the dilapidated double-storey red brick building, and the message: *WINE, DINE & DANCE* flashed across the panel board fastened just above the door, with the name: *SHINDIG NITE CLUB*.

The inside of the club vibrated to the blaring of Afro Rock music and the stomping of the feet of the night revelers. The inner stage of the club, obviously the dancing ground, was full to capacity, and placed around it were a scattering of tables with chairs, occupied. Through the flash of the kaleidoscopic dazzle of the club's lights, one could see some of the patrons swilling their beer with abandoned relish.

At the far end, opposite the entrance, a bar with no liquor visible on its shelves was in full swing, as evidenced by the crowd of die-hard sots lolling with fists full of booze on its stools. The crowd here, as in the club's interior, was multi-racial, with the males of the white species and females of the black species being in the majority, all kissing and cuddling and doing things imaginable only to an inebriated or downright filthy mind.

Mary alighted from the late night train at Johannesburg station. She had travelled all the way from her home in KwaThema alone, afraid and lonely. She had to do it or god only knows what fate would await her and her family come next Monday. She knew the risk she was taking when she boarded the train at that late hour, but there was nothing she could do about it. She had to do it. She was so desperate that even when she got into the train she had clean forgotten how vulnerable she was. Her mini skirt had been purposefully put on even though she had realised its implications as far as incitement was concerned at that late hour of the night. She could have put on an ordinary full-length dress, or a pair of jeans or even a maxi, but that would have been counter-productive as it would have defeated the very purpose of her risking her life in the first place.

She took faltering steps towards the platform exit feeling guiltily naked.

'My, my!' A drunkard staggered purposefully towards her and she quickened her steps. 'Wait my shishter . . . hic . . . hell . . .' He made a determined effort to catch up with her but stumbled and fell with his nose absorbing the full impact of the platform gravel. She hurried on and climbed the steps leading to the outside two at a

time. She did not look back, for not only was she not interested, but the experience had unnerved her badly.

Her heart was pounding wildly as if to wrench itself free of the veins and arteries that held it down so suffocatingly, and she thought about all those horrific stories she had heard or read in the newspapers about Jo'burg. Once, she had heard about how girls were mercilessly beaten and raped by the brutes that crawl the darkened streets of eGoli. She had also read of girls being gruesomely murdered and mutilated by the thoughtless fiends that abound in all the devilish haunts that are part of the makeup of the golden city.

She handed her ticket to the sleepy ticket examiner who took it and scrutinized it indifferently. Having regained possession of it, she clutched it momentarily in her sweating palm before pushing it into her purse. She felt so alone and so afraid. With trembling knees she headed for the town thinking all the time of what might happen to her at any moment. She had taken time to prepare herself. Her friend, Molly, had told her of the dread which she herself had once experienced. Only, Molly had had no need to it. She did it just for the fun of it. Mary's ordeal was of necessity.

'If Molly could do it,' she thought, 'why can't I? It is necessary.'

She walked on, headed for the inner part of the city, all the time keeping within the well-lit streets of the town. She knew where she was going, she knew where the Shindig Nite Club was.

She came to the entrance of the dilapidated building and stood wondering what her next move would be. Molly had warned her to steer clear of the swarthy ones: 'They are brutes Mary,' she had admonished, 'give them just a hint of a smile and they are apt to think that you are willing to spend a night in bed with them and all for free. How do you like that, all for FREE, f-r-e-e. Mark my words, don't ever go for that type however smartly they might be dressed.'

It was the first time she had visited this place, and though Molly had given her all the ropes about the place, at this moment they had flown out of her benumbed mind. Suddenly the door flew open and a blond head stuck out to take a peek. It was a cherubic handsome face and Mary liked what she saw. For a moment the young man stood looking at her, and then he stepped outside closing the door behind him: 'What can I do for you lady?'

'I . . . I . . .' she faltered.

'You coming for a swing?'

'Yes,' she smiled showing her even white teeth. 'How much?' she asked.

'By courtesy of Ian 'Fancy' Styles' — he proffered his well-trained hand — 'it will be on the house. I happen to be a shareholder here.' He winked and smiled.

Captivated by the smile, she smiled back awkwardly.

Ian realised that though she looked a country bumpkin, and was dressed as a slut, she somehow had class. There was nothing awkward about her: a finely chiselled ebony face, a well-sculptured torso and moulded feet befitting a mannequin.

'Easy fresh meat,' he thought.

'Like a drink?' He flashed his infectious smile.

'Yes.' She blushed inexplicably.

He pushed the door to let her in, and once inside, he took her hand and expertly manoeuvred her around the dancing revellers and the reeling inebriates towards the bar. 'What will it be? A highball do?' asked Ian knowingly. He knew his cards, an expert at his game.

'Yes,' she said. Even though she would have nothing to do with liquor by choice, Molly had counselled her to accept drinks when offered, telling her that otherwise she had no hope of making it in the hurly-burly world which she was now poised to enter, albeit reluctantly.

The pulsating rhythm of the Afro Rock music soothed her taut nerves and she began to take stock of her situation. It was, she thought, not all that bad.

'Come from out of town?' Ian was sending out his antennae.

'KwaThema, Springs.'

'Expecting someone?'

'Not necessarily.'

'A dame like you alone?' — he feigned surprise — 'your boyfriend must be nuts.'

'I haven't got one.'

'You lie.' Ian was right, indeed she was lying and he saw it written all over her face, in her eyes and in her shifty movements.

Of course, like any beautiful girl her age, she had a boyfriend, an educated one for that matter. The only reason she was here, was that she needed money and she needed it fast. Her graduate boyfriend, Zizwe, did not have it. There was also no likelihood of his having it soon, for he was out of employment. As a last resort Molly had suggested that she come here.



'The drinks, sir.' The wine steward materialized with the highballs and placed them on the counter in front of Ian and Mary.

As Ian was fidgeting for his wallet, Mary was exercising her novice's mind on speculating about Ian: what he was worth and the likely price she would wean from him. Molly had said the going price was ten rand a stint, and Ian, definitely a man of means, was worth far more than a paltry ten rand. His fashionable 'Man-About-Town' clothes spoke for themselves; his shiny shoes, his bearing and all; a self-made man.

Her eyes strayed to the well-stacked wallet and they would have popped out of their sockets but for the instinctive and timely restraint inculcated into her by her mentor, Molly. This well practised and well-presented act, however, did not escape Ian's trained eye. He feigned a nervous cough and assumed a regal bearing. The waiter left smiling happily as he pocketed his large tip.

'So, no boyfriend.' He changed his tack, holding his glass delicately in his long fingers.

'Yes,' she replied.

'Then we might as well have ourselves a ball.' He sipped his drink.

Imitating her experienced and obviously sophisticated host, she held her glass like he did and sipped her drink.

'A walk-over to a good lay,' thought Ian without compunction, as he eyed her well-rounded thighs protruding from under her brief skirt.

Nervously she tried to draw the skirt to cover them but it was no use, the skirt was too short and she hated herself for the degradation she had flung herself into.

'Haw . . . haw . . . haw . . .', guffawed Ian, 'come on man, you are no virgin now, right? Besides, it is good when a man admires that which is natural and . . . ' he leered lustfully.

'Of course not.' She was desperate now. Her morals, her womanhood, the very sanctity of her own body was at stake. She was being torn by her good Christian up bringing on the one side, and her outwardly insurmountable plight on the other — the latter being strengthened by the dulling effect of the whisky on her.

'I don't know . . . ' she trailed off, lamely trying to salvage whatever pride there was left.

'Another drink would perhaps loosen us up for a jig. Waiter!' he hollered and the steward appeared and immediately went back as soon as Ian had snapped his fingers.

'How do you feel?' he enquired.

'Just okay, maybe another drink

would do of course,' she answered, half convinced of the right of what she had planned to do.

Just then, Ian was busy talking to someone nearby and, left alone, she was trying with all her might to convince herself that it was worth doing. Her life and that of her family depended on it. It was the last straw they could hope to clutch onto in order to survive.

She came of a family of five children, she being the second youngest. Her father had been disabled during the war in 1945, six years before she was born. Her mother was now bedridden with chronic asthma. Her father's meagre war pension, and her mother's limping old age pension fell far short of covering the cost of keeping her home and also providing her mother's medical expenses. To crown it all, she was unemployed. All her elder brothers were hopeless drunks and there was nothing anybody could do about them. Instead, whenever she could, she would give them something to eat in order that a scandalous thing like death through starvation could be avoided. More than that, she knew quite well that she could not afford burial expenses and that a pauper's funeral would blemish her otherwise proud genealogy beyond recognition. And this, she feared more than most.

Her younger sister had not yet come of age and was still at school through the generosity of a kind uncle.

On the previous day, she had come home from visiting Molly to find under their front door an unenveloped letter from the East Rand Administration Board's Superintendent, stating that they were now three months in arrears with their rent. The letter had succinctly stated that, if they had not paid their rent by Monday morning, they would be evicted without recourse to any higher official. And this, the letter, her letter, her dilemma, her family's dilemma, had driven her thus far.

'Mother hen,' coaxed Ian as he placed his hand on her thigh, 'brooding over crippled chickens, eh?' He laughed, not realising the irony implied in his jest.

'No,' she said lamely.

'Come on then' — he pointed to the glasses on the counter — 'let's drink to your health.'

'Oh' — she did not see the waiter placing the glasses before them — 'I . . . ' She sighed, preferring to say nothing. Ian gulped, and she gulped.

An hour later they were on the dance floor and her head was spinning. They had drunk four shots a piece and now the shots were beginning to take their toll.

'You don't seem alright.' Ian feigned worry. 'Let's go outside, the air is cooler there. I have a car, we'll rest there a bit.'

She nodded her heavy head. One moment she had been so hilariously happy and now the next, she felt so sick. She felt like throwing up there and then, but expert Ian restrained her and motioned her to the door, out of the lobby, and into the street, where he made her throw up. Then purposefully, he dragged her, in full view of the others who were there, behind the red structure, put her down on the dirt and ripped her panties off. She tried to struggle but his powerful hands kept her down. 'No! Ian no!' She began to wriggle with the last ounce of strength that was in her.

'No!' but it was no use.

'Alright . . . alright . . . ' Ian was breathing heavily now, his fingers fumbling for his belt buckle. 'Alright . . . alright . . . ' he kept moaning through heavy breathing.

In the recesses of her mind, a word, a forgotten idea came into being: 'Ten rand, Ian . . . ten rand . . . ' she blabbed lamely, and it went on and on in her mind until she lost consciousness.

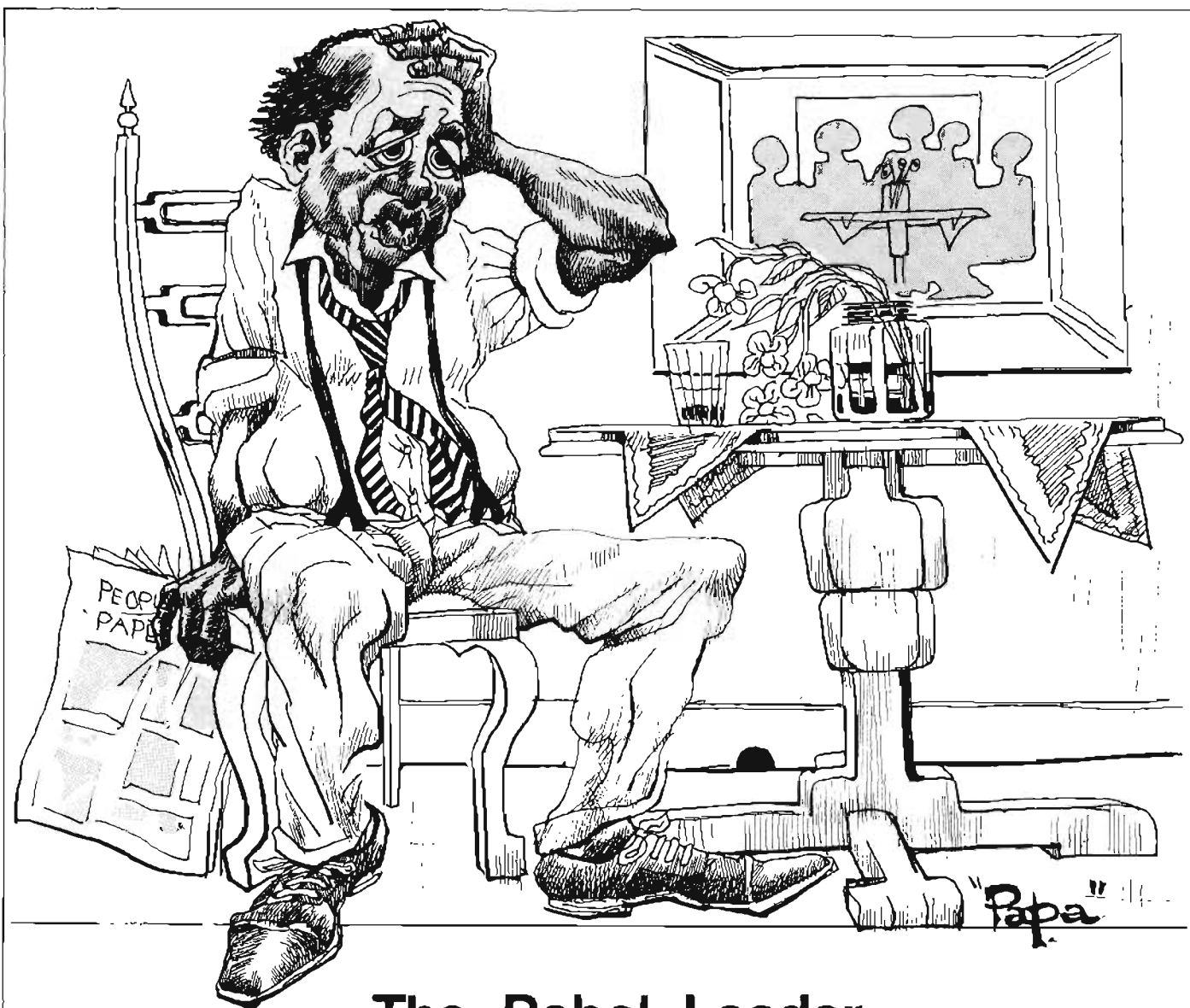
The sun came over the horizon and a chilly breeze swayed the grass and the branches of the trees. An obnoxious odour wafted in her direction and she blinked. The sky had turned a clear grey. Her mouth felt sour and dry, her throat was parched. She blinked again and closed her eyes. Her body was aching all over. She remained with her eyes closed, afraid to move lest she saw what she imagined had happened. It had happened alright, it did not matter.

Suddenly she opened her eyes and hoisted herself onto her elbows. As she had feared, she was alone with garbage and flies for company. Her purse, she remembered. Frantically she searched for it. Using her bare hands she clawed at the garbage like a demented scavenger, but there was no purse to be found.

How utterly degraded and how utterly humiliated she was. Vilified she was, and she knew it, never mind the ten rand which was not there anyway.

'How am I going to get home,' she wailed, freezing in the chilling breeze. 'I should not have done it' — her body was wracked with sobs — 'it was not worth it, it does not help.'

Extracts from *I, Teacher, Humble Servant*, a novel in progress by Letshaba Thubela, were published in *Staffrider* Vol. 1, Numbers 3 and 4.



## The Rebel Leader

A story by Michael Siluma, illustrated by Mzwakhe

Pluralville was a big township with a population of more than a million people which, despite its meteoric growth over the years, had remained what it had always been: a squalid, mal-administered and dangerous-to-live-in place.

Naturally the people of Pluralville were not content with their lot. For many years they had pleaded with and tried to persuade the Pluralville Township Administration Board (P.T.A.B.) to improve the situation in the township. But because of the difference in aims and strategy of the leaders, the people's fight against the P.T.A.B. had failed to bring about even the slightest change.

There was Mr. Mthengisi and his group of men nominated by P.T.A.B. to lead the residents. They called themselves the Pluralville Civic Committee. These men lived in plush homes, rode in BMW's and received fat cheques every month from the P.T.A.B.

They had little support, if any, in the township, but their masters always insis-

ted that they were the authentic representatives of the Pluralvillers.

Mr. Mthengisi's last public appearance had been at the local stadium when the residents had packed it to discuss the increased rentals which the P.T.A.B. had wanted to introduce in the township.

Speaker after speaker came out strongly against the rent increase, and the people, who knew they could not afford the increase because of their miserable earnings, had agreed with these men.

The inarticulate Mr. Mthengisi was given a chance to air his views. Among other things he said that though the people always attacked the P.T.A.B. for the bad roads in the township and for its failure to bring electricity to Pluralville, they were refusing to pay higher rentals. Where the hell did they think the Board would get the money from?

In a calm and appealing tone he asked the people to stop complaining about the high salaries the P.T.A.B. officials al-

located to themselves. It was not child's play to run a place as vast as Pluralville. 'To some of them it is really a sacrifice to work for P.T.A.B.,' he reminded the people. He concluded, amid murmurs of disapproval, by saying: 'Batho ba heso, le se ke la mamela Makomonisi, hobane ha le ntshuwa matlong ha a no le thusa. Makgowa ona a tla reng he le sa patale rente?' (My people, please do not listen to the Communists. They won't be around to help you when you are evicted from your houses. And what will the White people say if you don't pay rent?).

He had hardly shut his mouth when someone yelled: 'Sellout', and another shouted: 'Makashaywe.' The people started booing him. Two youths pounced on him, threatened him with assault and angrily ordered him and his cronies out of the stadium. That happened three years ago.

All he had done since had been to issue pro-P.T.A.B. press statements and attend functions in white suburbs.

His humiliation at Pluralville Stadium had been but one in a stream of humiliations he suffered because of his P.T.A.B. utterances. The most remarkable had been at a women's meeting convened by him and the P.T.A.B. at the Pluralville Hall. The women had been called to discuss the health situation in the township. Refuse was not being collected and some people were dumping it in the streets. Blocked toilets and burst water pipes had gone unrepaired, turning the township into a muddy, filthy place with a stench even a pig could not tolerate.

Mr. Mthengisi made a speech in which he warned the people of the health dangers of staying in such a squalid township as Pluralville. Why, someone asked, was the Board not doing anything about the situation. 'Every month we pay rent, don't we, Mr. Mthengisi? I would like to know what the Board does with that money. I always thought it was meant, among other things, for such problems as the one facing us today.'

The cleanliness of the township, Mr. Mthengisi replied, was the joint responsibility of the residents and the Board, not of the Board alone. He added: 'It is up to us, the people of Pluralville, to show the Board that we love our township; that we are capable of keeping Pluralville clean. It is only when we have proved to the Board that we care for Pluralville that they might consider granting us autonomy.'

The women started murmuring and when he tried to quieten them they clapped hands, making it impossible for him to continue. Some even howled at him. He was ultimately hounded out of the hall with tears in his eyes.

For collaborating with those who made the lives of Pluralville people miserable, Mr. Mthengisi had become the villain of the township. But he could find solace in the knowledge that the people knew him and knew what he stood for.

This could not be said of Mr. Kgatello, chairman of the United Residents' Association. Very few people knew anything about him or his Association's objectives. Even the P.T.A.B. wanted nothing to do with Mr. Kgatello.

The stated aim of U.R.A. was to fight for the betterment of living conditions in Pluralville. They rarely broke their characteristic silence. When they did, it was over irrelevant matters during arguments with Mr. Mthengisi's P.C.C.

Only Mr. Nhlabathi, a successful businessman and leader of the Pluralville People's Movement, had the support of both old and young in the township.

He differed in many ways from his rivals. Although he lived in a beautiful mansion he allowed even the poorest of the residents to enter through the front door, something the rich never did. Unlike Mr. Mthengisi and Mr. Kgatello, who wore expensive suits and had broad neck-ties dangling from their fat necks, Mr. Nhlabathi wore Afro-shirts and khaki trousers.

**'The women started murmuring and when he tried to quieten them they clapped hands, making it impossible for him to continue. Some even howled at him. He was ultimately hounded out of the hall with tears in his eyes.'**

Mr. Nhlabathi had opposed the rent increase at the meeting from which Mr. Mthengisi had been ejected. Meetings convened by him were well-attended, and his speeches would be punctuated with cries of 'Amandla!'

As Mr. Nhlabathi's popularity grew, so the Pluralville Township Administration Board's fear and hatred for him intensified. His image dwarfed that of Mr. Mthengisi, the Board's protegee, and the Board was not going to take it sitting down. Mr. Nhlabathi was an obstacle to their plans. He had to be removed from the scene; he had to be taught a lesson.

His home was raided one morning at 3.30 a.m. They took him away without saying where they were taking him. He was detained for six months. During this time Mrs. Nhlabathi tried to pay her husband a visit but they made it clear that no one, not even his wife, could see him. 'Your husband is a good-for-nothing grown-up who cannot look after himself when he is free. We are going to take care of this trouble-maker husband of yours,' an officer at the police station told her.

After his release, Mr. Nhlabathi addressed a meeting at the Pluralville Stadium. His ideas had not changed one bit. He was still bitterly opposed to the P.T.A.B. and support for him had, if anything, increased after his detention.

The P.T.A.B. was infuriated by these developments. They had to find ways of containing this 'anarchist'. They barred him from using either the township hall or the stadium. He was also prohibited from addressing meetings of any kind in Pluralville.

Mr. Nhlabathi was not daunted by this. He now attacked the Board and

communicated with his people through the press and was more outspoken than ever. He would bundle up the Board and Mr. Mthengisi and make mince meat out of them. The people were unwavering in their support for him, but the Pluralville Township Administration Board was not yet beaten. If detention could not change Mr. Nhlabathi, other tactics had to be used.

Mr. Nhlabathi started having nocturnal visitors at his home. At first these surreptitious visits were intermittent but soon they became a regular thing. Sometimes Mr. Nhlabathi would secretly visit the offices of the P.T.A.B. The officials would give him V.I.P. treatment and have lengthy talks with him.

*The World*, a local newspaper, had always been efficient and untiring in its coverage of township events, particularly those involving Mr. Nhlabathi, the people's leader. But the newspaper never mentioned the meetings between Mr. Nhlabathi and the P.T.A.B. It was simply not aware of them.

The Pluralville people did not realise that Mr. Nhlabathi had undergone a change which had split him in two. He was still the public figure, an uncompromising and implacable opponent of the P.T.A.B. — and also the friend and collaborator of the Board.

Mr. Nhlabathi held them under a spell from which they could not break free. They saw him as their true and only leader who could not set a foot wrong. Hence, when the P.T.A.B. suddenly made Pluralville Stadium available to Mr. Nhlabathi and his Pluralville People's Movement, no one questioned the change in attitude towards Mr. Nhlabathi.

At the township meetings he assured the people that they would win in their fight against the Board. But at functions in white suburbs he told the whites that Black people were naturally patient and tolerant and that he, the people's leader, believed that Pluralville's problems could only be solved through negotiation with the Board. 'We hope and trust that the Board will, one day, fulfil its promise of making Pluralville the most beautiful township in the country,' he'd tell his audiences.

Although the people became aware of their leader's double-talk, they were paralysed by the belief that he could never betray their popular cause.

Meanwhile, rent in the township spiralled, families were evicted from their houses, the streets became rivers of filth from blocked sewerage pipes, and the Board continued making promises.

A PROTEST FROM A BUSHMAN

I

This is my native land  
 My real native land  
 I know every tree and bush by its name  
 I care not that I am poor  
 I have lived in this land  
 And hunted all over these mountains  
 And looked at the skies  
 And wondered how the stars  
 And the moon and the sun  
 The rainbow and the milky way  
 Rush from day to day like busy people.

I have enjoyed this life  
 The light in the stars  
 The lilt in the music or songs  
 The joy in the flowers  
 The plumage in the birds  
 The charm in women's breasts  
 The inward warmth and rich vitality  
 The distant music of cowbells  
 All these lightened the burden of my sorrows  
 I have nothing outside this body  
 I have neither a house nor property  
 I roamed where I liked  
 And hunted wherever I chose.

I have enjoyed the bounce of youth  
 And stayed wherever I chose  
 I have danced in the sun  
 I have danced in the wind  
 I have danced around the fire place  
 But now and I say now  
 There is a swelling crescendo of sorrow  
 That makes goose-pimples on my body  
 I live in sick apprehension  
 Freedom is gone  
 Life is tremulous like  
 A drop of water on a mophani leaf.

The talk is bushman everywhere  
 I am called a nobody  
 A race of rugged filthy people  
 Who cannot clean their floors  
 Whose blanket is the fire  
 Who spit and sneeze freely everywhere  
 Whose bodies smell of root ointment  
 Or like a cowhide soaked in the river water  
 My countrymen call me names  
 I am torn between life and death  
 Propped between freedom and slavery  
 I am almost like a wandering ghost

My tears glide in pairs down my cheeks  
 My hands shake because of old age  
 Sometimes I am struck with a horse whip  
 I am no more than a refugee  
 A loafer they say yet others loaf too  
 Whilst other men work  
 It is true I do not worry for lunch  
 As birds do not worry about theirs too  
 My countrymen eat, drink and laugh  
 They live in beautiful houses  
 My life is tremulous like  
 A drop of water on a mophani leaf

I and my fellow men and women  
 Sleep under trees or in caves  
 Or on the open ground  
 Or around the open fire place  
 We starve and die of thirst  
 The finest part of our rich land is gone  
 We live in these dry and sandy hot deserts  
 We can no longer hunt freely  
 Life is a scourge, a curse  
 It is tremulous like  
 A water drop on a mophani leaf.

II

Man has become an intruder,  
 A puzzler, unstable, a sick being  
 A mafia to me and my brothers  
 Dispossessed am I of my land  
 Barbed wire do I see all over  
 The austerity of human laws do I feel  
 I bow down to red tape  
 I frown on the insensitivity of my countrymen  
 And on those that paraphrase my plight and my life  
 And with plethora of questions and stories  
 Donate bushmen paintings  
 To foreign museums and archives  
 To boost the coffers of selfish men  
 Life is tremulous like  
 a drop of water on a mophani leaf.

My countryman has become an intruder  
 A puzzler, unstable, lured by the fetters  
 Of a civilization he does not understand  
 Hungrier, ever grabbing and balkanizing my land  
 Shackling it with iron and cement bridges  
 Wounding, burrowing holes into its river bed.  
 This land was once my private garden  
 Whereon I hunted as I pleased  
 And enjoyed the free kiss of the breeze  
 Bushman am I  
 Bushman in the blood  
 Bushman in the heart  
 My land is gone  
 Life is tremulous like  
 A drop of water on a mophani leaf.

I frown on the insensitivity of my countrymen  
 And on those who paraphrase my plight and my life  
 Into parables of ifs and perhapses  
 The erosive action of man's intransigence  
 Outshines the prudence of honest men  
 And man is now at variance with himself,  
 With his fellow men, and is forever grabbing.  
 These are the dynamics of a sick society  
 The austerity of human laws do I feel  
 No more do I enjoy the free laughter of the wind  
 No more do I enjoy the ferocity of lightning  
 No more do I enjoy the comforts of bushman medicine  
 This is tabooed  
 Life is tremulous like  
 A drop of water on a mophani leaf.

Albert G.T.K. Malikongwa/Botswana

BOIPUSO KE JOO – GABORONE

A dikidika di go wele, Gaborone,  
A masego a go wele, Gaborone:  
Motse o manne mo Botswana –  
Wa etelwa ke baditshabatšhaba,  
Ba o etela ka methobodika,  
Ba tswana gareng ga dikaka,  
Melao ya dirwa, e e popota,  
A melao e e thata selobota,  
Boipuso ke joo – GABORONE... .

Ana mmatla – kgwana ga a robale,  
Phokojwe wa morago masetlela;  
Ke masetlela, ka batho ba mmonye –  
Gaborone e otlala mogolo le monnye,  
E otlala Mosweu le Montsho  
Gaborone ke letlharapa-legolo,  
La go mokanelwa ke dinonyane,  
Go thailwe melao e e botšatša,  
Ka ke yone e eletsegang – GABORONE... .

Engelane ya re fa mašetla,  
Mašetla ra a mokona segolwane:  
E rile fa re ntse re sa ntse,  
Ra bona fa batho ba thibetse;  
Batho ba tloga ba leboga Morwa Seretse,  
Ba re a tihogole a gole jaaka tlou;  
Matlo a mantle, a diphuthego, a tla,  
Botswana ya nna makopanelo a ditšhaba,  
Gaborone ya rarwa ka phetakepajana,  
Dipone tsa masigo tsa tloga tsa agwa... .

Mekoti e e sa itseweng, ya eptswa,  
Teemane ya lotlololwa kwa Orapa:  
Le yone mekoti ya menyafala –  
Ya menagana, ya nna mentsi,  
Ditiro tsa phadhalatsa batho,  
Gaborone ya amogela batho pharagatlha,  
Mapai bangwe, ba tloga ba a latlha,  
Se se sa feleng sone, se a tlhola,  
A re felela a mantsinyana, mathhomola,  
Wee – Wee – Dumela Gaborone wa rona!... .

A Ditakaneng le yone e bonwe tlheng,  
A ditakaneng le yone e nne ntleyana:  
Mekgabiso wee – e nne tengnyana –  
Bakwena ba busiwa kwa Molepolole,  
Bangwato ba busi wa kwa Goo-Mmabesi-A-Kgama,  
Letsholathebe a tshola Barwana... .  
Knosi Lincwe a laya boo-Kgafela,  
Gorwe a bogosi bo se lebalwe,  
Ipuso ga se go dira bonweenwee,  
Dithamaga, dikenene lo tlhogoleng,  
Gaborone ga se leruarua, ke mmitša –  
Nna o kokotlele, Gaborone, DUMELA GABORONE WEE –

A mosadi yo a otlang Botswana!  
A thele e geletseng maši:  
E a pharolela kwa Gaborone,  
E a ntsha mo Gaborone ka bontle,  
E a gasetse kwa Pandamatenga –  
E a gasetse kwa Bokalaka kwa.  
Le kwa Borolong e go etele,  
Kgongwana e e thulang e sa gadime,  
Ka go sa etelwe, o ipatlela tlala,  
Sefepha-bontsi se se ramagana,  
Nka go bona kae, ka go etela, GABORONE?

Ke palame tshutshumakgala maloba,  
Ke tswa kwa Teemaneng, ka nosinyana:  
Ka feta goo-Letlamoreng – A – Tshidi,  
Sebokołodi sa tla se le maphethephethe,  
Ke re ke se akole, se nne se pholethe,  
Sa rarala dithaba tsa kwa Lobatse,  
Sa phethekgana, se lebile Gaborone,  
Khunwana, kgongwana ya goroga,  
Ya tsena teng e ntse e e kgwa mosi,  
Ka okomela ka bona GABORONE teng,  
Ka re a ke bona Gauteng yo monnye nnaa?  
E se Gauteng, e le sepakasedi sa GABORONE... .

Gaborone, o kile wa bo o le sekaka,  
Le nto go sena e e agilweng koo:  
Ke go bona fa o le letshonkoko –  
O sa nwe le ke yone tota, koko,  
Ga agiwa matlo a a bophadiphadi –  
Ra felelwa ke a a mantsi matsadi,  
Masiela a sianela kwa go wena,  
Mathomela a go etela ka boganka,  
Wa etelwa le ke baswagadi jaaka dikgaka,  
Dikgaka di bony bonno bo masisi –  
O naledi e e phatshimang ka metlha,  
O pekema fela o so tshabe le mogaka,  
A noka e e sa kgaleng, PHUTHADITSHABA... WEE –  
WEE - GABORONE... .

Cedric L. Thobega/Botswana

THE GREEN HOUSE

(for Joban van Wyk)

The hermaphrodite earth,  
full of crisp shadows and questions, sings.  
Day brushes its hair and wears clean clothes

but my mouth is full of stone

Stars click their nails like cats  
on the stockings of a beautiful woman:  
at night the mirror curls up patiently  
in my room purring for her elusive body.

i dig between my toes  
for ways of losing

new lovers tear at their meat  
(small mouths blunt with lust)  
and if they smell decay only think  
others must have eaten too.

i sharpen  
an okapi against the bedroom wall

The pregnant sun hangs:  
Myself? I am aging

and rifle the handbags of old ladies  
for their teeth and memories

I have stood too long in the wedding wind:  
was born on just such a day as this  
straddling the veld

Kelwyn Sole/Namibia

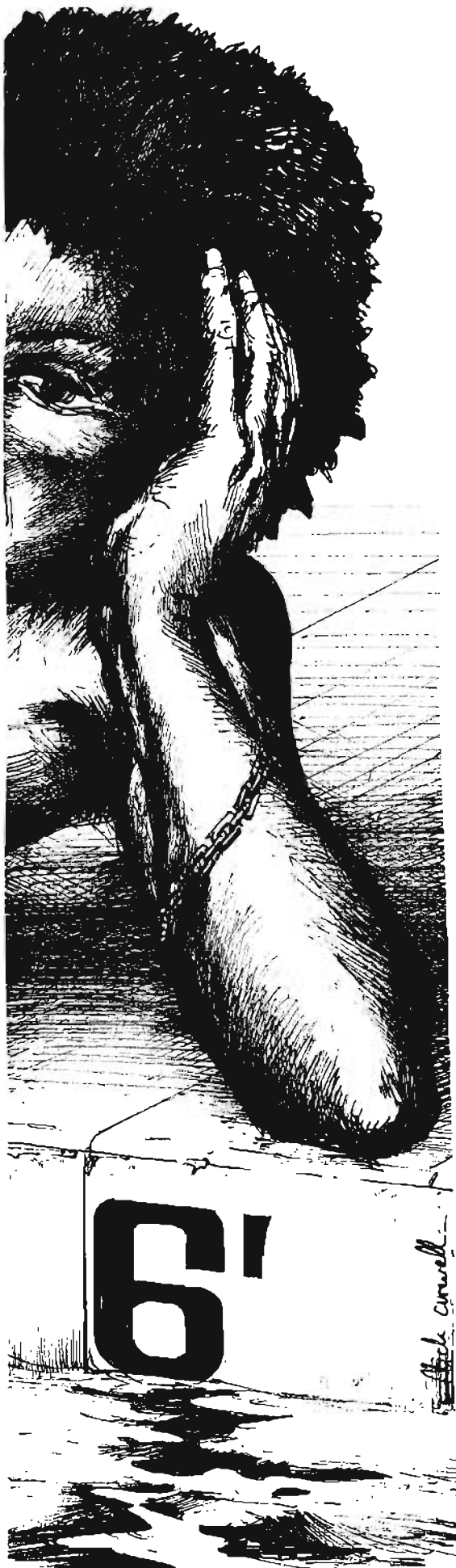
THE PROMISE *A short story by* Christopher Wildman  
*Illustration by* Nick Curwell

The university pool was like a blessing in the bright Pretoria morning sun. Mariette prepared herself for the dive. The 'boys' had just finished swabbing the stone floors and the grass banks were freshly swept green carpets. She sliced the water in a clear, knife-edge dive. Lying on her back, Mariette smiled to herself at the memory of all those chaste morning swims in the ladies' pool these four years she'd studied at Pretoria. But there was a promise in this morning sun that offered the future as a perfect counterweight to those four years: she was going to America. The South African Diplomatic Service had found her unusually satisfactory for the task, sensing, without her having to spell it out, the conservative cast of her mind. Dutch Reformed Church, political science and sociology as supports to her English degree: she would make a good ambassador's secretarial assistant. Washington was only two days away. The sky above her was an immaculate blue. One silver jet plane would cut across that blueness and carry her far from this suburban neatness for which she had come to feel such affection. Soon she would be inside a completely different scene — crowded, international and sophisticated. The anticipation thrilled her with its vague yet shiny forms — its giddy ether. She climbed out and shivered with excitement, enrobing herself in her freshly laundered white towel-coat.

She was even glad she'd be free of Paulus's haunted face. She had been careful not to get entangled with any of her admirers this past year; marriage, which had originally been the logical climax to her degree, had been deftly postponed. She'd even found it quite easy to gently remove all thoughts of engagement to Paulus. It had all been very flattering, his devotion born out of sleepless nights culminating in his proposal of marriage that last Sunday morning before term ended. Marriage itself seemed to be aptly supplanted by the diplomatic opportunity in America. As she looked at the sparkling light on the surface of the empty pool she was reassured by the simplicity of it all; being able to serve her country even if only in her small female way. Her morning swim, which she had come to regard as a kind of baptism strengthening her against the small challenges of the day, seemed this morning doubly significant. Yet the thrill of what these next few days would challenge her with actually made her squeeze her towel tightly as she stared, transfixed, at the shiny surface of the water. Then, in a sudden burst of movement, she ran to do the final packing.

She seemed to have slept for hours when she awoke at 10 a.m. in the Hotel Mayfair, Washington D.C. America. I'm actually here! Her body was still aching with the excitement and discomfort of that long flight via Rio. She seemed to be surrounded by a million reflections in mirrors and glass: skyscrapers, highways, clouds, brash colours and jet planes queuing up to land. The reflections seemed to be telling her of the thousand new experiences opening up before her. But first, the swim.

The raucous atmosphere of soul music mixed with the early morning drinks. Combined with the booming horizons of noise, it swamped her excited mind as she approached the hotel pool. My God! She'd forgotten. There were black bodies everywhere — of course! One slender negro, with large shades and a gold medallion on his proud black chest; was gently fondling the waist of a rather indifferent tall blonde — she's maybe Californian! An exciting shock passed through Mariette. Imagine this in Pretoria! She really couldn't take her eyes off these confident negroes, mixing so casually among the many hotel guests. She felt a mixture of panic and awe at all this sudden newness. As she shyly walked to the edge of the pool she found she had caught the eye of an almost silken dark brown form at the far end of the pool: he'd almost waved at her from the steps where he sat. Just like that! A sudden burst of confidence made her dive assertively in his direction. He'd notice the perfection of that dive if he wasn't blind! The water shocked her with its warmth — and it seemed so alive with the carefree shrieks and high-pitched shouts of the various swimmers. It was like a Hollywood movie soundtrack.



## CAPE TOWN

Why am I swimming towards him? What would my friends say in Pretoria? — on my first morning, too! As her eyes caught the other side he seemed statuesque yet vibrant, his knees drawn up and his strong shoulders leaning on his ebony fore-arm with its huge gold bracelet. He was looking away, but just as her head dived down she saw how swiftly he looked in her direction. I'll simply climb out right in front of him — and smile! — she thought. But I won't let him touch me. The mere anticipation made her heart panic. I mustn't be too coy, but then (she thought of Paulus and those firm rejections) I mustn't lose control. The water seemed almost blue-black to her now. The temptation to slow up and back out was becoming strong but she forced herself to swim even faster, although she was careful not to move so quickly as to lose grace. He was moving, she noticed. He came right to the pool side: he was

making it obvious that he would be ready for her when she reached it. Lazily, he lay his full length on the very edge and propped his face on his elbow so that the gold bracelet set off the warm glow of his large, clear features. His dark eyes were smiling broadly at her and they seemed frankly to gather all her energy into that smile. What am I doing? Do I want this? Supposing he ignores me — or grabs me? Mariette felt the confusion in her blood mixing with the dark blue water which seemed almost unbearably warm. She made her final burst for the side, right below his patient, receptive smile. He was about to speak — and a flood of strange relief swept through her as she raised her streaming face, confident that the intimacy of his glance meant he was going to speak to her. His voice, dreamlike yet direct, had a luxurious warmth and clarity: "Tell me, do you believe in Jesus Christ?"

## GUGULETU

In your prayers  
remember . . .  
Modderdam

In your prayers  
remember . . .  
Werkgenoot

In your prayers  
remember . . .  
Unibell

Think of the squatter babies  
Let our prayers  
Meet at the CROSSROADS!!!

**Nkos'omzi Ngcukana**

### INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

Black people seek for  
intellectual freedom

The right to think to inquire and to learn  
the right to hold opinions  
the right to practice art freely  
to evaluate and to criticize  
the right to listen, to discuss and to publish and to read.

These rights are guaranteed to our tradition  
Let's give them a chance to function  
Let us not be deafened by the oppressors.

Come good people . . . seek for intellectual freedom.

**Zoli Kota**

## BERGVILLE, NATAL

### COME QUICKLY

Fairest of the young  
You're as slender as the clove  
You're an unblown rose!  
I have loved you,  
You have not known it.

Have pity on my passion  
I faint every hour.  
Give me some hope,  
I'm sick with love,  
May I die and all my years be yours.

May you be pleased and your sorrows be mine.  
Suffer me to be your slave:  
Your price is not to be found,  
But my fortune is yours.  
I burn, I burn, my flame consumes me.

Don't turn away your face from me.  
Crown of my head!  
My two eyes  
I die — come quickly.

**Skhumbuzo Zondo**

## YOUNG BOYS

Nix piece and jam; nix piece and jam;  
 Happy  
 faces going up and down; feeling  
 pity  
 for the ground underneath their  
 feet  
 Like the have-nots feeling downtrodden,  
 born  
 to beg and steal  
 Happy faces behind counters  
 Empty faces before counters  
     Counters that break families  
     that know neither spending  
     nor the secret of sparing  
     the beauty of young boys  
 Consider not  
     like the truancy they proved to me  
 successful.  
 Sis, the witches of the night  
 Bring back my monies lest the devil  
 comes in your sleep tonight  
 tomorrow to have black shawls under the  
 blue sky.  
 Tiny legs carrying big heads or big  
 monies,  
     So, that Auntie Kokie ease it  
     with carried-bones  
     Until only dry clean bones  
 are left in the dark corners of the  
 loo.  
 Promising bodies needing tameness  
 while teachers preach distinctions  
 preachers proclaiming Utopias  
 proclamations made daily  
 Daily Mail reporting arrests  
 reporters telling it in black and  
 white, learned and unlearned about  
 young boys.

David Mphuso

## COMPLETE ILLUSION

Total unawareness of your fate.  
 Complete ignorance of the obscured  
 Truth.  
 A truth to open your eyes  
 To this hallucination as strong  
 as the winds.  
 The whirlwind like the breath  
 of a dragon  
 Hissing as it careers along the valley  
 In its purity;  
 Sweeping along the impurities of earth  
 The impurities of doom and final  
 Destruction.  
  
 Why can a life be dependent  
 Upon an ice that hates heat?  
 Why can an inspiration be  
 A piece of cloth?  
 There is no substance of consequence,  
 Nor a material of long guarantee  
 In this thing called love  
 In erotic sense.  
 It's an illusion to drown a nation,  
 A screen that  
 If removed,

Can damage irreparably  
 A human society.  
 It's good  
 In its presence.  
 But in its absence  
 It spills beans  
 And breaks cups.

This illusion is poisonous  
 To the learners.  
 Like sponges they absorb it,  
 Like an arrow from a bow  
 It goes  
 To pierce through the tiny heart,  
 Killing a life that depended  
 On its charm,  
 This complete illusion.  
 This total unawareness  
 of your fate.

Anthony More

## WHERE ARE THEY?

It was country at first  
 Covered with mat accordingly  
 With the thick mat of nature  
 The green grass all sure

When standing on a high place not hummock  
 Over the place casting your eyes  
 Admiring the beauty of nature  
 With joy and contentment  
 Beating in your heart

The sweet green grass grazed by the cattle  
 The grass showered by rain water  
 Rains prayed by our great people  
 With their young others moving lazily  
 That was a sign of peace.

During summer, sunny days  
 Under the tree shade, at home men seated,  
 From one to another pass the calabash  
 In the veld the herdboys  
 Busy with their craftwork  
 That was a sign of peace

To the very same mountain go  
 Over the very same scene look  
 Can you see them again?  
 Where are they?  
 What has made this slip  
 Through your fingers  
 And left you starded?  
 Can you tell – Where are they?

Now your tears are falling  
 And the soil is showered by them  
 Those tears are salty  
 Unlike rain water  
 In the soil  
 Some chemical reaction takes place.

The green grass is no longer green  
 Cattle are dying  
 And poverty is creeping  
 People are starving.  
 Where are they?

Anthony Makou



## Drama Section

### JUST BECAUSE I'M AN ARTIST *Extract from a play by Nape Motana*

**CHARACTERS:**

FRED: 28 Years, graphic artist.

MONIKA: 24 Years, Fred's wife.

SAFIRA: Monika's mother.

LESIBA: Fred's friend.

Act One

Scene One

*Fred in a single room, unkempt hair, and surrounded by art material. He yawns. A knock at the door.*

FRED: *(Yawning)* C-o-m-e in! *(Enter Lesiba)*

LESIBA: Howzit pal!

FRED: Number one! What have you got for me?

LESIBA: *(Smiles)* Nothing. I came to say hello. I am on my way to town.

FRED: I see.

LESIBA: You are a busy bee these days. How is the art going?

FRED: Yes I'm a busy bee. Painting can be painful, but it leaves you with satisfaction when you think that what you have done is good.

LESIBA: Oh I see. Are you preparing for another exhibition?

FRED: I'm just working... no specific exhibition in mind.

LESIBA: How was the previous exhibition?

FRED: Superb!

LESIBA: How many artists were there?

FRED: We were only three.

LESIBA: *(Examines Fred)* You look babalaazed pal.

FRED: Of course! Our host gave us a lot of wine. *(Fred takes out two cigarettes, offers Lesiba one, lights them; they smoke.)*

LESIBA: Who was your host?

FRED: Professor Wolfgang.

LESIBA: Oh, the one who stays at Waterkloof?

FRED: Yes.

LESIBA: Ya, a cunning man... he makes you drunk when you need money.

FRED: You need not be so bitter. He is not as bad as you think.

LESIBA: But what has he done for you? He keeps on milking you poor artists.

FRED: What?

LESIBA: Ya, you've heard me!

FRED: You are provoking me Lesiba! All I can say is: he gave us his house, and he invited some art collectors. *(Short pause)*

LESIBA: *(friendly tone)* Have they bought any of your works?

FRED: You can see for yourself... eight out of ten sold!

LESIBA: G-great boy! *(Stretches hand)* Have my paw! *(Fred ignores his hand)* What's wrong with you?

FRED: Nothing wrong.

LESIBA: *(Pitched voice)* Congrats man! Are you throwing a gumba?

FRED: *(Mimics Lesiba)* 'Gumba, gumba,' that's what you know best.. When we go uptown you think we go for wine. Now you...

LESIBA: Ssh, don't take your heart too far. I...

FRED: You shut up! 'Gumba, gumba,' that's what you are after, bloody sucker!

LESIBA: *(Pats Fred on the shoulder)* Please chommie, don't take your heart too far. I didn't mean to harm you.

FRED: *(Points a finger)* You mustn't talk like that in future.

LESIBA: *(Looks at his watch)* Look, it's getting late. What must I bring you?

FRED: *(Fumbles at his pockets)* Take this, I want to kill babalaaz. Bring a half-jack of brandy.

LESIBA: That's okay. Goodbye!

FRED: 'Bye!

*(EXUENT)*

Act One

Scene Two

*Fred's single room. He scrutinises his incomplete paints; lights a cigarette, smokes; looks at his wrist watch.*

FRED: *(Soliloquy)* This girl won't come. She said twelve, now it's half-past one. Girls can give you a thumb to suck; they can be tricky. *(Scratches painting with pencil)*. But I trust Monika. Monika is often the source of my inspiration. I must excuse her late-coming, because she must look her best. That's what makes me tick. *(Laughs)*. Let me while away time. *(Continues painting.)* This room is too quiet for my liking. *(Plays jazz music.)* I'm afraid, if Lesiba arrives first I'll kill babalaaz, and she will find me drunk. *(Knock at the door.)* It must be Monika. Come in! *(Enter Lesiba.)*

Ah, look at him. I expected a girl, not beards, what will I do with you?

LESIBA: Nothing but booze and booze, until it's lights-off. *(Fred shakes his head.)* Who do you expect?

FRED: A chick.

LESIBA: Who is she?

FRED: Monika.

LESIBA: When did you catch the bird?

FRED: Last month.

LESIBA: Last month? But why didn't you tell me?

FRED: I just wanted to surprise you. Right, let's have that half-jack, we are celebrating!

LESIBA: But you said it's for taking out babalaaz.

FRED: *(Brings glasses.)* Let it be babalaaz of her love. *(They pour.)* I love Monika very much.

LESIBA: More than this brandy?

FRED: Yes; let's down a short. *(Fred and Lesiba raise glasses.)* This is to announce the death of babalaaz!

LESIBA: *(Looks around the room.)* You stay alone in this room?

FRED: Yes. All by myself! No cat, no dog, no chicken.

DRAMA SECTION

LESIBA: (*Points at the bed.*) What about the bugs?  
 FRED: Not even one! (*They smoke.*)  
 LESIBA: You will run mad one day.  
 FRED: I am an artist.  
 LESIBA: And so what? Look how dirty the floor is.  
 FRED: Man, don't worry about the floor. Let's drink. Tell me, are you a health inspector?  
 LESIBA: I'm giving you advice as a friend. You need a woman.  
 FRED: For what?  
 LESIBA: (*Pours brandy*) Cooking, washing and cleaning your room.  
 FRED: (*Pours*) You must be old fashioned. I have my ten fingers and two legs.  
 LESIBA: I bet you won't say the same tomorrow. And why did you leave your uncle?  
 FRED: It's because of that woman, my aunt. She wanted all the money for every painting I sold.  
 LESIBA: Did you tell your uncle?  
 FRED: Yes.  
 LESIBA: Why?  
 FRED: You can guess... he's wearing (*gesticulation*) a cap over the eyes.  
 LESIBA: Ya, you had it tough. (*Short pause.*) I must go home, friend.  
 FRED: Okay (*pointing at the bottle*), let's squash it. (*Both pour and drink whilst standing.*) I will take you half-way, that girl won't come.  
 LESIBA: (*Staggers*) She'll come tomorrow, man. And er... you must marry her... (*Fred supports bim.*) Do you hear?

(EXEUNT)

CINCINATTI *Reviewed by* Brenda Leibowitz

*Conceived and directed by* Barney Simon

*Cast:* Barrie Shah, Vanessa Cooke, Bo Petersen, Sam Williams, Thoko Ntshinga, Peter Piccolo, Marcel van Heerden, Ron Smerczak, Lesley Nott.

*Venue:* Upstairs at the Market Theatre.

*Cincinatti* is one of the most original and refreshing local plays I have seen for many years. Whilst exploring various aspects of Jo'burg city life with considerable depth as well as humour, it is devoid of the angst-ridden 'heavies' which plague so many of our serious plays, and the humour is neither gross nor simplistic. Very human and honest, it has a wide audience appeal.

'Cincinatti', the name of a club in Fordsburg where, according to Sheila, the lead guitarist's wife, in her introductory monologue, 'company directors dance with domestic servants, gays in satin, guys in denim', where people feel, 'My God, my Jesus, I'm ALIVE,' or it is 'freedom floating like a lost balloon.' The latter description does sum it all up though, because the multiracial club where the music is too loud for people to talk, is euphoric, operating in a vacuum; the people who go there to dance are distanced from the factors operating in the surrounding society, consciously or unconsciously. This dialogue between the accountant's wife, Pat, and one of the main groupies, Candy, points out the ambiguous value of Club Cincinatti:

*Pat: Ah well. It's just that I really think that they rip people off... Well, they use it as a place where black*

*people and white people can meet. Right?*

*Candy: Well, to dance.*

*Pat: Well, when you get there you can't talk to people anyway.*

*Candy: But you don't...*

*Pat: 'Cos the music's too loud. When you want to buy a drink they charge you such crazy prices, danger pay, half those black people who go there can't afford to buy drinks anyway.*

*Candy: I don't know. People seem to buy drinks. I don't know.*

*Pat: And so they go and spend their whole week's salary on buying drinks at the Cincinatti.*

*Candy: Ah! but they have a good time there, man, you know, it's the only place they can go. Where else can we go?*

The plot is very simple: Cincinatti is closed down by the police and the play develops as a set of scenes where various people going home from Cincinatti or involved with people from Club Cincinatti interact, and we learn about their lives, their attitudes to 'city life' and, of course, to politics — (those who have as much as thought about politics.)

The 'Cincinatti' episode acts as a unifying structure for the play, and the few props are used magnificently,

especially the rotating discotheque light between scenes, with disco music, in particular *Freak Out*, which recreates the frenetic atmosphere of a disco, insecure, empty and struggling, which is typical of the lives of many of the characters in the play, although they always have some interesting quality as human beings, and as the play stresses, they are all *alive*, despite vacuousness, lack of political awareness, or whatever. And people like Thembsi and Candy manage to generate tremendous excitement on stage, about this newish social scene which the police manage to shut down, arriving in their 'dog carts.'

The roles devised by/for the actors are as follows: Sheila, an Indian from Greytown, Natal, who married a musician 'of another faith' and came to live with him in Johannesburg. She sings the opening song 'Cincinatti', which she composed with Duccio Alessandri, very well, but her role is fairly weak and self-conscious, not particularly revealing. Vicky, a gawky, raw go-go dancer from Carltonville appears racist and ignorant, and can be seen as a foil to the more intelligent and aware Sheila in the opening scene:

*Sheila: PASSIVE RESISTANCE.  
 Vicky: Hey? Oh...*

## DRAMA SECTION

But the pathos surrounding Vicki's 'nowhere' life is already becoming evident: her boyfriend, Hedley Smit, is a deadweight guitarist without a job, who doesn't even meditate anymore, she claims, and is still living in 1966! Vicki wants luxury, to be supported by a wealthy man like Gustav the pimp who, although 'he's always in the shit', according to Hedley, 'at least he carries his shit around in an Alfa Sprint'. Their relationship is one of the most interesting, because although they don't question their values, about South African society in particular, (she won't dance in front of 'coolies' and 'bantoes' and he says, 'Listen! In five years time the afs are going to be running the show. Where's the boere going to be then?') they feel dissatisfaction with the directionless lives they lead.

Thembsi, from Soweto, operates late hours in Hillbrow, will dance with white or black men at the club, but doesn't read the papers, doesn't think of conditions in Soweto when she dances in Club Cincinatti, once for 'five hours non-stop!' —

*Nightwatch: You didn't read about him?*

*Thembsi: Where Baba, in the newspaper? No, I don't read newspapers.*

*Nightwatch: Drum, Post?*

*Thembsi: Did you see my picture in Drum in the Coca Cola advert? I'm the girl on the right eating a naartjie, my boyfriend is pouring me a coke.*

— Always propositioned by men, she rejects both Hedley Smit, who meets her at the station and thinks he can get a quick screw for nothing 'cos she is black, and Abraham Luthuli, the nightwatch from Cincinatti, who has a son her age. In fact, it is because his son was arrested by the Special Branch at the time of the riots, that Abraham has left his farm and wife in Newcastle, where he lives 'far from the white man' to help his son in Johannesburg. It is Abraham who makes the 'political statement' at the end of the play, and although this has been well prepared by his earlier behaviour, it is less exciting than the indirect 'statement' made by himself and Thembsi at the station where they were rude to a 'plaasjaapie' who had the nerve to come onto the black side of the station — 'Witman, wag daar, nie hier. Apartheid.' — and together ritualistically chased Hedley away after he became offensive to Thembsi, a high moment in the play.

The 'plaasjaapie', Pieter, features

again with a British bisexual who has somehow made South Africa his home and tries to seduce Pieter, and later with Candy, one of the 'vacuous' types; Candy doesn't bear in mind things like the war in Rhodesia when she speaks to a Rhodesian, but she is open to all experience, even to Pieter from Boegoeberg, and she dances with 'just anybody' at the club. One of the final and most important points in the play is when she berates Pieter for talking of 'kaffirs', 'Bantoes' and even 'Hottentots'. She doesn't give a political substantiation for her anger, just tells him, 'Your head sal opgeklop wees' in Johannesburg for saying that. She goes on to explain to the earthy and raw (and verkramp) Pieter that 'in Jo'burg you must feel the vibes, be like a bok — smell people, feel people' (words not exact) and act accordingly. This seems more or less to sum up the play, but perhaps I have seized upon this comment for its mostly positive value. Nevertheless, I do think it an important and fairly subtle way of asking the audience for a whole lot more out of their lives and behaviour in this crazy city.

### SUGGESTED READING LIST: AFRICAN DRAMA

#### FROM HEINEMANN AFRICAN WRITERS SERIES

Short East African Plays in English edited by David Cook and Miles Lee

Ten One-Act Plays edited by Cosmo Pieterse

Short African Plays edited by Cosmo Pieterse

Five African Plays edited by Cosmo Pieterse

African Theatre edited by Gwyneth Henderson

African Plays for Playing 1 and 2 edited by Michael

Etherton

The trial of Dedan Kimathi by Ngugi wa Thiong'o

#### FROM RAVAN PRESS

Contemporary South African Plays edited by E. Pereira

Ravan Playscripts:

No. 1 Not His Pride by Makwedini Julius Mtsaka

No. 2 The Fantastical History of a Useless Man devised by Malcolm Purkey and the Junction Avenue Theatre Co.

No. 3 Lindiwe by Shimano Solly Mekgob

No. 4 The First South African by Fatima Dike



## Staffrider Workshop

This is the third in a series of articles for STAFFRIDER WORKSHOP by Esk'ia ('Zeke') Mphahlele. In it Zeke continues his discussion of short story technique by considering further examples of work by leading African writers. *Chirundu* — the new Mphahlele novel — was published last month by Ravan Press.

Under the theme 'Betrayal' we have three excerpts: (a) from a short story, (b) from a novel and (c) from a short story.

### (a) Can Themba/THE SUIT

'Son,' (the old man) said, 'If I could've avoided this, believe you me I would, but my wife is nagging the spice out of my life for not talking to you about it.'

It just did not become blustering old Maphikela to sound so grave and Philemon took compassion upon him.

'Go ahead, dad,' he said generously. 'You know you can talk to me about anything.'

The old man gave a pathetic smile. 'We-e-ell, it's not really any of our business... er... but my wife felt you see. Damn it all! I wish these women would not snoop around so much.' Then he rushed it. 'Anyway, it seems there's a young man who's going to visit your wife every morning... ah... for these last bloomin' three months. And that wife of mine swears by her heathen gods you don't know a thing about it.'

It was not quite like the explosion of a devastating bomb. It was more like the critical breakdown in an infinitely delicate piece of mechanism. From outside the machine just seemed to have gone dead. But deep in its innermost recesses, menacing electrical flashes were leaping from coil to coil, and hot, viscous molten metal was creeping upon the fuel tanks...

Philemon heard gears grinding and screaming in his head... He turned round and did not hear old Maphikela's anxious, 'Steady, son. Steady, son.'

The bus ride home was a torture of numb dread and suffocating despair. Though the bus was now emptier Philemon suffered crushing claustrophobia. There were immense washerwomen whose immense bundles of soiled laundry seemed to baulk and menace him. From those bundles crept miasma of sweaty intimacies that sent nauseous waves up and down from his vis-

cera...

He felt like getting out of there, screamingly, elbowing everything out of his way. He wished this insane trip were over, and then again, he recoiled at the thought of getting home. He made a tremendous resolve to gather in all the torn, tingling threads of his nerves con torting in the raw. By a merciless act of will, he kept them in subjugation as he stepped out of the bus back in the Victoria Road terminus, Sophiatown.

Can Themba was the kind of writer who went to great lengths in the use of what is called impressionistic language — language that is meant to startle or shake you up as a reader. He did this mostly by using strong words and images: 'nagging the spice out of my life'; 'it was not like the explosion of a devastating bomb. It was more like the critical breakdown...' 'deep in its innermost recesses, menacing electrical flashes were leaping from coil to coil... fuel tanks...' and so on. We can imagine something like this breakdown in the husband's wounded self-pride; we can imagine his nerves reacting like electric flashes, and then, like a car engine, going dead. 'Philemon heard gears grinding and screaming in his head.' The writer continues with the image of the car, to the extent that what Philemon imagines seems real.

A word of caution: Can Themba often succeeded with this impressionistic language. But he could also overdo it, so that reading it would be like biting into a slice of bread with a layer of butter 3cm. thick. It is not fair to ask the reader to take so many hammerstrokes in the form of words and images overloaded with meaning and associations, and coming in quick succession, relentlessly pounding on his senses. The mood or feeling or dramatic tension you want to express should tell you whether to use impressionist language or not. Just as we experience in life moments of tension and of ease, from one to the other, we need to demonstrate this. It also gives

the reader a chance to be drawn into the tension and then reflect upon it.

There are no hard and fast rules concerning impressionistic style. We are living in an age of stress and tension. And in a country where these are concentrated, often to a point where we want to scream, we, especially Africans, feel compelled to employ a language (or diction — choice of words) that pushes and pushes and drives a meaning home with the force of bare fists, a language that breathes like wrestlers, to quote a Black American poet. Impressionistic diction is quite common among Black Americans, whose life is also riddled through with pain. We simply recommend that the writer should not lose control once he has decided that the subject calls for impressionistic diction. Other writers, like Nadine Gordimer, Hemingway and so on, use other ways to produce impressionistic effects. See again how Miss Gordimer uses objects and gestures to create a vivid impression.

*Intensive* language that is maintained for a number of lines; *intensive* images through which the writer works out feelings and thoughts so that we can best understand them; images that are contained in concrete, visible, tangible objects; an *intensive* arrangement of words or lines, short and long, so that a *vivid effect* is produced; the *intensive* recording of physical surroundings and details of behaviour — all these are techniques we use for impressionistic effect. Some writers sustain such language longer than others in any one piece. And it has nothing to do with whether we are describing rural or urban life. Life everywhere can be, and is being, felt intensively. This must be said though: that however much we feel raw life intensively, we do not simply translate that feeling into words on the page. The writer has to choose a suitable language (diction) for it and find a proper place for it in the story, determined by his or her own intention. This is the central function of all art: to transform raw experience so that the final product

## STAFFRIDER WORKSHOP

is a thing of beauty. Beauty here means that it has the power to move us, and to broaden and deepen our emotions and thoughts as viewers, readers, listeners. Thus sorrow or grief can be expressed with beauty through art, even though in our experience of grief in the raw we may suffer shock and even slump on the ground, unconscious.

### (b) Ngugi wa Thiong'o/A GRAIN OF WHEAT

Note: Gikonyo has just returned from a Mau Mau detention camp to find that his wife, Mumbi, has a child whose father is a government-appointed guard and an enemy of the Mau Mau, also a former friend of Gikonyo's. After his wife has broken the news,

*Gikonyo did not move. He only sat, leaning backwards, against a post behind him, his eyes now immobile, now rolling, without registering anything. Even the thought that Mumbi had been to other men's beds every night for the last six years seemed not to disturb him. As if drugged, Gikonyo did not feel the wound; could not tell what caused this terrible exhaustion.*

*He failed to sleep. Gikonyo lay on his back and stared into the darkness, every minute conscious of the heavy breathing from the two women (Mumbi and his mother). Six years he had waited for this day; six years through seven detention camps had he longed for it, feeling, all the time, that life's meaning was contained in his final return to Mumbi. Nothing else had mattered; the camps, mountains, valleys, everything could have been wiped from the face of the earth and Gikonyo would have watched this, without flinching, if he had known that he would, in the end, go back to the woman he had left behind. Little did he then think, never thought it could ever be a turn to silence. Could the valley of*

*silence between him and the woman be now crossed? To what end the crossing...? No, this silence was eternal... The silence to which he had now returned was dead... Perhaps daylight would show the way.*

*But the sun did not bring relief. Early in the morning the child shrieked for attention. Mumbi lit the fire and again held the child to her breasts. The child went on whimpering, tearing into Gikonyo's nerves. Smash the child onto the floor, haul the dirty thing into silence, he thought, without attempting to rise from the bed. He did not want to see Mumbi's eyes, nose, mouth — yet how that face had pleasantly tormented him in detention? Now he recoiled within, at the passing thought of Mumbi's hands on his body...*

Consider the beauty in the manner in which grief, resulting from a sense of betrayal, is expressed in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel *A Grain of Wheat*. Read the passage over and over again. Powerful words carrying powerful feelings, or powerful feelings expressed in powerful words. That is what we want in good writing. Powerful words spell beauty of expression, e.g.

1. *'As if drugged, Gikonyo did not feel the wound; could not tell what caused this terrible exhaustion.'*

2. *'... stared into the darkness, every minute conscious of the heavy breathing from the two women...'*

*'... feeling that life's meaning was contained in his final return to Mumbi. Nothing else mattered: the camps, mountains, valleys...'*

*'Little did he then think, never thought it could ever be a turn to silence.'*

*'Could the valley of silence between him and the woman be now crossed? ... The child went on whimpering, tearing into Gikonyo's nerves. Smash the child onto the floor, haul the dir-*

*ty thing into silence, he thought...'*

These powerful words, notice, are arranged in a way that form images (word pictures). Each image vibrates through our physical senses — sight, hearing, touch, and through our feelings: we begin to feel Gikonyo's anger, sense of weariness, oppressive sorrow, accentuated by the silence. And then we are set thinking: about the fate that must have befallen so many other detainees, about Mumbi's betrayal. Her own silence tells us that she has surrendered herself to the fate: 'It is done,' she seems to say to her husband. This is how a rich image should take us beyond the experience itself. It should lead us out through several associations the picture excites in our minds towards an expanded or increased awareness.

It is this larger awareness of life that our readers want out of literature and the other fine arts. At the same time, when they are exploring our images, their ability to see, feel, imagine, think, is increased and they become aware of more aspects of life, new ways of responding to it. This is what we mean by searching for a meaning — the search that the writer is taking us on. Remember: meaning is not a solution to a problem, not the answer to a question. It can only be explored by the writer's use of such images as illuminate the various dimensions of life, reveal the many sides of an experience. The reader's awareness of these many facets of life in turn increases his ability to see, to feel, to think. It is an education for him. And to the extent that the reader is increased, moved, educated, he is revitalized, renewed. Thus literature is engaged in a continuous revolution. Not a revolution that spills blood, but a revolution in thought, feeling, in some part of the personality that experiences a release, busting the chains that define its smallness.

## AFRICAN LITERATURE: AWARD

A new annual prize of \$3 000 is now available to African writers and scholars whose work is published in Africa. The award's sponsor is Mr. Shoichi Noma, president of the major Japanese publishing firm Kodansha Ltd. Conscious of the fact that book needs are particularly acute in Africa and that encouragement should be given to the publication of works by African writers and scholars within that continent — instead of abroad as is too often the case at present — Mr. Noma has established an annual award for an outstanding new book written by an African author, and published in Africa by an indigenous African publisher.

The award will be presented for works in one of the following three categories, rotating from year to year:

- (1) scholarly or academic,
- (2) books for children,
- (3) literature and creative writing (fiction, drama and poetry, as well as essays on African literature.)

Further details about the Award can be obtained through Staffrider.



## Book reviews

*We killed Mangy-Dog* by Luis Bernardo Honwana. Reviewed by Mafika Gwala.

*Hill of Fools* by R.L. Peteni. Reviewed by Amelia House.

*Mhudi* by Sol. T. Plaatjie. Reviewed by Milton Doyle.

*Batouala* by René Maran. Reviewed by Robert N. St. Clair.

*We Killed Mangy-Dog*/Luis Bernardo Honwana

Dear brother Staffrider,

You are surely coming up right with the Staffriding. Let it go! On!

Perhaps it would be of benefit to the Staffrider venture to have a readers' page for the expression of views regarding the current trends in South African arts and literature. More especially, since there is developing a South African English that is a continuation from where people like Can Themba, Casey, etc. left off . . . into the Black awareness literature of the early seventies; up to Soweto '76; and after.

This letter has been urged by the review of Luis Bernardo Honwana's collection of stories, *We Killed Mangy-Dog*.

The review has been finked. Honwana is one of the early Southern African writers who went beyond 'protest literature' without the artistic message getting banal.

*Mangy-Dog*. It's a dynamic story with balanced brakes, applied where the race/master-servant conflict would otherwise slip out of hand. 'Ginho . . . you are cross with me? Shouldn't we have killed the dog? Senhor Duarte told us to . . . you were there too.' But the damage has been done. The guilt must be transferred to Senhor Duarte but the machismo remains with the killers. Just as with soldiers/mercenaries in oppression wars.

Another character, Changhai, also projects the same feelings to the protecting Isuara who wants to save the dog (the depraved). Her helplessness and failure to save the dog fit in well with the prevalent hot position of Black Sash and other liberal agencies.

Quim, chief executioner of the killing, doesn't need any such persuasion or tact. He counts on his pride: 'Hey, gang we've got to kill the dog . . . Senhor Duarte told us to. He said he was counting on us.' The way Jimmy Kruger has to count on his preying police departments.

The sympathetic character, Ginho, is obviously black. Faruk, Asiatic. Like Gulamo. But Gulamo sides with Tuicin-

ho (Ginho) and dares to confront the manhood-seeking Quim. Really stands up to the superiority-complexed Quim.

Honwana also wrote a moving story — *Papa, the snake and I*. It's not necessarily the political message that I'd like to point out. It's become irrelevant now; contextually speaking. 'Cos Frelimo did their thing and the story is set during the colonial period. Essentially, the relevance lies in the socio-political and fatherly expression of Ginho's father when he has to say, 'Even a poor man has to have something. Even if it is a false hope!' This is after the white farmer, Senhor Castro, has been to him demanding compensation for his dead dog which was bitten by a mamba in Ginho's yard.

Ginho's father is finding himself when he says to Ginho: 'People don't mount wild horses, and they only make use of the hungry, docile ones. Yet when a tame horse goes wild, it gets shot down; and it's all finished. But tame horses die every day.' For being tame.

What irked me was to see the complete reality of Honwana's stories being toned down to non-identity. Have met people with the same reaction. Yet how important is Honwana's method to local writers. More, the reviewer himself agrees that Honwana 'never preaches, never raises his voice' — is a subtle observer.

One is forced to remember how, in the sixties, the literary circles (obviously liberal) ignored an important writer like Doris Lessing. She was so vital to S.A. literature. Author of worthy books, including *Winter in July* (stories), *The Habit of Loving*, *A Man and Two Women* and a trilogy *Children of Violence*. Has also published several books after settling overseas, one of them a documentary on the English. One can say she was true Zimbabwean! Just as Olive Schreiner had deep insight into the native-settler dispute. Doris Lessing, ignored!

Let us not let it happen when we Staffride. Please.

Best of thoughts — Mafika Gwala.

*Hill of Fools*/R.L. Peteni

The story of the *Hill of Fools* can be simply told. Between the Hlubi village, which lies below the Hill of Fools, and the Thembu village, which lies across the Xesi River, there is a bitter rivalry. Zuziwe, the Hlubi village beauty is engaged to Ntabeni. He is a prosperous farmer and avid churchgoer, who has been accepted by her family as a suitable future husband. Ntabeni is much older than Zuziwe. She falls in love with Bhuqa, a leader of the Thembu warriors. They have to meet in secret. Ntabeni tries to gain her back, but only succeeds in igniting another fight between the villages. Zuziwe's brother is killed. She discovers she is going to bear Bhuqa's child. An abortion attempt has tragic endings for her.

The theme of the story has been used by many writers. It is the time-tried star-crossed lovers, Romeo and Juliet, theme. This theme was also used by Lewis Nkosi in *The Rhythm of Violence*. As with each writer using this theme, Peteni brings a new vitality to the story. It is not the Montagues and Capulets merely transported to South Africa. The Hlubis and Thembus are Africa. The story is told with simple ease and although one guesses at the inevitable one feels almost compelled to finish it at one sitting.

The simple story is but a small part of what the book has to offer. Peteni brings to the English language a rich African idiom. Chinua Achebe said he was going to use well this language that had been given to him and Peteni demonstrates this sentiment.

Diliza, a young Hlubi warrior, explains to Zuziwe why he must hate the Thembus and builds up a series of images to make the point that he does not really understand the hatred. After naming many things and creatures in nature, he says, 'Don't ask me. Ask the maker of these things and the maker of me.' It is the timeless Africa that we feel. There is no hurry to get to the point. We can spend time observing the sun, the moon, the stars, the rain and the wind. We can embrace the vastness of Africa.

## REVIEWS

Peteni takes the time-tried story and makes it work on an old and new level in South Africa. It is at the same time held within *no* boundaries (like the sun, stars and moon) and yet within *narrow* village boundaries. Throughout the book these two opposing points are made to work. Within the characters themselves there is the struggle to exist on both levels. They need to belong to a wider world and yet the village boundaries must be observed.

The jealousy of the other girls over Zuziwe leads them to attack her. Ntombi, cousin of Ntabeni, leads the attack supposedly to side with her kinsman. When Zuziwe's family go to Ntombi's family and she is to be punished, we have a description of dogs attacking a cat. 'They had not attacked the cat because they wanted food to eat, but because the instinct to kill had been roused.' These parallels in nature appear as an extra motif.

*Hill of Fools* works for me on another level too. I cannot but draw parallels with the Immorality Act. Boundaries are drawn on colour lines and love cannot go across them. We are brought up to hate. Diliza has learned to accept the hatred without question and in a similar manner, as a means of survival as enforcers of a social pattern, parents and teachers perpetuate hatred across colour boundaries. The Romeo and Juliet story is played out daily in a very real way in South Africa.

This book should prove of use to students in various disciplines. It will not only be analysed by students of literature, but also by students of linguistics, sociology and political science.

### *Mbudi*/Sol. T. Plaatjie

Sol Plaatjie's *Mbudi* is an extremely mixed work. In Tim Couzens's introduction and two very different reviews in *Staffrider* (November/December 1978 and March 1979) the book has provoked a number of sharply conflicting responses. What can no longer be in doubt is the importance of this work. It is a book which has forced into the open the most vital issues on the question of how we are to *read* works which come down to us from the past.

In Tim Couzens's introduction to the H.E.B. edition the novel is interpreted as a 'corrective view of history'. *Mbudi* is seen as revealing and correcting the distortion and suppression of our history which has been a consequence of white rule and colonialist and nationalist ideology. Mshengu, who reviewed the novel in the March *Staffrider* reminded us of Plaatjie's Christianity and his

acceptance of the values of white 'civilization'. The review draws our attention to the words and phrases used by Plaatjie which suggest that life as led by the 'natives' before the arrival of (white) 'civilization' was 'primitive', 'simple', 'barbaric'.

Mshengu sees Plaatjie as talking about 'native life' from a position *outside of it*, and contrasts this with the position of Achebe, Dikobe or Casey Motsisi who wrote about the experiences of black people from within. Mshengu's review is concerned to point out repugnant and dangerous thoughts in the novel and to warn readers and students about the *effect* of this (and other) work on them.

But no work — book, poem, or picture — ever has it all its own way. The book does not always merely have an effect. The purpose of the review is not just to put people on their guard. What any book will yield up to us is largely a result of the way in which we approach it. And this is why the differences between Mshengu's review and Tim Couzens's introduction are so important: they pose the problem of how we are to approach literature which has been handed down to us.

I began this review by saying that *Mbudi* is an extremely 'mixed' work. This means more than that there can be more than one valid opinion about the book. The book is itself a product of a *conflict* of perspectives. Plaatjie does use the language of white 'civilization' to distance himself from the 'barbaric' past of his forefathers. But he also gives account of their customs and political traditions which show these 'barbarians' to have been highly civilized by any reasonable standards. The Boers (except the de Villiers clan) are shown to have been a crude, rigid and unimaginative people who could have learnt a lot from 'native life'. When Plaatjie talks about the 'natives' he does use words which show that he was deeply complicit in the 'civilization' of white rule. But the words he puts into the mouths of the Baralong point to the vitality and richness of the culture which white 'civilization' has long been in the process of destroying.

Mshengu correctly points out that Plaatjie's is not an unbiased view of the tribal conflicts he describes. But it helps not at all to try and blot out the memory of those conflicts. In order to achieve unity and solidarity against Nationalist Party divide-and-rule strategy it is important to *understand* those conflicts. Novels such as *Mbudi* can provide only a starting point: it is clearly a

Baralong view of history. Much research is necessary in order to allow us to understand both the historical conditions which originally produced those conflicts and the present conditions which keep them artificially alive.

Plaatjie can be seen as standing at several 'crossroads'. As an educated Christian and part of a black elite he put himself at the service of his people in the campaigns against the injustice of the Land Act. Part of this campaign was to write this book which shows the circumstances in which the blacks were robbed of their land. The campaigns also included pleas and petitions to the British government and appeals to their sense of 'fair play'. (Plaatjie dedicated *Native Life* to Queen Victoria.)

Plaatjie was the first Black South African novelist writing in English. His education tore him from his peasant origins and set him firmly on the road to a (western) 'civilisation'. But he retains sufficient connection with his own Baralong people to be able to reconstruct, probably from verbal accounts, a crucial moment in their history, and to save that piece of history from oblivion. He is at one and the same time *one 'civilized' man talking to another about the 'uncivilized'*, and a chronicler acting in accordance with the truth that nothing which has happened should be regarded as lost for history.

Let us not forget the mobilizing power of the story which Plaatjie tells. *Mbudi* is written in the conviction that the inventions brought by the whites (the gun, but also the ox waggon and many others) have utterly changed 'native life', for good and ill. Nothing will ever be the same again. But the rule of the white tribe is as fragile as that of the Matabele. As oppressors they cannot hold out forever against the solidarity of all those that they oppress.

### *Batouala*/Maran, René

This novel centres around Batouala, the chief of one of the tribes in French Equatorial Africa. The story begins with a description of his period of courtship with the beautiful Yassigui'indya and the establishment of their conjugal residence within the village. It ends with his prolonged encounter with death after being severely attacked by Mourou, the treacherous black Panther. But, there are other themes throughout the novel. One of them deals with the social world of Yassigui'indya and her love affair with Bissibi'ingui, a young man who is continually sought after by the women of the village for his portrayal of manhood. Another theme involves the

Boundjous, the French colonialists. It tells about how they have exploited the natural ecology of the region and have also oppressed its local population by viewing them solely in terms of a labour class. It is perhaps this aspect of the novel that has created so much fervour among its French critics. Some doubted its veracity and have challenged its descriptions of social abuse and others were incensed by it.

For some literary scholars, the story of *Batouala* is a vivid description of naturalism. In it, they find detailed evaluations of nature and its importance for village life. There are lengthy accounts of animal life and the fauna of the region. Djouma, the pet dog, takes on added significance in this naturalistic

setting. He is clothed with the warm attributes of friendship and contributes to the foreground of *Batouala's* social world.

René Maran writes within a phenomenological tradition. His concerns are those of the participant-observer. He expresses the world as it is seen by *Batouala*. He views women as Bassibi'ingui would. And he shares the warm emotions that Yassigui'indya experiences. When he describes the initiation ceremony and the feast of circumcision, Ga'anza, it is alive. You feel as though you were physically present among the participants sharing their agony and partaking in their triumph. Although René Maran was born in Martinique and spent some two decades of his adult-

hood in the French colonial service, his literary expression does provoke a depth of perception characteristically associated with the participant-observer tradition. It was for this reason, among others, that he was awarded the renowned Prix Goncourt and shares the honours with Marcel Proust in recognition for his contribution to French literature.

In the introduction to the English translation, Donald Herdeck of Georgetown University notes how this work has contributed to the Negritude Movement. It was this novel that provided the model for the writings of Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, and Léopold Senghor.

## EYE

### Mzwakhe Nhlabatsi on visual arts

The most disturbing factor in my mind today, about art, is the question of contact between the artist and the black public: whether it's there or whether there is none today.

During the past twenty years, have black art and artists been in touch with the black community? The answer as I see it is, 'No, not all'. The black artist has been working for or within the framework of white exploiters, with their questionable promises that they'll make them great masters of our times — without caring, however, whether the amount they give or pay for their work is enough to let them do better work and live without hassles.

The other problem is the talk of the older generation which leads to our downfall. When they see a talented or creative young artist, they always instil into him or her ideas of making money: 'If you keep up with this kind of talent you will sell well and make a lot of

money with whites in town.' They forget that what they are seeing should actually be preserved for the future cultural heritage, not sold as money-making objects that have no place or purpose in our lives and our community.

Now there is some light that the younger generation is throwing into the art world — in the form of art exhibitions, often combined with poetry readings. And this is taking place deep in the heart of the black communities, not in town where it becomes something irrelevant to the environment.

I'm not saying that exhibiting in town is unwise, but it's not my idea, my direction. It's great and praiseworthy if black art events should start first in Soweto or any other black township to give the roots and meaning of art to the people, and to educate and instil an appreciation of art into all those who are in the dark about artistic concepts, aims and expression.



Drawing by Mzwakhe Nhlabatsi

I want to give praise and courage to those who are the propelling power behind art exhibitions and poetry reading sessions. Events like these are always cultural and educational: in the way they are presented, they are reminiscent of the events that came out of the Dadaist, Futurist, Surrealist and other movements in Europe, in the trying times before and after the two world wars. In the manner and style they are presented in the black community, they really enlighten many aspiring artists who are groping in the dark — especially those that didn't know how to express



themselves.

Through these events, people are beginning to be aware of how to express to other nations the sordid life they live. Gradually and seriously they develop in the process of attending these events. Sooner or later we will have more Picassos and Michaelangelos emerging out of our own life style, doing bigger and better things.

The most appalling and destructive restraint on our art and on our community (Black), is the financial and political structure of our country. It's bad. If there could be some change somehow, where we could live and share equally, the heritage and interest in art could be so much more beneficial. All the people, black and white, could afford to express themselves as they liked; and they could afford to buy any work that suited their pocket and their taste. But how can a person afford or appreciate art if he is oppressed?

The environmental art expression that prevails now is very much politically inclined. The younger generation is in great need of freedom. So in the whole environment of their art one can see a concern with struggle. A struggle to be free: to be able to express oneself as one wishes. But at the moment this is impossible, because around us we feel and see pain, hardship, starvation. We live oppression. A clamp-down of freedom of expression; bannings, detentions, death — and a waste of all creativity: these factors, too, kill our interest in art.

One of the most urgent needs today is to build instincts of art appreciation, by introducing art subjects into lower primary, post primary, secondary and high schools. And related to this, is the

enormous need for art schools and colleges to be built within black areas, where self-taught artists and those interested in art could be introduced to the rapidly-changing industrial demands for artistic skills, and to other avenues of employment which are closed to black artists at present because we lack formal art training and qualifications. These colleges could be of great help in offering diplomas in courses like fine arts, graphic design, ceramic design, interior design and industrial design. We would have fewer starving artists if we had formal qualifications which would give us access to jobs in industry.

I would like to suggest to the youth programme organizers that if possible they should change their set-ups into proper art and design colleges, offering diplomas at the end of each course given. The ELC art and craft centre in Natal is attempting to fill this need.

Places like the Witwatersrand College for Advanced Technical Education, and the Michaelis Art School in Cape Town are models of what we need.

The incentive to write about art has, for me, been very great. I tried to find historic reference material (art books for example) about black art in South Africa — but in vain! I was searching to know about the lives and backgrounds of the artists that lived before I got into art. It's so sad that there are no books at all about their lives, their aims, their achievements, their problems. Even more heart-breaking is the possibility that we won't be able to see their work, due to the fact that there are no slides or records available. So in a tragic way our art is lost to us.

They are not to be blamed for what happened to their history. The people

to blame are the ones who exploited them for their own ends without caring what happened to the records of their lives.

To sum it all up, the younger generation is becoming dedicated to the art scene. We are taking the utmost care and interest in safe-guarding our heritage, culture and art. The way things are being led now, I feel sure that we are heading somewhere, and building contact between the black artist and the community.

Note:

*Staffrider* looked around and discovered a few sources of analyses of Black South African Art:

1. A. J. de Jager *Contemporary African Art in South Africa* C. Struik. Here the illustrations of art works are useful but the text is slightly patronising. The author negates any political or social criticism in the content of Township Art.
2. *African Art*  
A journal put out by the University of California, Los Angeles. Some numbers of this journal have contained articles on Black South African Art. Not all have been good but again the illustrations are useful.
3. *Art Look*  
A journal published in Johannesburg. The standard is usually high.
4. *Lantern*  
A government journal. The illustrations are useful.



Ralph Ndawo/Photo



## Vusumzi and the inqola competition



A story by Marguerite Poland

*In our last issue, Vol. 2 No. 1., the boys wanted more wire and the best place was Yeko's store. The woman working at the shop was not helpful, but Mr. Yeko came to the rescue of the boys. As a patron of the youth clubs, he could not refuse their request. They found the wire and ran back to the youth club. Mrs. Dladla gave them a pair of pliers to share and they sat together in a corner sorting their pieces.*

Vusumzi worked so hard his face was damp and gleaming and he muttered to himself as he tried to cut a thick strand. At last it snapped and the longest piece shot away and skidded across the floor. Josiah Penxa who was still playing darts with Velaphi, kicked at it. Vusumzi put down the pliers and went to fetch it but Josiah snatched it away while Velaphi pounced on the pliers. They pranced around the room keeping just out of reach. Vusumzi was much smaller but he pursued them, protesting ferociously. The older boys teased and jeered until Mrs. Dladla bustled over and ordered them outside.

So Vusumzi worked, and while he worked he thought of the red-brown guitar with the cowboy transfer. He modelled his car very carefully. He used flattened bottle tops for headlights and made number plates by cutting up an old fish tin and hammering it out. The neighbour's lodger was a painter and he asked him for a little paint. The old man came and admired his work. He squatted down next to him in his speckled overall, puffing at his pipe and advising how best to draw the tiny numbers.

'Heee!' he exclaimed, tapping his big stained teeth with the stem of his pipe. 'But that is very good my son, but that is beautiful!' He tilted his hat back and scratched his head. 'You will win indeed with such an inqola.' The old man clicked his tongue in admiration, turning the car over in his bony hands.

'You must have the right wheels Vusumzi, mntan'am, with springs,' said the painter.

'Springs Bawo?' Vusumzi looked at his car and back at the old man. 'Where can I find that thing?'

'You must ask the man who repairs

cars near the hawkers' place. Ask for small springs,' and he held up his fingers to show the right size.

Vusumzi went to the hawkers' place where his mother had a stall. She sat on a wooden box next to the mat where her fruit and vegetables were laid in neat pyramids. It was an art to make the fruit balance. Today she had potatoes and oranges with thin, crinkled skins; tomatoes which she kept in an enamel basin and ginger beer in every sort of bottle that Vusumzi could find in the City dump.

'Ewe Mama,' he greeted.

'Ewe mntan'am,' she smiled. He waited as she counted out tomatoes for a customer. He sat down and dismantled a mound of fruit and then piled it up again; it fell and oranges rolled about upsetting the potatoes.

'Suka Vusumzi!' cried his mother irritably. 'Pick those up!' He restored the oranges and potatoes to their places and complained that he was hungry.

'I wish for vetkoek,' he said.

'Aw, aw, aw, always hungry. There is surely a big worm inside you that eats all the food I give you and leaves nothing for your stomach.' She took a handkerchief from inside her blouse and untied it carefully. She gave him four cents. 'And here,' she added, 'is fifty cents for you to buy meat. Bring it back straight away.' He took the money and trailed past the other hawkers to the meat stall.

An old woman had meat and offal laid out on newspapers. Flies crawled lazily across it buzzing irritably when disturbed. Vusumzi bought offal — it was cheap and when boiled with chilis was a good relish for mealie-meal. He held out the small basin his mother had given him and the meat was weighed.

Then he went to Mama Djantjies who sold vetkoek. They were plump and stained the paper round them with oil. He bought two. He ate them as he went along, licking the rich fat off his fingers and crunching the crisp bits at the corners. He stood near the bus-shelter watching people climbing off the bus from town; old women in black shawls with heavy parcels; young men bantering with girls in big, bright shoes who laughed and nudged each other. Vusumzi idly ran one greasy finger round the rim of his basin and wondered at their silliness.

Vusumzi's mother was packing her fruit and ginger beer into a carton. 'Take the meat home to Mkhulu,' she said tiredly as she hoisted the box onto her head. Vusumzi started to protest but thought better of it. Once he reached the house, he moved quietly. He did not want his grandmother to see him — she always found housework for him to do. He put the meat on the kitchen table and hearing Mkhulu shuffling in from the yard, he slipped out, running down Njoli Road as fast as he could.

Vusumzi looked through the straggling hedge round Mr. Nene's workshop. Six cars were parked there. Some without wheels rested on blocks. One was a bright blue van with 'Funerals — Easy Terms' written in big, black letters on the side. Mr. Nene the mechanic was peering under the bonnet of an old white Valiant. Several other men stood around smoking. Mr. Nene popped up every now and then for a tool and to wipe his sweating face.

Vusumzi crept through the hedge and laying down his car he scuffed his feet in the dust looking for springs or scraps of wire. The men glanced at the small, thin boy and forgot him. He

## CHILDREN'S SECTION

found nothing and though he wanted to ask Mr. Nene if he had any springs to spare, he dared not interrupt men's conversation. At last Mr. Nene emerged from the inside of the car. He wiped his hands on a cloth which he slung over his shoulder, and rummaging in his pocket, he brought out a packet of cigarettes. He lit one and blew a miraculously long stream of smoke through his nostrils. He noticed Vusumzi and called, 'Weh mfana! Wenzani — what are you doing?' Vusumzi said nothing and hovered uncertainly. 'Come here,' said Mr. Nene, beckoning.

Vusumzi went forward with his eyes on the ground. 'I want springs please,' he said awkwardly, 'for my car.'

'Yo!' exclaimed Mr. Nene with mock surprise. 'You have got a car?'

'Ehhe!' Vusumzi shuffled his dusty feet.

'A big van?' The other men laughed and Vusumzi's ears felt hot. He shook his head.

'You've got a taxi heh?'

Vusumzi grinned shyly but said nothing. He examined a stone very carefully with his toes.

Mr. Nene stopped teasing the little

boy and said kindly, 'Where is your car, mfan'am?'

Vusumzi fetched it from the hedge and it was passed round among the men. 'Hayibo! But this is very nice,' said Mr. Nene. 'This is very nice indeed!'

'What's nice?' said a voice, and round the corner of the workshop swaggered Boxer Nxumalo, the man from the music shop.

'Yo Boxer!' said Nene, playfully putting up his fists and sparring for a moment. 'This car of yours is giving plenty of troubles!'

'What's this?' asked Boxer, glancing at Vusumzi's inqola. 'You going in for second-hand models these days Nene?' They laughed. Vusumzi squirmed. But Boxer took the car and whistled admiringly. 'Hey man,' he said, sliding his big sunglasses onto the top of his head, 'this is something. You must put on the wheels now . . .'

'And springs,' interrupted Vuzumzi in a small voice.

'Yes,' said Boxer. 'If this car had a good suspension, it would be great.'

So Vusumzi and Boxer and Mr. Nene went into the workshop and sorted springs. The men were just as enthusias-

tic as Vusumzi. Mr. Nene laughed as he lit another cigarette. 'We are just like kids, hey Boxer?'

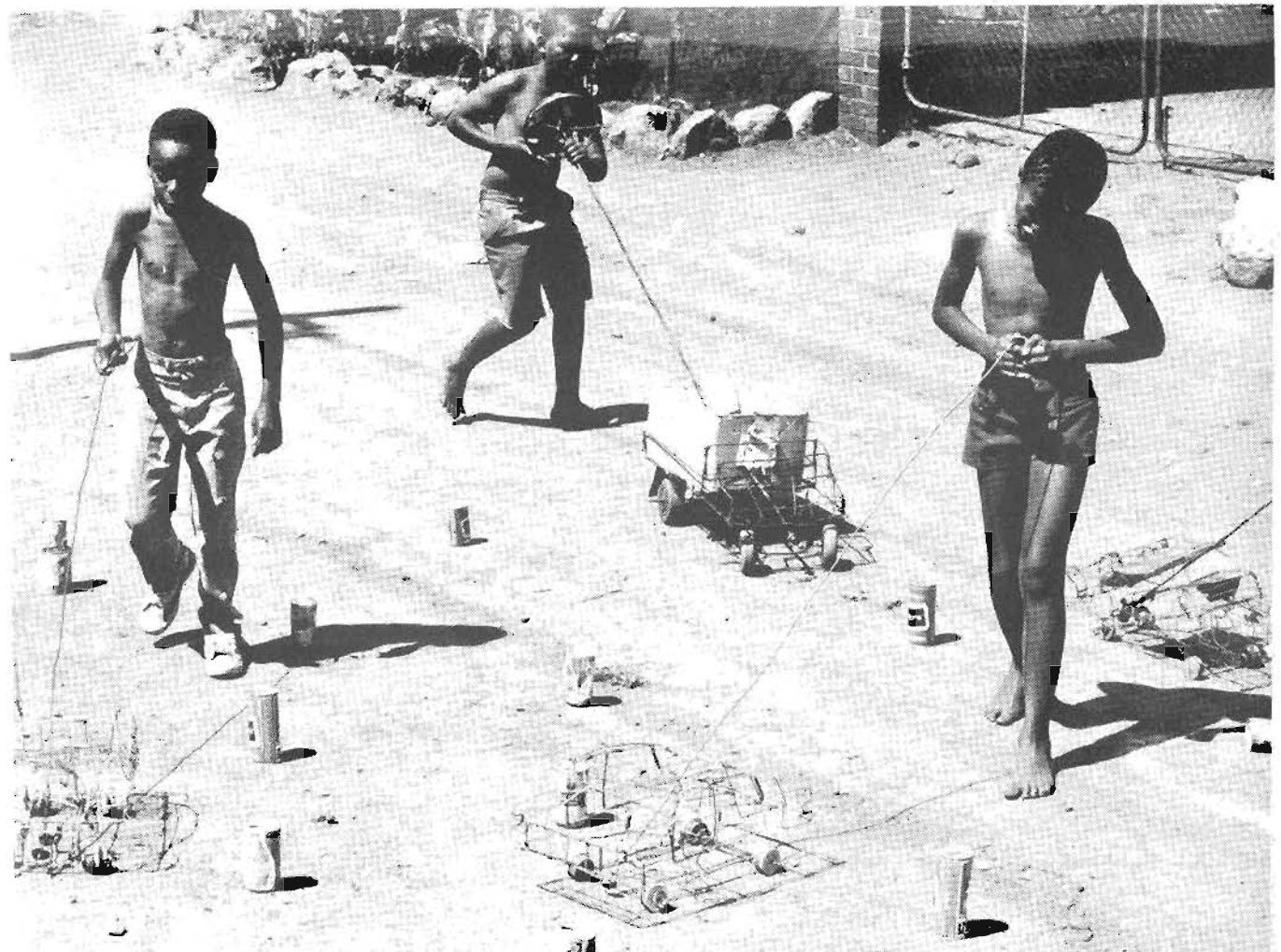
'Speak for yourself,' growled Boxer but he grinned.

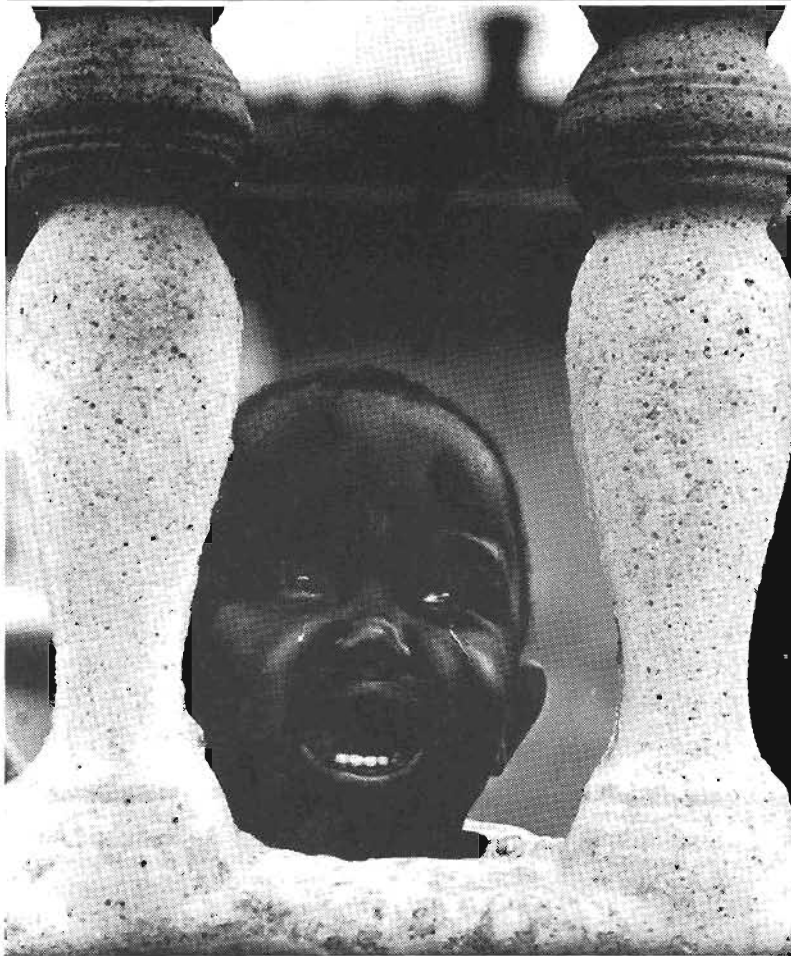
They watched Vusumzi fit the springs giving advice and clicking with impatience when he fumbled, but he would not let them help him. Mr. Nene found some old pieces of tyre and Vusumzi cut them into strips and fastened them round the small, wire-spoked wheels. When his car was finished it was beautiful.

'Yo!' cried Vusumzi hopping from one foot to the other and forgetting to be shy. 'Yo! This will win the inqola competition.'

'So it will,' agreed Mr. Nene, snapping off the top of a cooldrink. They sat round the table and drank. Vusumzi, even though his head was not very high above the table-top, felt like a man among men.

*In our next issue, read the last part of the story with the dramatic results of the contest.*





Ralph Ndawo/Photo



Biddy Crewe/Photo

CRY NOT LITTLE ONE

Cry not little one  
Mourn not little one  
Mama will live  
    To love and raise

Cry not my love  
Mama rests  
She is not dead  
But has gone  
To prepare for you  
    Better place

Cry not little one  
I am here  
To protect and  
    To love and raise you

Little one  
    At your infancy  
    You already know  
    You know of suffering  
And my little one,  
I don't want  
To fool you  
Try to console you with lies  
That this world is Canaan  
    No, it is hell  
    It is cruel  
    It devours

People here  
    Kill  
    Rob  
    Rape  
    Exploit  
    Hate

There are wild animals that will eat you  
So, little one  
    Trust no one but yourself  
    Your conscience

And I saw a woman  
With a child on her back  
A child so beautiful  
    So black  
Kneeling in front of me  
With the child held in offering  
And she said to me in tears  
    Bless my child  
    Let him not grow  
In suffering like you

Bless my child  
And let him not grow  
To exploit, to kill  
To rob and to hate  
    But let him grow  
    To be fair  
    To love, to respect  
    And to praise  
    His ancestors like you  
And hearing this  
    I blessed  
    I prayed  
    I cried!



Leonard Maseko/Photo

And I saw children  
Playing and laughing  
At nothing  
Seeing jokes in everything

In my mind  
I saw myself a child  
A child who could think  
A child who could judge  
And walked towards them

I saw their faces  
Losing happiness  
When they saw me  
And they started crying  
'Cause they saw through me  
'Cause I was not one of them  
'Cause I was evil  
'Cause I was a grown-up

I want to sing  
My favourite song  
I want to dance  
My favourite dance  
I want to recite  
My favourite poem  
After hours  
I want to sit at the fireplace  
By your side  
I want to listen  
To your deep voice  
Taking advice and ideas  
'Cause you're wisdom  
After hours  
Our souls will mingle  
You'll be me  
I'll be you  
After hours.

Sikhalo kaMthembu/Orlando West

## NEWS FROM SOUTHERN AFRICAN PEN CENTRE (JOHANNESBURG)

What is P.E.N.? In short it's a world association of writers — 1 000 approximately — and stands for the ideal of one humanity living in peace in one world. Members pledge themselves to do their utmost to dispel race, class and national hatreds. P.E.N. is opposed to any form of suppression of freedom of expression and opposes arbitrary censorship in times of peace. Membership is open to all writers, editors and translators who subscribe to these aims regardless of nationality, race, colour or religion.

Presently we are planning to have a 'writers wagon' that will visit groups outside the reef area, and hold readings and writing workshops and discussions within the wagon. All writers are invited to join the first trip to the north.

At present readings are taking place approximately once a fortnight or on special occasions. Writers' groups are expected to give notice of their readings a month in advance. For information on forthcoming readings, availability of transport, etc. telephone the chairman of the Centre at Johannesburg 391178 or the secretary at Johannesburg 7252096. All *Staffrider* readers are cordially invited to read their work or to join the audience on these occasions. One will be held at Dube Y.W.C.A., Soweto, on 18 and 19 May — Africa Arts Festival — featuring all groups in the reef area and outside. The Centre will be having its conference on South African Writers in July.

The Centre's task is to secure the right to write, free from institutionalized harassment, for all South African writers. It is therefore taking up cases of alleged harassment whenever these are reported and asking writers to stand firm and united on this issue. It is also raising and distributing financial support for the dependants of imprisoned writers and those in detention. Two young writers, Lebenya Mokgeseng and Molifi Mosekili, were detained recently and are still in detention.

### THE MOFOLO — PLOMER PRIZE

1. The Mofolo-Plomer Prize (named after the writers Thomas Mofolo, 1877 — 1948, author of *CHAKA*; and William Plomer, 1903 — 1973, author of *TURBOTT WOLFE*) is awarded for an unpublished novel or volume of short stories with a length of not less than 30 000 words written by a writer resident in southern Africa or a southern African writer living abroad. Entries must be in English.
2. There is no age limitation for the 1979 prize and it is the intention of the Committee to encourage writers who are not yet established.
3. The prize is R500 — donated by Nadine Gordimer, the founder of the Prize, and three Johannesburg publishers (Bateleur Press, Ad. Donker and Ravan Press).
4. The names of the judges will be announced later.
5. The organisers regret that they cannot undertake to return entries without return postage, which should be enclosed in the form of a postal order or cheque. Nor can the organisers offer detailed criticisms of manuscripts received.

The Committee of The Mofolo-Plomer Prize is pleased to announce the awarding of the 1978 prize to the joint winners:

Deon Divigny for his novel, *THE ISLAND OF THE BIRD* and E.B. Lurie for his novel, *THE BEGINNING IS ENDLESS*.

The judges were Athol Fugard and Ezekiel Mphahlele who made the choice out of 23 manuscripts submitted.

The authors, both of whom come from Cape Town, will each receive R250.

Previous Mofolo-Plomer winners were:

1976 Mbulelo Mzamane: *MY COUSIN COMES TO JO'BURG*

1976 Peter Wilhelm: *AN ISLAND FULL OF GRASS*

1977 J.M. Coetsee: *IN THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY* (Published by Ravan Press and Secker & Warburg, London. Also won the CNA Literary Award 1977).

The 1979 Prize will be announced later this year and entries have to reach the Prize Committee by 31 May 1979. Two type-written copies of each entry should be sent to:

The Mofolo-Plomer Prize Committee  
c/o Ad. Donker (Pty) Ltd.  
P.O. Box 41021  
Craighall  
2024

Entries sent to the previous address, c/o Ravan Press, will be forwarded to the Committee.

