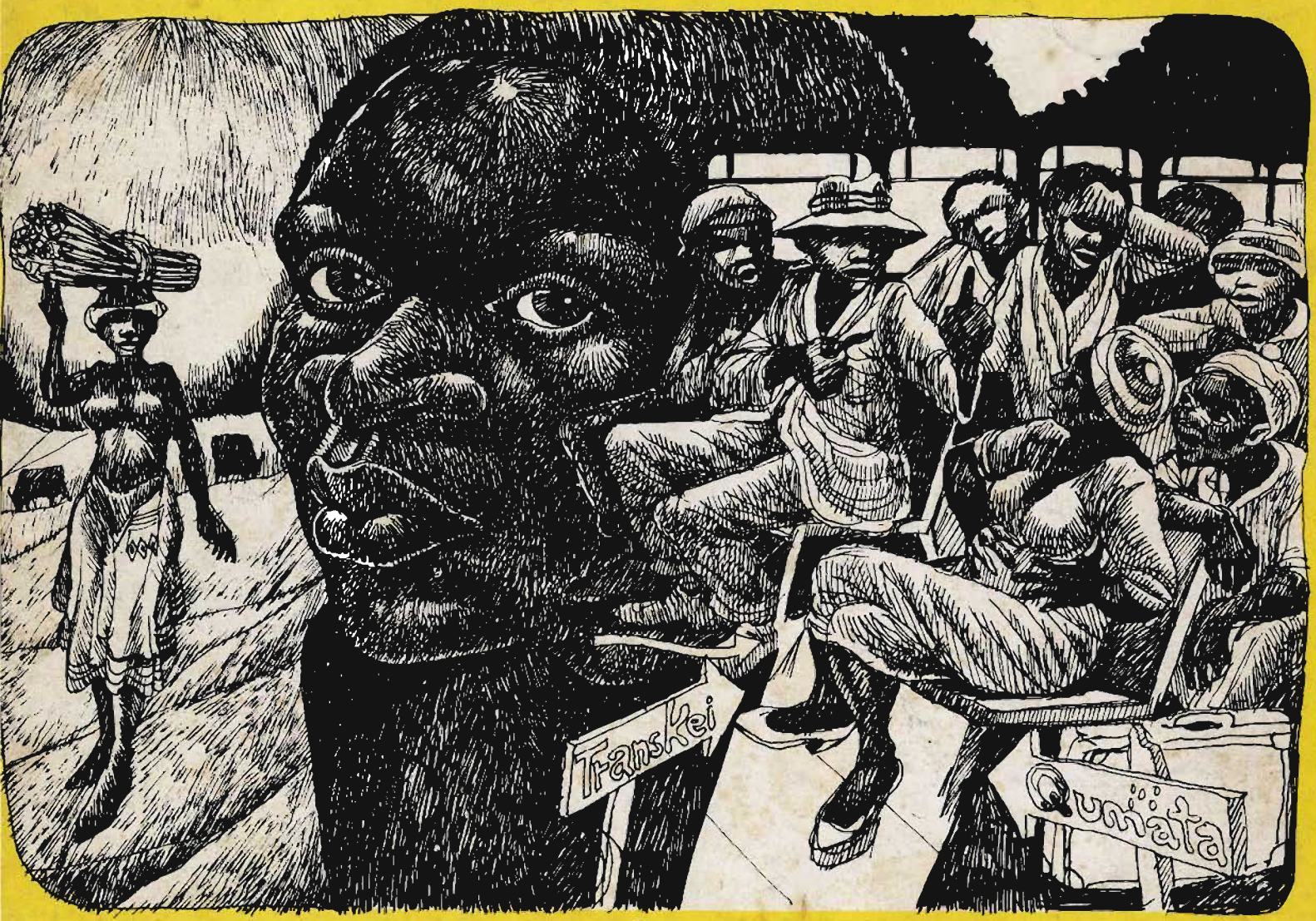
Staffrider

Vol. 2 No. 3 July/August 1979



3 Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion

A new story by Mtutuzeli Matshoba

OGANDA'S JOURNEY
by Zeke Mphahlele

HEAVY NEWS
Short story by Funda Mtuli

"EYE" GALLERY
The gallery on the page

S.A. Labour Bulletin

Photo/Alf Kumalo

The S.A.L.B. was launched in April 1974 by concerned academics and people in the labour movement in Durban to present views on industrial relations from an independent labour perspective. Forty-one editions have been produced since then.

The bulletin is one of two journals devoted to industrial relations in South Africa, and it is read and subscribed to by key decision-makers in this field. It is seen overseas as the major journal on labour in South Africa.

'A major and continuing source for such (labour) studies is the excellent South African Labour Bulletin'.

Peter Waterman, Institute for Social Studies, The Hague.

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What's on at The Market Theatre

CINCINATTI Scenes from city life Conceived and directed by Barney Simon. Starting on August 20 for four weeks in the Main Theatre.

ANGEL CITY by Sam Shepard. Featuring Lesley Mangezi. From August 27 in the Upstairs Theatre.

HOW THE OTHER HALF LOVE A comedy by Alan Ayckbourn from September, 25 in the Main Theatre.

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Soweto Speaking

to Miriam Tlali

Photo/Mxolisi Moyo

No. 9: Sergeant Moloi

Now in retirement, and widowed, he lives in Rockville with his sons, daughters, and grandchildren. He relaxes in his comfortable home and speaks with authority on the subject of being a soldier – a 'good' one - who served in the highest rank then attainable by blacks in the South African army. Before the Second World War, Sgt. Moloi was a Staff-Sergeant in the Johannesburg Municipality. He is a well-known resident of Soweto, a leading figure in the local Anglican Church of Saint Francis of Assisi.

He receives regular visits from people from all walks of life, old and young, who are always eager to tap his extensive knowledge and wisdom. He has travelled to East and North Africa, England and Europe, also more recently to Australia. He rubbed shoulders with men like Major Johnson, who led the Victory Contingent to Kensington, England in 1946, at the end of the war.

In this interview, Sgt. Moloi remembers how, when he was a prisoner of war in Egypt, he was reunited with a white former colleague of his whom he had not seen since they were municipality policemen 'arresting Africans for passes' in the streets of Johannesburg. Sergeant Moloi was then a Sergeant Major and Van Eck a driver stationed in Marshall Square (now known as John Vorster Square).

He relates how later, as war prisoners in the hands of the Germans, they parted because Van Eck would not attempt to escape. Being the daring soldier he was, Sgt. Moloi decided to adhere to the instructions he had received while undergoing training as a spy in this country to 'always try to escape'. He and a friend named Shawa took the plunge and succeeded. Then began Sgt. Moloi's long, arduous and heroic journey of twenty days through the desert, in the midst of which Shawa resolved to take a different direction and he wandered alone. Finally, exhausted, hungry and thirsty, but as determined as ever, Sgt. Moloi stumbled into El Alamein and the safe hands of the Allied Forces. As a trained spy, his expert knowledge and wide experience in the desert led to the successful destruction of enemy camps in the desert and to the sinking of ships.

Sgt. Moloi speaks of Montgomery, of Rommel and the 'Barrage of Alamein'; of everything to do with the 'War of Hitler' and his experiences when he returned to this country where he was once more obliged to 'look for work' after the discharge. He once more found himself face to face with the realities of the South African way of life as a black person. He finds fulfilment in speaking about his glowing past. His youthful-looking eyes sparkle as he carries his thoughts back. He remembers it all as if it were yesterday . . .

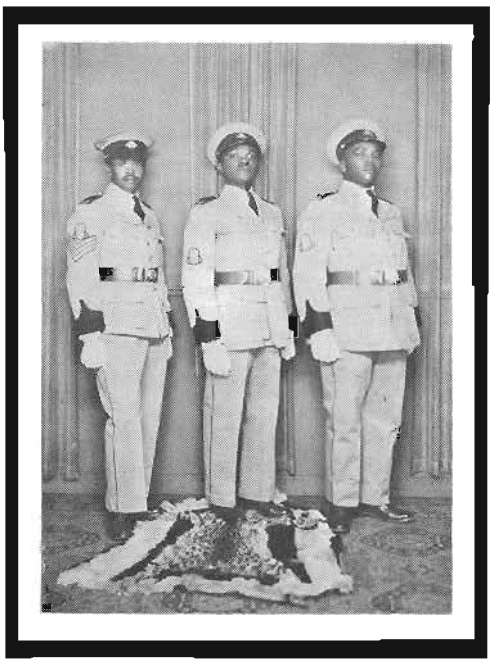
Van Eck swam half-naked with only a tattered swimming costume and a water-bottle for two days. You see, I was a prisoner, having been captured by the Germans. It was while we were at this camp that Van Eck arrived, having escaped from Tobruk. He was an expert swimmer. He had swum for two whole days! So many miles of sea! He made it to land and that was when we saw him approach our camp . . I saw this white man coming towards us like this. *(Moloi raises his forefinger to indicate that Van Eck was stark naked).*

He only had this bottle hanging round his neck. I thought there was something familiar in his walk and appearance. He had thrown away his gun and he moved slowly as if uncertain how he would be received. When he was near enough, I asked him: 'Man, it's as if I know you. Where do you come from?' 'I'm from Second South African Police.' 'Who are you?' And he replied: 'Van Eck.' You see, when I arrived at Marshall Square from the Municipality there was a driver whose name was Van Eck. I was not sure, but I thought he must be the man I left at Marshall Square when I joined the Defence Force. I asked him again: 'Are you a relation of the Van Eck who was a driver with the South African Police? Do you know me?' He answered: 'Why would I know you?' I asked him again: 'Don't you remember us moving about together arresting black people for passes and loading them into pickup vans? Is it you?' He nodded. It was him alright – the naked one. I shook my head. I started asking the men there: 'What will he wear?' And we looked around. There was a Shangaan man by the name of Mzamane. He gave him his trousers to wear. He wore them, and we used to sleep together.

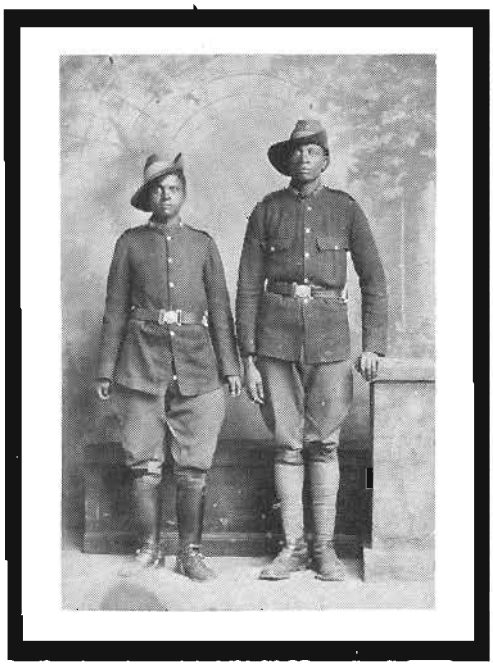
(We laugh.)

Then there started this disease called dysentery. Some prisoners were in the hands of the Italians and others in German hands. The Italian prisoners' camp was a distance away from ours. Many Germans died. We were all mixed up, captives from the Allied Forces under German and Italian guard. *I* was in charge of all the mixed up prisoners in our camp. I was virtually the doctor, having had some training from the St. John's Ambulance. I nursed our sick. They were worried and they kept on saying that they wanted 'salami'. They said it was something you take to cure dysentery. Where could I get *that* from? I told them that I did not have any 'salami' to give them. You see, we were taught in St. John's that there must be a layer in the stomach so that the inside part of the intestines is not scraped off – because as soon as that happens, you die.

I had stayed long in the desert. When we had first got there, we had dug in some supplies. I searched and went about looking for possible spots where we had hidden some of the stuff one could use. I found a tin of liquid paraffin. I gave this to the sick soldiers and they drank it. Then they complained and said that 'it makes our bowels work too much!' I explained that because it is oily, it would help to make



Sergeant Moloi has many photographs and mementoes which recall incidents and achievements in his past as he talks to Miriam Tlali. These photos show him (on the left in both pictures) as a young soldier close on fifty years ago.



a little layer to protect their insides. Dysentery is very harsh. It eats into the wall of the stomach and makes holes there, and a person dies because he starts excreting blood. The liquid paraffin I had given them *did* help because in our camp we had no deaths. The Germans died every day. Then one day a doctor from the German side arrived at our camp and asked me: 'Why don't you die?' I answered: 'I don't know.' Then he went around searching everywhere to try and find the reason why our people were not dying as much as their men. He found the tin of liquid paraffin and took it away with him. Then when he was gone, I went into the desert again and scratched around for some time. Finally I found another tin of liquid paraffin and took it to our camp. Then I thought of a plan. I poured small quantities of the liquid into bottles and gave them to the soldiers to hide away under their mattresses and pillows, so that when the German doctor arrived, he would not find any of that stuff. I threw away the empty tin.

I was taught in my spy training here, that we should 'always try to escape'. That by so doing you are actually fighting. Whoever has captured you will be forced to allocate guards to look after you: they won't all go to the front line. So their numbers will be diminished.

While we were in captivity, the Germans thought of another contrivance. They said that *I was the king-pin*; that I must look after everybody and watch their every movement. They also said that *I* should pick men for duties and so on. I refused because by so doing I would in fact be doing *their* work for them. I said to myself: 'This is the thing they taught us when we trained as spies.' They all advised me to accept but I refused. They all encouraged me including this very white man, Van Eck. He was actually a German who came from Randfontein. He did not normally speak German but he was fluent in it. Van Eck is German.

I refused to do the work and said: 'Choose someone else.' The German Colonel said that I was refusing to work. I was in trouble. A general and seven soldiers wielding guns arrived to come and shoot me because I was said to be stubborn, refusing to take orders. They were the firing squad. They all said I *must*. This Van Eck was the interpreter. The General said: 'We know the law of the British. The procedure is that when you are given orders you must obey. You are refusing to work, and yet you know nothing about this war. You don't know how it started, and we too do not know. Now when we ask you to work, you refuse to work. Now what do you say, are you guilty or not guilty?' I said: 'I never refused to work'.

The German general called me. He was on my side. He said: 'He's a hard worker. He doesn't refuse to work. All these things you see done here are his work. He's refusing to be *in charge* of these people. He is in fact the *king-pin*. If he should raise his hands now and say: 'Kill them!' you'd see even these with the guns obey him. This man is a soldier of the British. You can't *change* him today and make him a soldier of the Germans. Take another man and put him in charge.' But the Colonel said: 'Let them make him work very hard so that he'll be sorry he refused to work. *Let him work!* We can't let it go like that!' I saw death near. I was really scared. I was looking at the sky thinking of death. They said I must sit down.

When the men saw me sit, there was excitement all over. The men shouted 'Hoo-o-o-o-o!'

They made me carry bullets to the front line. I had sores all over but still they made me carry the bullets. Blood was flowing from the sores. We went in relays to the front-line with the heavy loads. I said to the white man (Van Eck) along the road: 'If it wasn't for these few showers of rain, I would reach the English Channel . . . and if I reached the English Channel, the face of the whole world would change!' It's Napoleon's pronouncement, isn't it? He was speaking of the sea between France and England. He said: 'If I could cross the English Channel, the face of the world would change.' I looked at the white man and said: *'If I could reach that escarpment, the face of the world would change.'* He said: 'Don't say that. You'll die along the way!' I looked at him and thought, 'A German – he's white. He trusts his own people. He won't tell me the truth.' He tried to advise me. He said: 'I know German. These people have been beaten. They'll leave us here and run away.'

I then organized some of our boys. I said to them: 'As soon as they start bombing, we must leave.' We dug a hole on this side of the fence which came out on the other side. Then we closed it again. We fixed ourselves up and were ready with our water bottles and all. When we asked Van Eck, 'Are you ready?' he kept on lying: 'I've fixed up everything, I've fixed up.' Then when the time came for us to leave, only one man left with me. Van Eck remained behind. The one who left with me was called Shawa.

(In the next issue . . . Sergeant Moloi speaks of 'The start of my twenty days in the desert'.)

STAFFRIDER eye GALLERY

A series of untitled drawings by Kay Hassan of the Creative Youth Association, Diepkloof.

UNTITLED

The blood
The scarlet expanse
Stretching
Drained
Flowing
Touching the horizon's lips

The music
Emotions
Cut deep into my soul
Invoking weeping
Welled in tears
I saw faces of our fathers
Blurred images of a thousand sphinxes

The voice
Distant melancholy tunes of wisdom
Never to be found on tape
Forever imprinted on the threads of our culture
Soft
True
Liberating
Nudging now and then
The ribs of a slumbering nation
North, east, south, west
Clockwise we move
To catch our tails
We cry

The agony
Of a child
His limb lost
Buried in the dust of the ghetto
This Soweto
This Langa
This Nyanga
Our world
Our heaven
Our hell

The eyes
Drooping
Hiding . . . behind dreams
Shadows of longing
Knowing
There is truth
Fearing
To unlock the darkness . . .
Hoping
For salvation
Thinking
It is the will of God
Proclaiming
Let's die now
And live later

Mabuse A. Letlhage

NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia threatens to overwhelm me
I yearn to see the beloved faces of home
I yearn to see my Pa and Ma
Home sweet home
It seems an eternity
I cannot bear to be without you

My childhood friends
I remember the fun we had
The happiness and dangers we shared
Adventures and troubles we encountered

Nostalgia, Home remembrance
Home sickness
You bring sorrows to miners
prisoners, boarders and exiles
You torture, you haunt me
You frustrate and assault me
Yet I've one thing to thank
Nature gave us the power of dreams
I will see my home in a dream

Icaboth Maubane

AFRIKA

I yearn for the warmth of your breast
The breast which has known a touch of strangers
The breast that has become a home of passers-by
The breast of whose warmth I am deprived

An artificial blind-man I am
With transparent mist all around me
My eyesight has lost its worth
Though my inner sight has grown

I stretch out my hand
But where is your touch?
Cold air strikes me instead
Chilling and piercing my sturdy body

I take short steps
Gradually I move
And desperately I search

I will find you
You are mine
You belong to me

Lebethe Lebethe

TRAIN AFTER TRAIN

A leg,
No stomach.
'There lies a finger,'
said one brother.
He is dead —
So what?
He is like a doormat
Trampled by train after train . . .
Clothes tattered,
Body scattered,
Still trampled
By train after train . . .
Way back home, someone waiting:
Children playing, enquiring:
'Mother, is father not coming home tonight?'
Oh, sweet children!
'Father is probably working late.'
Little they thought, he is up to heaven.
How long, how long
Is she going to wait, and wait?
Spend a sleepless night,
Train after train . . . ?

Jonas Makobe

Heavy News

A story by Funda Ntuli, illustrated by Mike Phillips

Greatcoats have a certain dignity, one might have observed. Perhaps the dignity belonged to the sombre sons-of the-soil personages inside them? One might have wondered, and not known. But the two old men in the coats conversed tranquilly, drawing occasionally on pipes filled with 'Boxer'.

From time to time Tat' uTshawe would produce a long stream of spittle, taking pains to avoid his companion's coat. Exactly two minutes thereafter Tat' uNgqosini would do the same, taking equal care not to offend his friend. They would then continue their conversation after the fashion of the elderly African, which makes conversation an intricate art.

'You see, it is heavy news in proper truth,' observed Tat' uTshawe.

'Yes, that then is the only truth It is indeed heavy news', replied his friend. Tat' uTshawe gazed introspectively at the distant blue hills of the Transkei. Then, as if with sudden inspiration, he turned back to Tat' uNgqosini. 'Where this *indaba* is heavy Ngqosini, child of my home, is that our chiefs can do nothing about it!'

'You talk of chiefs, Tshawe? They are nothing but headmen. Even the men who work at the place of the great one tell us that Matanzima can do nothing about it!' At this stage Tat' uNgqosini affected a dignified pause to knock out his pipe. Both he and his friend could clearly hear the introductory song of the programme 'Ons Afrikaanse Hoekie' on Radio Xhosa. The music came from a transistor set in the kitchen where Zandile, the newly-arrived daughter-in-law to the Tshawes was pounding mealies for the midday meal.

'You see, Tshawe,' resumed Ngqosini, 'these things are arranged by *abelungu* there in *Pitoli* (Pretoria). There is nothing that can be done.'

But when *abelungu* want to change jobs they have houses provided with enough space for their whole families.'

'Yes, Tshawe, but could you not perhaps be making the mistake of forgetting that we are not *abelungu*?' Tat' uNgqosini carefully phrased his question so as to preserve the mutual respect that existed between the two of them. Such is the African's constant concern to engage in steady cool-tempered discourse. Many phrases, expressions, implications and symbols are apt, depending on the context, to be regarded as insults. One has to tread warily.

'Yes, we are not *abelungu*, Ngqosini. We are not *abelungu*, mfowethu. But our sons do more work. Do they not deserve even more than *abelungu?*'

Slowly the idea of a joke took shape in Tat' uNgqosini's mind. He considered it, his face gradually lighting up until he laughed out, 'Ha ha, I can just see them building huts like these there in the City of Gold'. And he waved his arm to encompass the five or so mud huts which covered the uneven yard. The pair laughed uproariously so that Zandile stole a quick look outside and had to duck back quickly when Tat' uTshawe appeared to be looking her way. It is bad manners, especially for a newly-arrived daughter-in-law, to listen to the conversation of the old men of her new home.

'But Ngqosini,' interrupted Tat' uTshawe, 'do you not remember from the days when we worked, how the mounds on the mines reminded us of our long-forsaken homes? Maybe the huts would not be out of place, my brother.' 'Yes, it is true. At such times one used to think of the children who

could be burning each other around the fireplace; of the wives who could be squandering the hard-earned money with other men in shebeens in the towns.'

'Yes, it is just as you say, child of my mother. It is just as you say it.' Tat' uTshawe waited a suitable while before continuing.

'But if we were to stop this playing around, Ngqosini' — there was another pause during which Ngqosini's face assumed a very serious and attentive expression — 'if we were to stop this playing around, houses would have to be built in the City of Gold for our sons It is not proper that they stay on the mines for six to nine moons at a time, without their families. That corrupts the behaviour!'

Tat' uNgqosini agreed. 'It corrupts the behaviour. Yes, it is just as you say it. It corrupts the behaviour.'

'You see that thing Ngqosini? It is just as I say it.'

'Yes, it is just as you say it.'

There was another long pause. Tat' uNgqosini speculated quietly within himself, appeared to hesitate, then, in soft respectful tones, enquired, 'I do not know if I would be troubling you my brother . . . ' He stopped to cough apologetically. Tat' uTshawe, ever quick off the mark, took the hint and said, 'Talk my brother, you just talk. What is it you want to say?', although he could more or less anticipate what was coming.

'If it does not bother you, Tshawe I would be sending a child to fetch a little beer from home if I had any, and I am thirsty, *mfondini*.'

'Oh, that is going to be rectified. MamQoco!'

'Tata!' Zandile immediately responded from the kitchen. Her hand flew to her head, unbidden, to check her turban. It was taboo to go to the old men bare-headed. She then rushed out to her father-in-law.

Tat' uNgqosini rose from his bench.

'I'll be back, Tshawe,' and he went to relieve himself against a convenient tree. A number of fowls scattered as he approached, raising an unmusical row. This caused a black mongrel to take an interest in the proceedings. The dog started chasing the fowls. This in turn caused Tat' uTshawe to take an even deeper interest in the dog.

He sprang up surprisingly quickly, picked up a block of firewood that had been lying around and deftly attended to the dog, catching him squarely on the shoulder.

Unruffled, he resumed his seat and attended to the business in hand. 'My child, then you do not want us to taste of the little thing you brewed yesterday?' he asked with a broad smile.

'Father, it is only for you to say it and I shall bring it.'

'Just see, my beautiful child! Bring us a little then, beautiful MamQoco. Your fathers are thirsty.'

'It is good, Tata,' Zandile said as she rose from where she had been half-kneeling, to do as she was ordered.

'Make sure the boys feed the dogs, Tshawe. If they start eating the fowls they soon go on to steal eggs. And a dog that steals eggs can only be killed,' advised Tat' uNgqosini on his return.

Tat' uTshawe had observed that it had been Tat' uNgqosini who had started all the excitement but, wisely, he said, 'Yes Ngqosini. It does not help to say that you are going to watch it, and at the time when it steals the eggs you beat it. It only thinks that it can steal even more when you are not there.'

'Yes, Tshawe, it is just as you say it.'

Tat' uTshawe looked serious. 'You will forgive me, Ngqosini. What we have here at the place of the Tshawes is only the dregs of the gourd. But you will drink the beer that I drink. You will have what I share with you and be content. Things are heavy. The sons are away with the money in the City of Gold. They are not here to look after us.' He then lifted the grass mat covering a billy-can of mealie-beer that had been brought by Zandile.

'You are a man Tshawe. That which we get we give thanks for. Therefore I say, Tshawe, *Nikani*, you who turns things so that the down is facing up, we thank you. And as for the sons, it will not be hard for much longer. Three moons now and our sons will be amongst us.' The beer was passed from Tat' uTshawe to Tat 'uNgqosini.

Having drunk his fill, the latter placed the can between the pair for whoever first felt like drinking again.

'Yes, it is only three moons Ngqosini and my son will be with us. I hope for presents. But surely he can't forget a bottle of brandy for me?'

'Surely. It is just as you say it, my brother. Your Sipho is a good boy. It is this Aaron of mine whom I do not see quite clearly. The city corrupts the behaviour of these children.'

'Yes, Ngqosini. It is the truth that you tell. It is just as you say it.'

'Yes, it is just as I say it, Tshawe.'

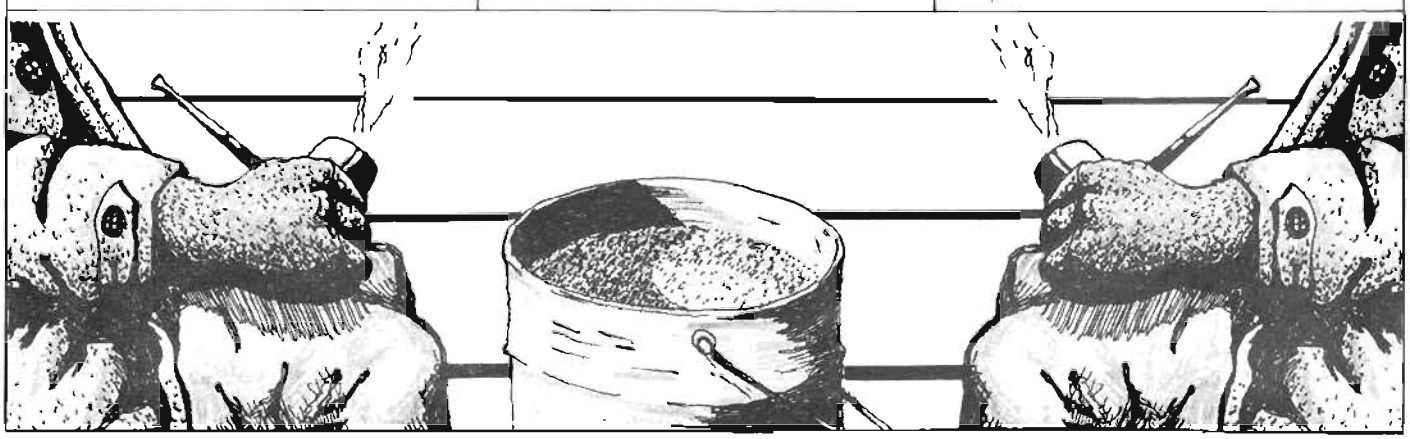
Aaron and Sipho left the gates of the mine-compound in a relatively happy mood. Sipho's spirits had been dampened just a little by the bad dream he had experienced the previous night.

He had dreamt that Zandile, his wife of three moons to the day, had prepared a great feast for him when he arrived home. There was so much meat that men threw whole chunks for the dogs to eat. Even the dogs soon lost interest in the meat.

Sipho had recounted the dream to Aaron, for there is a belief that a dream of ill-luck can, at least, be 'softened' if not totally 'conquered' by being re counted. And Sipho knew that those below the ground always come in dreams and if they show meat to someone it means death in one's family or, at best, a spell of ill-luck.

They walked quickly to the station, beating the pavement rhythmically in their black-and-white gum-boots. Tembisa was a long way away. One did not want to waste such a special day. These visits to the townships were the highlights of one's week on the mines. And, more significantly, one could have a woman at a reasonable fee if one bargained wisely, having bought just the right quantity of booze. And remember, the wives were far away beyond the mountains in the Transkei.

Of course Sipho knew some men who had been *'tsotsi*-ed' by the women of the townships either through not



being able to negotiate wisely, being too boastful and thus having to prove one's financial boasts or lose face, or simply through getting too drunk.

With the last, Sipho did not sympathise at all. He had learnt never to take more than a *'nipbu'* of brandy at any given occasion.

Sipho and Aaron sailed merrily onto the train, both checking that their passes were in their overall pockets.

Zandile reflected on the way it had all started. Exactly a week after their wedding Sipho had to leave for Johannesburg as he had been instructed when being recruited at the Tsolo Magistrate's offices. During that week Sipho had shared her grass mat only one night. This was because Sipho, being the first-born son, was required to spend most nights discussing with Tat' uTshawe the 'things that eat the household'. The matrimonial ceremony had cost much in terms of *lobola* and the entertainment it was customary to offer.

Two days after Sipho's sad departure, Zandile had, as they say, 'gone to the river.' Thus the red evidence that flowed out of her had assured her that Sipho had not left her with child.

As the weeks went by Zandile befriended a girl who had been forced to leave school because she had fallen pregnant. Her name was Ayanda. They had met by the river in the late afternoon. This is the time when the girls and young wives go to the river to fetch water for the night. A home without water in the night is said not to be a home at all, for anything may happen at night that will require the urgent use of water.

Ayanda was the one who had brought her the curse of the heavy news that was now like the scabies that sticks with a dirty *inkwenkwe* Ayanda was the one who had introduced Zandile to her cousin. When they were alone she had drawn Zandile's attention to his attractiveness.

Mbulelo ('Mbu', she later called him) certainly looked a sharp *'mamuaza van die dorp af'*. He always wore sharp-pointed shoes with the tips 'boned' to a brilliant shine. He made a point of coming back armed with a multi-coloured cap and a new outfit each time he came home on holiday. These were normally sufficient weapons to win the current beauty of the village.

Zandile had tried to resist Mbulelo's charms at first. He wooed according to the traditional code. It is thrust and parry, the man effecting verbal attack, the female verbal defence. This battle soon deteriorates into a comic exchange because the language of love sounds like the talk of children to all except the two who are talking. Then comes the crucial moment when the girl must take a decision.

Zandile remembered that with her it had gone something like, 'Yes, I do love you. But then I love you the way I love all people.'

Mbulelo had the light of triumph in his eyes. You just sense these things and know that victory is imminent.

'Yes, but that means you do not hate me,' Mbulelo had said, coming closer. Of course, in the townships of Port Elizabeth, where he worked, he would hardly have been called well-dressed. But then, this was a village in the district of Tsolo, Transkei.

The dreams that Zandile had at night flashed through her mind. Sipho dominated them and she was always in his arms. She would wake up sweating and then she would know desire as she had never known it before. And here was this Mbulelo . . .

'Yes, I do not hate you, but . . . ' she heard herself saying, as if from outside her body.

'Well then, if we do not hate each other why don't we *jola*? People who love each other . . . ' and then she was in his arms. For the following weeks, at convenient times, followed brief, stolen moments of intense passion by the river side.

And then she had not 'gone to the river.' Panicking, she had sought advice from Ayanda.

'It is easy, Sis' Zandi. When next you go to Umtata go to a bottle store and chemist shop and ask for gin, Martins Pills and Essence of Pennyroyal. I'll write them down for you.' Ayanda had made it sound like the easiest thing in the world.

Thus it came about that Zandile found herself in her bedroom. She had warmed half a cup of gin, as Ayanda had said. The pills and the essence she had also taken. But now remorse played with her. Had she taken a life? Was the thing inside her human? But Zandile knew she had taken the easier though risky course. She knew she could die, but to disgrace her parents!

She woke up early the next morning and breathlessly checked the cloth she had placed against herself. When she saw the speck of red on the cloth she burst into tears. Whether they were tears of joy or self-pity it would have been difficult to tell, just then.

'This matter is heavy, Ngqosini, because it is not a matter for old men. Sipho must make it right himself when he returns. But it is definite that Mam-Qoco has taken a lover,' and Tat' uTshawe stopped to take a sip from a billy-can in front of them.

'It is just as you say it, Tshawe,' said Tat' uNgqosini, 'but this thing about Zandile, have you all its truth?'

'There is no doubt. They were seen next to the river with the eyes of the flesh. MaDlamini saw them and you know she is not a buck of all forests.'

'Yes, she is not a liar,' agreed Tat' uNgqosini. 'But the sons are coming back. It will be solved.'

'Yes, it is just as you say it, Ngqosini. And remember, the sons bring presents and alleviation of the hardship we have.'

'It is the truth that you speak Tshawe. Yes *mfondini*.'

The two constables watched the fighting from their van. The men involved had not yet seen the police van. 'You know Koos,' said the one constable, 'I've never been able to understand why they fight so much amongst themselves. I mean . . . ' 'Ag, Pieter man, they are just born like that. It's good they are not fighting us hey?' 'Ja, ja Koos,' agreed Pieter.

Sipho knew that it would be bad when he got home. The visit to Tembisa had started it all. He and Aaron had picked up two buxom women and were walking with them towards a *shebeen* when two Basotho men appeared. A fight immediately ensued over the women. This only stopped when the police van approached.

Sipho thought he recognized one of the men. This was confirmed when they again met the men at the compound. The fight was resumed, only this time ever-increasing numbers of Xhosas joined in on Sipho's side and Basotho did the same on the other side. The whole compound became involved. The police were called in.

An informer did his unsavoury job and Sipho, Aaron and the two Basotho men were called to the mine manager's office. They were informed, in not very distinct *fanakalo*, that they were being sent home as they had started the fight. They were to remain there pending 'further investigation by the police.' They waited. Nothing further was said. They hesitated, then Aaron asked the crucial question. No, was the answer. Their wages had been frozen because their six-month contracts had not been completed. As the bus stormed on, Sipho knew he was carrying heavy news to the people of his home.

LIFE UNEASE

My life is a ball
Bounced against a wall.
It keeps on returning
Simply because it has to.

It is a weed fought against,
But it keeps on coming up,
Depending on its tough
Character for survival.

It is a life obstinately seeking
A justification for existence.
It is a life so self-sufficient
And proud that it won't
Apologise for its existence.

Somewhere along the line
It came into contact
With its inner self:
It was the agonizing realization
That it was a stranger to itself
That prompted it to go
Back to its roots in order
To search for an identity.

It is a life reduced to such
An appalling degree of servitude
That it cannot help being hard
To all the world's mysteries.
And the most mysterious
Mystery is 'why it is shown
Such horrible contempt?'

Nevertheless it comes up
With an increased
Will to survive
Everytime it is shown
Such contempt:
A life whose determination
Is envied even by those
Who stand in its path.

Mongezi Radebe

IF I WERE A PRIEST

If I were a priest
I'd never pretend to be
What I really am not
Like this country's lot.

I'd show men my wrong
And leave them musing long
At what sort I am.
I'd tell that to the people.

I'd tell them not to steal
Like most of us (priests),
I'd tell them not to lie
Like we do to them.

Don't you think it'd be good
To have a priest who would
Tell his ills
To so many sinners too?

Abel Dichaba

SABOTAGE

I come down on my knees
  praying
  and weeping.
For this life that I spend
  fearfully,
  painfully
  and tearfully
  in the ghetto
Is the heavy price I pay for
  the ignorance
  the cowardice
  and the setbacks
Which have the bantus as the main actors.

I come up to my feet
  spread-eagled,
  full-face
  and examining
It comes as no wonder to see
  the hunters,
  their entourage
  the bargainers
  and the bantus
All emerging from four corners
  in hippos,
  scorning,
  hating,
  sickle-handed
  and clutching screwdrivers
To sabotage the peace of my mind.

Bulara Diphoto

WHAT TO TRUST (AND WHAT NOT)

Roses are good to behold
Not easy to hold
They have thorns.

Water is good for swimming
But be unblinking
It can drown you.

Food is good for eating
Not surfeiting
It can kill you.

The earth, good for staying
Don't be trusting
There are earthquakes.

What can you trust?
A good and honest heart
Which never, never changes.

Abel Dichaba

SELF EXAMINATION

I need a mirror, desperately
To see myself, my reflection;
To see the reality that I am.

I long to see my eyes;
To read the tales they tell
To others looking at me,
To decipher the puzzle
That I am.

Lechesa Tšenoli

(An extract from a longer poem).

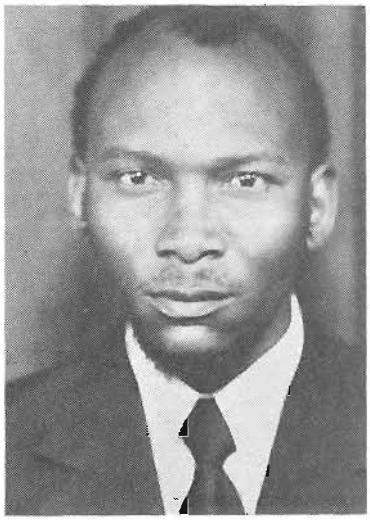
THE IN THING

Is waar
Jy het my
Nie getip
Om te sê
How loop die
GST;
Maar
Altyd van
Die mlungu
Se cunning
Praatjies:
Love thy neighbour:
En net om
Die hoek
Word die musty
Van my gesoek,
Of ek face
Die khwela-khwela.
Dié is unfair.

Nou laas
Het ek van
Die homeland
Independence
Of is dit
Miskien
Homeland dependence
Gelees,
Ek is nie sure
Van die two,
En dat Bra Luke
Loop met 'n
Cadillac of so
Iets wat
Bulletproof
Vensters het:
Nou ek
Phazama
Hoekom bullet-proof?
Hy bly in 'n
Mansion;
Hy chuck die mense
Van Winterveld
Weg van hom land,
Want hulle
Woon nie in
Mansions;
En ek verstaan ook
Ou Bra Kaizer
Is moeg van
Die Pretoria-manne
En hy is nie 'n
Moegoe.

Gister het ek
Van die
Timer gehoor
Ou Patrick
Te sê hy word
Bline excited:
Hy soek
Ook die
Rothmans King Size —
The number
One
In cigarettes.

Tlokwe Sehume/Atteridgeville



Molahlehi wa Mmutle

Two Poems

Robben Island has always had a special place in the imagination of South African writers – the Fugard/Kani/Ntshona play *The Island*, Zwelonke's (banned) novel *Robben Island* and Matshoba's story *A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana* come to mind. In this issue we publish two poems by a former 'islander'.

DEDICATED TO MY ONLY SISTER

Sweet my twin sister
The two years difference strengthened our love
Hot as anxiety our love remained
My sterile joy you couldn't share
You shared my fruitful sorrow
Poverty frankly and brazenly grinned at us
Our home was pervaded with its breath
It mantled the walls and polished the furniture
We slept with it and supped it.
In time it gnawed deeply into our brains and hearts.

Poverty made us cautious and prudent
It stunted our ambitions and ground down our hopes
It fizzled out our family life
We lived it like a chronic disease
It drove our mother out to drudgery
Picking up peanuts like a mad hen
Nine pence was to be her pay
She was driven to the grave by poverty
A dienskneg she died kneeling
Buried six feet into the floor she scrubbed.

All radiance of colour faded away for us
She was love and devotion to us
Joy, you knew no happiness alone
Solitude, sorrow and suffering mothered you
The hope of your living brother sustained you.
The knowledge of it poured forth a golden light
Sweet my love, hot as my anxiety
My sweet sister, reunion will come
Days of greater happiness await us
When I come back to you.

MY SANCTUARY

(In memory of my comrades still buried alive)

Where does time go?
Can't she be put back?
Like a spirit she's consumed
She vanishes with the speed
Of a closing eyelid
Where does time go?

In the small hours of the morning
I'll steal to the high window
To marvel at the beauty of the night
Bloubergstrand* my eyes discern in you
A beauty unblemished.

Like a monkey I'll sit on the railing
Feeling my inner eye ailing
Enjoying a beauty unsurpassed
Away from the misery of the grey walls
My eyes will cascade above the roof tops
Like a dry leaf on ripples of grey water.

There she lies
Her lights all golden
Like eyes of a billion giants
Holding council before an onslaught
What colours! What a panorama!
A spectrum, no, a signet of the gods.

Silence, and Atlantic waves
My soul swims in the cool waves of the night –
Below the murderous current of the grey walls
Why! I am floating backward and forward!
The current is gaining momentum!
An entanglement with an octopus.

Farewell! Bloubergstrand
Your snow-capped mountains are engraved
In my memory
You're the eye witness
Of all my misery and woe
We share a sacred secret.

* *Opposite Robben Island*

LET ME SMILE WITH YOU

hey
you up there
come down
and kiss me
leave the wind with the birds
leave the birds with the trees
leave the whites with their suburbs
and come down
and kiss me with a smile
hey
you up there
come down
and kiss your soil
goodbye
come down to earth for hunger and death
come down to earth for truth and wisdom
come down to earth for right and wrong
hey
you up there
come down
and kiss your worn mother
the grim face traced by arid winds
the deflated cheeks punched by virulent age and
the wailing winds from the far north
hey
you up there
come down
and kiss me with a smile
and kiss your soil
goodbye

David Mphusu/Gartasso

UNCALLED NAME

I curse you
Curse you, wiseman!
Civilization – as you put it
You, wiseman
Relic of Voyages
Son of this man, Gentleman of that lady –
You use Civilization as a doormat.

I've been named
I've been labelled
By this man
All around –
What a genius you are!
Master! Master of no . . .

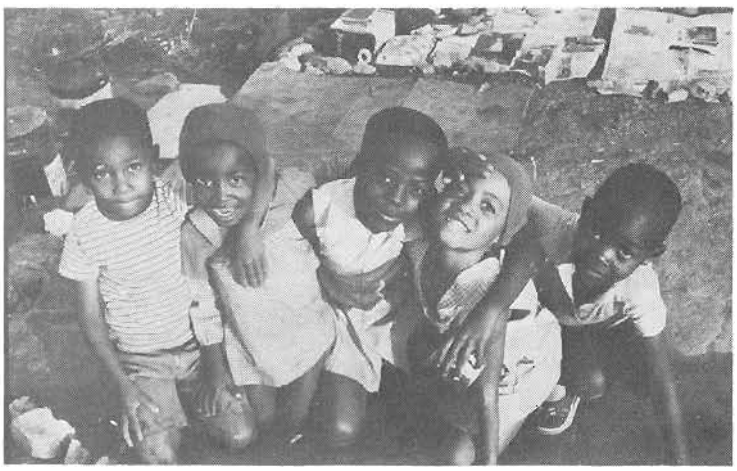
They ignore my traditional name –
I give them my name,
It's like telling them blasphemies.
My mama and papa don't know this name
That sounds like a stranger's –
They usually call me 'Sello sa Maberwapelo'
A name with an angry meaning
That's why I'm always 'crying' for my own land and culture.

Beast of burden I am
Burden's name it's what I have
A farmer's label
Labour tag
Furrow name.

I worked for this man
This farming man
and he called me what he liked
So I tried to tell him my name –
Brothers! I got a boot
A boot on my buttocks
That was my name, my uncalled name.

Piet!
Koos!
I'm called
while picking peas
in the hot sunrays
Yeah! even digging the sweet potatoes
in the cold winter of a nameless land.

Radipoponono ka Tladi



Township Life

Marjorie Makhadu/
Soweto

Seth 'n Sam

A story by Peter Wilhelm

Illustration/Marc Glaser

Peter Wilhelm a joint-winner (with Mbulelo Mzamane) of the Mofolo-Plomer prize in 1976, has published three books: LM and Other Stories *(Ravan),* The Dark Wood *(novel, Ravan) and a collection of poems (in: Bateleur Poets '77). A story ('Van') and recent poems have appeared in previous issues of* Staffrider.

Two boys, Seth n Sam – black and white, or at any rate decisively differing shades of brown – grew up together on a farm in the Northern Transvaal.

It was a cattle farm with huge stretches of good grazing spread like a mat over rolling hills, over which white clouds gathered, turned black and thundered. However, that was only in good years For the most part there was drought and Sam's father sat on his stoep and smoked a pipe morosely.

There was a lot of cattle theft in that area, and *skokiaan* brewing, and faction fights. Sometimes caches of arms would be found, but they were not terrorist weapons: in those years, it was said, the blacks only shot each other. The whites, of course, shot everybody. Wives, brothers, uncles, workers.

Seth n Sam were always together hiding in the hills, playing with clay oxen in the red dust of the yard. They spoke a mixture of dialect, English, and Afrikaans that did not please their parents and presented shocking problems of adjustment when they went off to their separate and unequal schools Because the boys appeared so inseparable, Sam's father – one of those strange liberal people you find like improbable rocky outposts in the deep countryside – considered sending them together to a non-racial school in Swaziland.

But he had no money.

One thing about Seth n Sam was that they looked alike. Of course there was that difference in skin colouration; but both had sandy hair that did not easily respond to grooming, and their faces under the sandy hair were always smiling – which makes people look alike even if they are dissimilar. They stood exactly the same height, and weighed identically, while their clothing was just dusty and similar.

Because they had been grouped together in the collective mind of the farm as 'Seth n Sam' it came about that Sam would be called Seth, and Seth Sam.

So it was for many years, until it was deemed – by whom was unclear – that Seth had had sufficient schooling and had to become a herd boy and undergo initiation. Sam wished, too, to undergo initiation, but his parents refused although there would have been no objection from the tribe. Anyway, Sam had already been circumcised while only a few days old in the mistaken belief that this would prevent masturbation in later life.

It became harder for them to be together to be Seth n Sam. Sam envied what he regarded as Seth's early manhood and freedom. He envied Seth's sexual adventures.

Seth, on the other hand, was aware dimly but definitely – that Sam was entering a greater world than was now possible for him. His teachers had been hard and horrible men who beat him and made him memorize everything; then, if he could repeat on paper what he had read (but not learnt) during his 'lessons' he would 'pass.' Actually, he learnt nothing. At one stage the teachers made them stop learning subjects in Tswana, and it all became English and Afrikaans. That was very confusing.

So Seth, sitting in the hills and pondering it all, growing older and seeing before him the prospect of tribal marriage and tribal existence, was irked by Sam's progress onwards toward the magical goals of matriculation and university. If Seth had been able to read he could have taken Sam's textbooks and taught himself in his many free hours. But he could only make out a few words of English – which the English master had been unable to speak – and his reading skills only sufficed for him to follow the plots of photocomics, which all appeared to be about the need to combat terrorism.

Seth had no wish to combat terrorism. He knew a great deal about politics since he had been listening to adult conversation all his life, and politics was discussed a great deal. He had heard a great deal about 'oppression' of the black by the white man. At first he was puzzled by this. He did not feel oppressed by, say, Sam or Sam's father. But when they took him out of school they initiated a process of thinking that continued schooling might have stifled forever.

When the matric results came out and Sam found he had passed comfortably, his first thought was to run into the fields to find Seth and tell him. It then occurred to him, for the first time that though Seth would be pleased for him there might be a seed of bitterness in the pleasure.

So instead of searching for his friend he began day-dreaming about the matric dance to be held in the town hall of a nearby village. He had already asked the girl he wished to take – her name was Martie – and had already suggested to her what they might be doing after the dance, together, in his father's car. Of course he had merely suggested this in a joking fashion, but a curiously knowledgeable look had come into Martie's eyes after he spoke – a look of cunning, and of anticipation. She had not even rebuffed him with another joke.

The dance was duly held, and some of the boys daringly brought along brandy and beer which they drank outside; and a few became drunk and sick, as was customary. Sam didn't drink, and regarded those who did with some contempt. If only they could see how ridiculous they looked! And how this lowered them in the esteem of the girls. ('Lips that touch wine shall never touch mine.')

He was totally courteous to Martie all night, fetching her food and cool drinks, whispering in her hair, dancing close to her (the band tended to play langorous waltzes rather than fast music), and enjoying the dimmed light beneath the tinsel and coloured paper and lights and assorted decorations that rustled together in the fragrant veld wind that came in the cool summer evenings in the mountains. It was romantic.

Then, the dance over, he and Martie sat together in the parked car in a quiet

lane on the way to her home. They had left together before midnight, before the dance had ended, as if by agreement. And when Sam pulled over, switched off the car, and listened to her breathing easily beside him, it was as if everything was going to come right; their moment was upon them.

They kissed a bit and, finally, Sam gently – and as it were by accident – touched her breasts. And she did not resist, but sighed again with a strange sort of meaning in the exhalation. Sam was very excited, in love, his head full of joy and his body already in painful ecstasy.

At a certain point they fell apart, again as if by agreement, in order to catch their breath and talk softly.

Naturally, they could not talk about what they were doing. Instead Martie said, 'Do you still play with that kaffir boy, what's-his-name? Seth?'

'Eh?' Sam sat back, amazed and uncomprehending. Had she actually said that?

'You know the one I mean – Seth the kaffir.'

At last Sam could speak. 'Seth isn't a kaffir. How can you use a word like that?'

'Well then, that Bantu Seth.'

Sam then did several things: he started the car, called Martie a cow (thus making her cry), and veered off into the road although – unlikely as this was at that time of night -- a car of drunken revellers was approaching. Fortunately it was on the wrong side of the road, and Sam too was on the wrong side of the road in his anger, and the cars hooted wildly at each other as if they were separate intelligent entities, and passed on in the night.

Border duty. It was noon and the *ous* were just sitting around, most of them *bosbefok*, drinking hot beer. Naturally they would all have preferred to have a Cold Castle, but this was the bush and they were far from base and refrigeration, so the beer (which was always around for someone to produce) was hot.

It was as hot as hot water. They all lay on their backs in their brown uniforms with their rifles and ammunition and grenades just thrown down and ate hot bully beef with the beer. The ground was like fine red powder that got everywhere, into your skin even, and everywhere you looked were big smooth trees and aloes with just a bit of scrub here and there. There was a river a few kilometres north – 'A natural barrier between freedom and communism,' some political officer had lectured them, and they had all looked at each other and said, 'Man, this *ou's* also *bosbefok*,' because the river was dry most of the year and terrorists came through whenever they wanted to, and in any numbers.

If you lay quite still on your back and let the beer enter your mouth drop by drop, it was bearable. You had to have beer, to dull your mind against the thoughts that came to you – of snakes, of the weird insect life in their surroundings, of the terrorists, of what your girl might be doing back home.

Peter Wilhelm/Sketch by Roger Clayton

Sometimes they listened to the radio, to the messages on 'Forces Favourites' all about 'missing you my darling' and 'longing to see you' and *'vasbyt'* and *'min dae'*. There were no original messages and one *ou* made them all laugh by making up dirty messages from the girls, talking in a falsetto voice in the middle of the bush, and everyone laughed, sure, but there was just this one tiny kernal of doubt in the back of an *ou's* mind. So you needed beer all right.

Suddenly one *ou* sat up and shouted: 'Come and get me you bladdy terrorist! I know you're out there!" And stuff like that.

So they all said:

'He's mad.'

'*Ja* man, he's *bosbefok*.'

'Shut up.'

Sam didn't say anything. He just lay there and thought: If I have just one more beer I might be able to sleep. Dear kindly God, why can't I sleep? It's such a little thing, just a little sleep, so you can get down into a nice mind-hole where no-one is going to shout at you or make you mad.

After a while some of the *ous* did sleep, lying there in their brown hot uniforms sweating out the beer.

But Sam could not sleep. After a while he felt acute discomfort and knew he would have to get up and urinate. But he didn't want to; he just wanted to lie there with his eyes closed. He even had a kind of flash dream – not the real thing – in which he did not have to get up because he had already urinated.

But in the end, of course, he had to get up and drag his legs into the bush. He was a shy young man and so chose a spot far from the other *ous*.

And there he met his first terrorist. Larger than life in a great bladdy camouflage uniform with a Kalashnikov AK 47 automatic, and grenades and an ammunition belt.

They faced each other in mutual amazement.

The heroic freedom fighter for the liberation of Azania, alias the terrorist, obviously could not make up his mind what to do. Sam considered running away, or even shouting to awaken his colleagues. But it was so hot, and he felt so weary and strained that he regarded any course of action as futile. He stood there with the sun making his head hot, and sweat dripped into his eyes like tears.

At last the terrorist spoke. 'I'm going to have to shoot you, you realise.'

'*Ja*, I can see that you have to do that.'

'I'm terribly sorry but it has to be done.'

'No man, I quite understand. If I was in your position I'd feel just the same.'

'I'm working for the freedom of all my country's peoples.'

'Look man, you don't have to make excuses. Just get on with it.'

The burst of automatic fire raised the *ous*, all of them first panicking, but then reacting well because of their training and getting their rifles ready and not looking at each other because they did not wish to see who was shit-scared and who not.

It was really bad finding Sam shot up like that; and it was also really bad to spend forty-eight hours without sleep looking for the terrorist, then making verbal and written reports of their dismal failure.

For by then Seth was well south.

Four Poems by Manfred Jurgensen

*Manfred Jurgensen's latest book of poems, **south africa transit**, is to be published by Ravan Press this month. His earlier collections, all published in Australia, were **signs and voices**, a **kind of dying** and a **winter's journey**. He has also published two novels, **break-out** and **Wehrersatz** (in German). The publication of his work here stresses once again that South African writers are not alone in their fight for free exp-pression.*

two arrivals

my knowledge of this land
was fashionably dressed
in doubts and anger
quoting itself
with daring alibis
and double-breasted motivation

i wore it
in the company of trackers
luring game
in front of microphones
imported lenses
or a shorthand memory
i'm left to decipher
on blank pages
as white as my skin
clothing the image
i try to shed in vain

spellbound by the call of brothers
to return home
i read sepamla
jensma and serote
although we do not yet live
either in one country
or in the one frail human skin
i recognise your voices
and feel your heartbeat
in my blood

could it be
my late incongruous appearance
in your home
marks the rushed dressing of a wound
inflicted by the thorny loss
we suffered when we bled alike
into difference

forgive such private
and presumptuous equation
the fearful hope of a grotesquely foreign brother

the western clown
dressed in your curses
ran out of tricks
a hundred laughs ago
i feel the sawdust in my eyes
the net is cast
for folly and its public shame
raised on applause

alone i stand in mockery
both yours and mine

durban revisited

outside the swingles' bar
he stood trying to sell
shoelaces he stole from
another metho-freak

he said he had no home
that he had been to war
he wanted me to tell
my fate i did not speak

it was my first white man
i saw begging his pride
rated below a rand

with no place left to hide
he gave his last command
refuse me if you can

at the cape (cape point)

the clash of oceans
pacifies this wintry afternoon
a spectacle so well-rehearsed
shipwrecks gather
on the high and dry
to witness its timely overcast
dimensions of a history
stranded in late discoveries

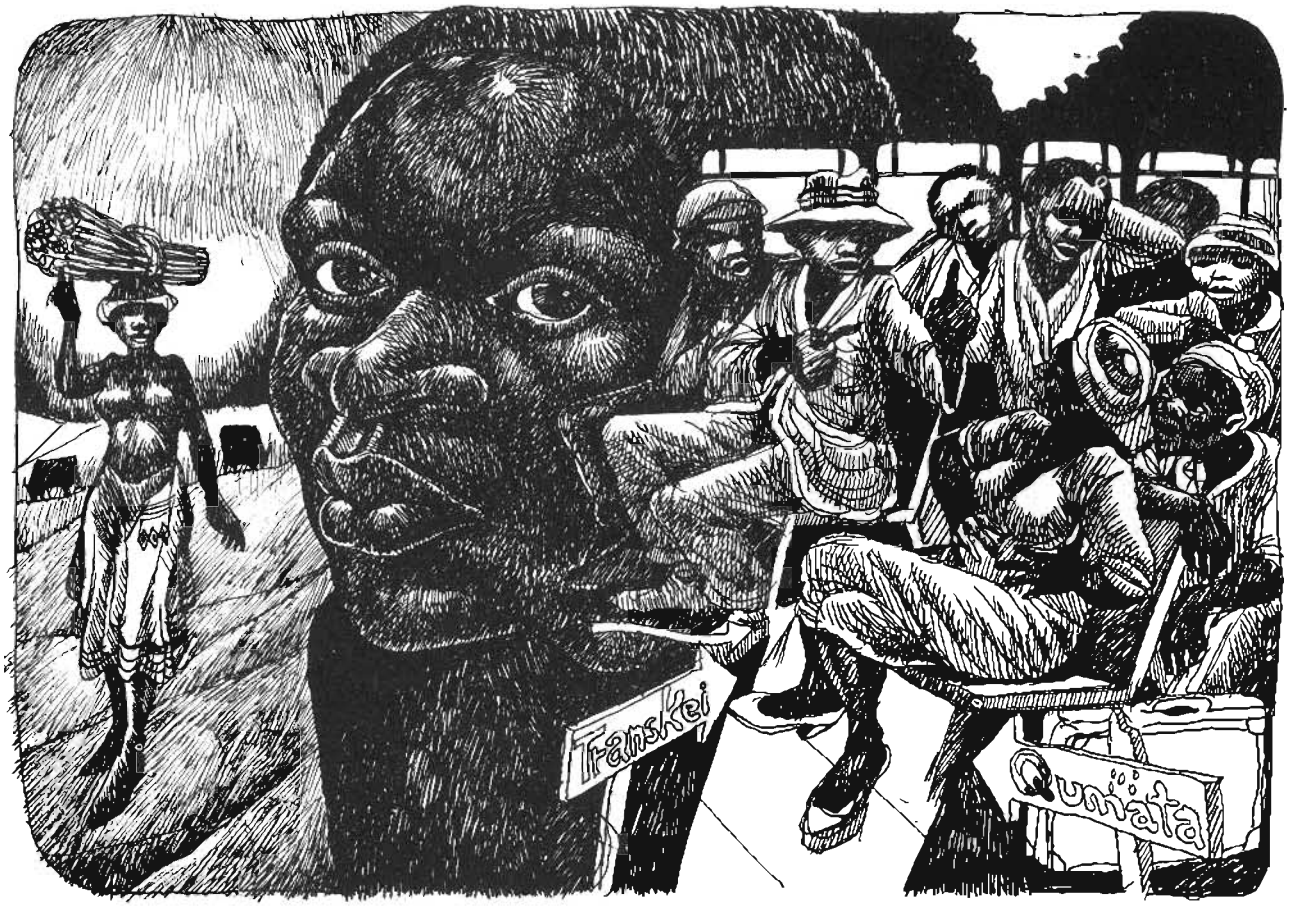
the blurred horizon
draws its hindsight from an aged baboon
this fellow creature which is cursed
with that other
blind discovery
the knowledge that hunger will outlast
the scope of man's identity
we drown in echoes of his cries

so let us stand here
for a while and watch how none too soon
images we ourselves dispersed
come together
in one focussed eye
again to see the sights of our past
and future in this stormy sea
the nature of these living ties

to a black student

your skin is borne
out by your being
the sight you scorn
still blinds your seeing

pity the white
with his big white lies
he has no sight
for he has no eyes



3 Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion

An extract from

a story by Mtutuzeli Matshoba, illustrated by Mzwakhe.

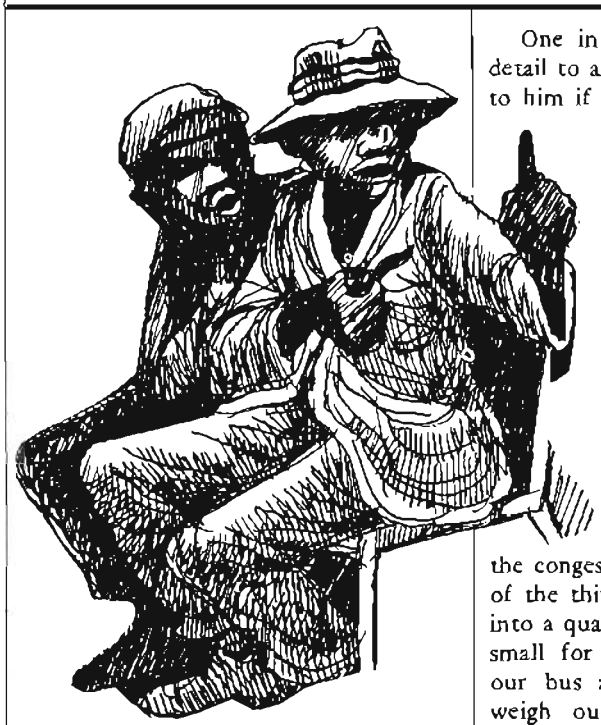
All these remembrances of an uncertain past flooded my mind like kaleidoscopic dreams re-enacted on the hills, the natural monuments stooping out there in the grey darkness. Many other eras had passed over them since time immemorial and they had just stood there, as immovable and unperturbed as when our train tore across them, now silently testifying to an epoch of oppression.

One of my friends began to snore. The rattle of the train, the singing of my brothers and sisters in the corridor and the discomfort of the people's class coach gradually and unnoticeably faded from my consciousness, leaving me to the mercy of a fitful sleep.

I was the first to be woken by the morning twilight. We were at Burghersdorp. The name took my mind back by about three hundred years: to those people history called the burghers, colonialists who came to South Africa during the era of the first white settlement. They would stand on an elevated spot on a piece of fertile land and let their eyes roam the horizons, all the while declaring everything in sight theirs — the land, the people and animals within the radius of their sight.

Please pardon the interpositions, dear reader. I find it hard to look at a country without its historical background looming over it. Maybe this is because of my belief that what is today is determined to a great extent by what happened in the past.

The arrival of our train in that cold, small town was an event which had caused loss of sleep to a number of young people who had risen early in order to honour its passing. Many of them studied our faces as if they had expected to recognise long-lost and returned kinsmen. When they realised that we were only some of those countless faces they saw once, at the station, and never again, they put on masks of disappointment. Their faces, however, told me that the following day or later, when other trains went past the station, they would be there, determinedly waiting for people to arrive from other parts of the country to add some change, no matter how insignificant, to the Burghersdorp scene. I added my urban origin, though nothing to put much store by, to my short list of blessings. I also found an explanation as to why the human drift is more towards the cities than in the opposite direction; why men prefer being brutalized by urban hostel existence to spending their lives in the countryside. The latter



might be a healthier environment according to scientific argument, but my heart will never be parted from my polluted, rat-race city background. The country was too dull and therefore mentally unhealthy. How could one develop a keen and creative imagination where the cow set the pace and the silence and loneliness of uninhabited spaces buzzed in one's ears?

We started moving and the faces of the country people sagged even more.

After Sterkstroom, which was practically the same as Burghersdorp, we reached Queenstown, bored nearly to death by women hawking: 'Dresses and *voorskots* for your loved ones at only five rands, brothers.' I was going to switch to a bus for the last leg of my journey, and I cheerfully welcomed the change as it meant that I had arrived at the threshold of country into which I had never ventured before. And now, perhaps, I would personally find out why the system and its cronies – black and white – were so eager to have me 'volunteer' as a citizen of a land so many mountains and valleys away from my birthplace.

I alighted from the train and bade my friend farewell from the platform.

You would never have said it was the same *amagoduka*. So meek and docile to the point where it caused one to despair, on the Reef! Fearing their baases like death. Perhaps a whiff of home atmosphere just beyond the horizons had something to do with the explosive excitement.

One in an overall was describing in detail to another just what he would do to him if he ever tried to get into the queue in front of him: 'I will remove my axe from my baggage, chop your thick neck and, while you're jumping around like a decapitated chicken, finish you off with a stick to teach you some good manners!'

The other dared him to try. From the look of their magnificent physiques, I decided that the duel would not be easy for either. Poor brothers, fighting among themselves, little aware that the congestion had occurred because we of the third denomination were fenced into a quarter of the platform area, too small for our great numbers, to buy our bus and train tickets as well as weigh our baggage. I'm telling you, the queue to the bus ticket office was like a rugby scrum consisting of more than a dozen teams. The bus would leave long before I reached the window. A little imagination, involving the men who were weighing the luggage in a slightly corrupt scheme, got me a ticket in no time. The Info Department would have given me a top post, then and there.

An hour later the bus rumbled out of the station, filled to capacity with us people of the third denomination. My sympathies went to those who had come in last and had to stand all the way to wherever they were going. Nevertheless none of them showed any dissatisfaction with their lot. I reckoned that they were only too used to discomfort.

Out on the tarmac road which had told me before we'd gone far that it just rolled and rolled, on and on for eternal distances, conversation started rising to a volume that swallowed the thunder of our machine, subduing it to a monotonous hum.

I shared the back seat of the bus with five others, one of them about twenty years old but living up surprisingly well to the men's discussions. I concluded that the labour camps had doubled the rate of his maturing.

'Tixo!' exclaimed the man furthest from me, in the other corner of the back seat, next to the manly youth. *'Tixo!'* he repeated. 'I'm going to see my wife, the girl for whom I sacrificed *izinkomo zikabawo.'*

'I bet she has forgotten that you gave up your father's cattle for her and is still making you pay for her being at your home,' the man-child responded.

'What you mean by that, *kwedini?'* asked his mate.

'She's going to demand money as soon as she gets the chance to be alone with you. At least she's expecting it – *anditsho?'*

'Tyhini! Unyanisile kwedini. The truth in your words cannot be denied. And to think that I had to leave her to seek work *eRawutini* as soon as we got married. To work for her! Although I scarcely enjoy her companionship.'

Another, wearing a heavy coat in spite of the heat interjected from the seat in front of us: *'Hayi, madoda.* Don't say that about the good wives. They keep the families together while we are away for months on end, even for years. Otherwise what would we return to find where we were born?' His voice reached a crescendo: 'Ruins! *Anditsho?'*

This caught the imagination of a few others within earshot.

'Here's a man who knows the facts of life, the facts of existence,' assented one who had been concentrating on a carton of sorghum two seats in front. *'Bamba ndoda, sela wehlise unxano* while I elucidate the meaning of your words. I can see they don't understand,' he continued, stretching his arm over heads to hand the carton to the man whose opinion he appreciated.

The other one received it with both hands, removed his hat and held it in his left hand before he took a sip. He smacked his lips and said, gratefully: *'Awu, camagu!* As if you knew how parched my throat was.'

While he took slow gulps from the carton, the owner went on: *' 'Umfazi yintsika yekhaya.'* (The woman is the pillar of the home.) *'Ikhaya yintsika yesizwe.'* (The home is the pillar of the tribe or nation – tribe in this instance.) 'So the woman maintains the tribe alive. She bears the children and brings them up while you drink *utshwala* and sleep with concubines *aseRawutini ezinkomponi*; sometimes forgetting or simply omitting to send her the money with which to buy even a sack of mealies. But when you return you find her there, the children alive and growing . . . '

'Mh, mh-h. *Ewe. Yinyaniso leyo,'* some of the listeners agreed. A young lady showed a bright smile. I felt that if it were not a men's discussion she would contribute.

'Kodwa, uthini ngale ndawo yamakrexe, mkhuluwa? They also have lovers. Don't they? Would you defend them with the same breath with which you are accusing us of having concu-

bines?' asked the man-youth with an indomitable expression on his face.

The man who had been addressing us from a standing position looked down thoughtfully at the young man and said: 'Say, *kwedini*. Do you already have a wife?'

'No, *mkhuluwa Asoze ndithathe futhi.*' (And I never will be betrothed). 'Marry a woman and leave her to the mercy of *amahlalela* (the loafers)! Never!'

'Whether what you're saying about marrying is a childish dream or not, you must know one thing and that is: *Ikrexe elingaziwayo alikho!*' (An unknown adulterer is as good as non-existent). 'The important thing is that you find your home still existing because of your wife. Your mother in your case. She does not ask you anything about your city concubines. She knows they are there — men can't exist without women — but she never asks. The little maintenance you bring back to her after being fleeced by concubines she accepts without question. Don't she?'

'She should, of course. Why not? If she doesn't I ask her about all the money that I've been sending her. I want it back!' the one who had sparked off the discussion spoke with typical chauvinist arrogance, as 'libbers' would see it.

The woman who had smiled at their conversation earlier could not suppress her views in respect of manhood anymore. Her retort corresponded with my own silent viewpoint: *'Uxolo, buti,'* (excuse me, brother) 'but what have your children been eating all the time? You think she's been tightfisted with your money when your children wanted food from her? *Ninjalo nina madoda. Ibe nifana nonke kunjalo nje!'* (You're all like that, you men. Moreover you're all the same!) 'You enjoy being referred to as family heads. Father, father, all the time, but you forget the very tummies of the reasons for your fatherhood status.'

'Suka, woman!' returned one who seemed to care little about women's views. 'You would never be able to start and support families without *amadoda.* What makes you think that you're the more responsible parties?'

'Of course we are! *Lo tata,*' (this family man) 'has just been telling you that we are the pillars of the tribes and you did not dispute it.'

'Madoda, this woman! Whatever made you jump into a men's discussion? Because now I'm going to show you just how inconsiderate you black women are: Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, all those that I've come across are nothing but selfish creatures.'

'The same as you black men who are so eager to start families which you end up failing to support, or grousing about.'

'Say, *mfazi.* Do you know that *singamakhoboka nje,* it is partly because of your self-centredness?'

'How, *buti,* how are you slaves? *Cacisa.*'

'In this way:' (he cleared his throat to enable his voice to come out smoothly) 'you forget that it is no longer like when we were born — when there was maize aplenty and cows with bloated udders to milk, and all our fathers had to do was plough the fields and keep their stock in good shape. Today those luxuries are all gone and because you insist on families, children all the time, we, the reluctant fathers, like this boy here, have to travel across hills and mountains to sell our labour cheaply *esiLungwini.* Don't you see that we would rather be slaves and stay like animals in those compounds than watch you and your children starving? You use your birthgiving nature to make us slave for you, and when we give you the little that we sweat blood for, still you're not satisfied. You call us failures as if *ilizwe* was governed by us and not the white man.'

In other words we're being blackmailed into slavery by the children they give us Interesting. True to a certain extent, when one thinks of most of our sisters who regard matrimony as their sole ambition and salvation. Leave everything, education, government and work to the men. Fold your arms and watch with hawks' eyes for the one that'll flounder into the pit of the rapture of your companionship, thus limiting the scope of his thinking to work alone, slaving in order to feed, clothe and house an ever-growing family, without any chance to pursue the very natural virtues of justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude. Fock! I'm also not getting married until I come across a sister who does not conform to that base expectation!

'Kodwa ke buti, both we and the children are yours. You can say "your children" to your wife but you are equally answerable for them. Even you would not be here damning womanhood were it not for the man-wife arrangement of life. It is only a matter of accepting one's end of the responsibility without any grumbles, in order to make life bearable under present conditions. Under the present conditions of men's making! *Andithi?'*

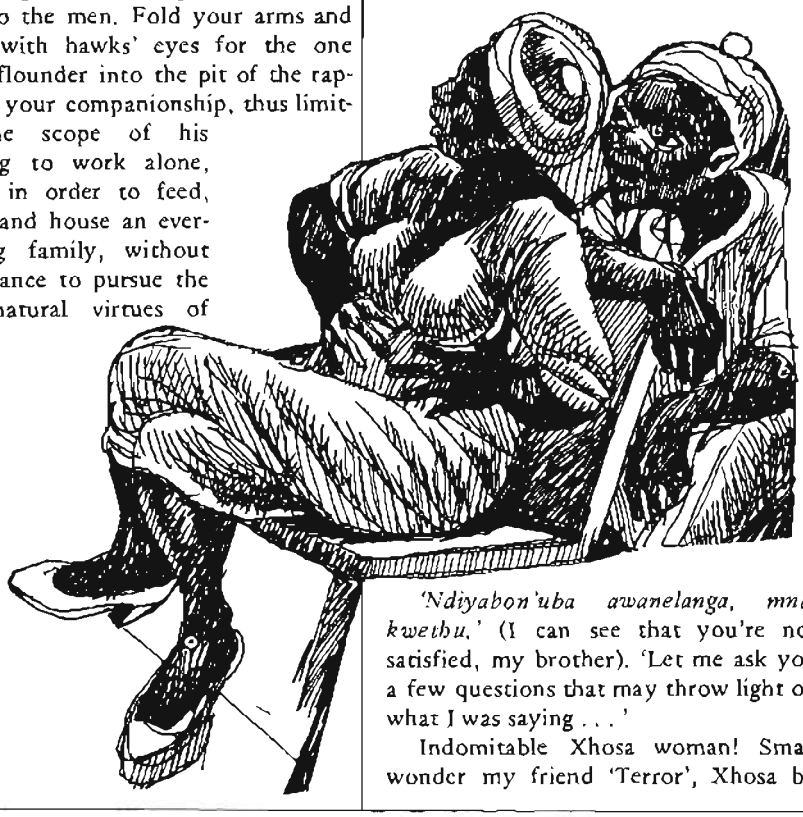
'Eh! Er . . . what do you mean "of men's making"? Did men create the world?'

'We don't know who created it, for sure. But the present state of the world is definitely of your making,' the lady answered vociferously, sweeping her arm in a semi-circle which showed that she meant all of us wearing trousers in that bus.

'He-e, madoda! This woman. In the first place why did you enter a men's conversation?' said the man and turned his eyes towards us for support. But none was forthcoming.

The lady retaliated: 'Your father could ask your mother such a question. So could my father, my mother. But I am a woman *wesimanje-manje* (of this time). You can't ask *me* such a question.'

Everybody burst out laughing at that. The man looked like a cornered rabbit.



'Ndiyabon'uba awanelanga, mnakwethu,' (I can see that you're not satisfied, my brother). 'Let me ask you a few questions that may throw light on what I was saying . . .'

Indomitable Xhosa woman! Small wonder my friend 'Terror', Xhosa by

birth, vows always never to marry a woman of the same extraction as his. 'They always have an argument to put up against men. Our mothers were the last disciplined lot of Xhosa women. My sisters — boy!' — and he ends up by wincing.

My answer to him is always that they are all like that from East to West and North to South of this globe, irrespective of ancestry, and that we need to mobilize in time to defend our divine right to make war and reduce the world to rubble.

As if she had been with me before the bus trip, she was saying: 'You allege that you are *ningamakhoboka* (slaves) because of us. Now answer this: is your state of subjugation not a result of your, er, how shall I put it — I'm sorry to say, your cowardice? Or your inability to foresee disaster? Of your own making? Where were the men when the land and cattle were lost? Something closer to our present reality: is it not your own so-called chiefs, men mind you, who have destroyed our very last subsistence by accepting *lo Zimelegeqe wenu* (this independence of yours) which removed even the faintest hope of developing the land?'

What she actually wanted to ask was, in simple terms: why did men allow other men to impose premature, tribal *uhuru* upon them? Or why did they accept 'self rule' without any economic structure to start with? What did they expect to live from? Where did they expect to work except where they had been working all the time, that is, in white monopolized industry?

Which reminded me where I was bound. I nudged the man next to me and asked: 'Sorry to divide your attention. Say, how far are we from the Transkei? When are we going to reach Umtata?'

He pulled his left sleeve up to look at his watch. 'We're almost in Transkei now. Qamata will be our first stop. Umtata is still far, far away. You'll reach it by sunset. I'm getting off halfway at *e*Ngcobo.'

That was not good news to me at all. Sitting crammed up in a violently vibrating vehicle from twelve to five or six in the evening was not my idea of a pleasant journey, despite the interesting conversation of the people whose *uhuru* I so ardently wished to witness.

'Hayi, madoda. Iyathetha le ntokazi! Imibuzo yayo iyahlaba.' (This maiden can surely speak. Her questions are also thorny.) This was all the men could say in reply — a concession, perhaps, that they had made love whilst Rome was burning. I also interpreted their response as reflecting a subconscious fear in the men to speak against their chiefs. For the lady had thrown the gauntlet before the men: to take it up they would have to criticize the rule under which they lived.

Mtutuzeli Matshoba's first collection of stories to be titled 'Call Me Not A Man', will be available from Ravan Press shortly. Who is Matshoba, and what inspired him to become a storyteller of this time? Here are some extracts from the autobiographical note with which the book opens.

I was born in 1950 in the early Soweto of Orlando (East and West), Shantytown, White City Jabavu, Pimville and Moroka. Today's Soweto, the sprawling dirt- and vice-polluted giant matchbox city, was more or less my age when my environment began to register in my consciousness . . .

Half-way through these first four years the loneliness of being the only child, and away from my parents for most of the time, was suddenly soothed by the arrival of a younger brother, Diliza, who would one day find himself in chains, en route to Robben Island — thus inspiring 'A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana' for our magazine, *Staffrider*.

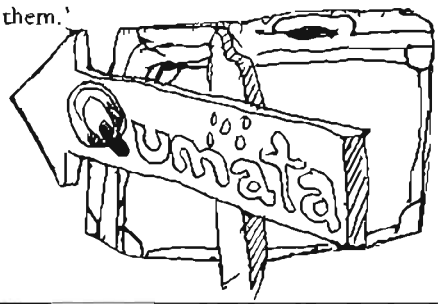
. . . I entered puberty and launched on an adventurous growth. Adventurous because it was hard, as it still is, to grow in the dog-kennel city. On Saturday and Sunday mornings there was always a corpse covered by wind-blown papers in Mohale Street, which passes my home on its way from the station to the hostel for migrant workers. From time to time someone that I knew would stab someone else that I knew, fatally. Occasionally someone would hang himself. My friends started going to the Van Ryn place of detention for juvenile delinquents or to 'Number Four', and returned to relate their episodes. I knew prison long before my turn came to pay a visit there.

To save me from all this my standard 5 and 6 teacher, Samuel 'Maviyo' Ngcobo who had trained a keen eye on me, advised my parents to send me to boarding school after standard 6 . . .

There was a strike the following year. It was raining when we were sent home. My friend, Thandi Jaantjies (a Xhosa) did not return, and I heard later that year that he had been buried alive in some mine. At the end of the year I passed Junior Certificate with a first class, and regretted that I had not put more effort into it. The new principal, Engelbrecht, had caused the strike . . .

I worked as an 'assistant' draughtsman at a die-cutting factory . . . My boss began unearthing new clients. One day he asked me: 'Matshoba, how would you like to be a millionaire?' out of the blue. I did not give any notice when I left. The firm went bankrupt a year or two later . . .

I want to reflect through my works life on my side of the fence, the black side: so that whatever may happen in the future, I may not be set down as 'a bloodthirsty terrorist'. So that I may say: 'These were the events which shaped the Steve Bikos and the Solomon Mahlangus, and the many others who came before and after them.'



Salt-rind moon, steer the deep-moving

Salt-rind moon, steer the deep-moving
tides to drown
iron-red rusted wrecks upon
these scattered reefs,
and watch their dead rolling
passage to burial on cold-shoulder shores.

Mariner, the seabirds mocking, dance the air
above your beachéd bones and
white sea washes through
your ribs
Your love no longer waits for you.

When Biscay rollers come thundering
across the harbour-wall
to batter the very town,
the looking-glass shivers upon its wall,
coals settle lower in the grate.
Your love lies sleeping.

Ah, you care not on such a wanton night
for you are upon the sea to walk
a broken hull
beneath the stars and scudding cloud.
The compass points another course
at the changing of hands.

Julian Crawford-Begg

NIGHT SCHOOL IN LANGA

Night hums with living:
Sounds seep into the
Stillness of a room
Where minds move
In a symphony of silence
Attune with the exam paper.
A siren wails
And more distant still,
Shouting, laughing,
An engine revved –
Intrusions
Irrelevant
As chocolate wrappings
In a concert chamber.

Evelyn Cresswell

THE VIEW

I see
from where
within pink chintz linen I sit
before the leaping log fire
and Oxford golden marmalade,
far-off views
of grey crags hidden
half by spindrift,
a thready cascade
to green glass trout waters,
and I hear a black voice
ask me
for the shoes.

E.M. MacPhail

IN A RHODESIAN GARDEN

It is August and the months are closing.
War rattles in the provinces, bombs
Blow out in cities. There is talk
Of peace and more murders in the bush.
Sons leave and do not return. Once
Were proud funerals and a sharp salute;
But now only the empty prayer,
The smiling photograph upon the dresser.
It is August and the days are numbered.

The garden is our last retreat.
The blue-gums along the fence,
The purple wisteria in bloom above the stoep.
Our happy days still haunt us.
This hour when light is mauve and warm,
The birds quiet and a drunken bat
Careens above the lawn, once held us
Perfectly. I can see it all: the house
Against a draining sky, a couple
In garden chairs upon the grass.
One room is lit: behind thick curtains
A houseboy sets the knives and forks.

That time has passed. Now soldiers lurch
In Meikles' bar with tales of villages
They burnt to get the truth. We talk
Our cocktails dry of friends on farms:
The tobacco fields untended, the dog
Found dead outside the kitchen door.
All swings about these points: the war
Is closing, the roads dangerous . . . but hear,
They're playing *Sweet Bananas* for the troops.

It could have been paradise on earth.
Behind our eyes windows look down-valley
From farmhouses where sunlight slides across
Abandoned afternoons. We will not live there again.
Here we play out the closing of a world
At tennis or bridge, sweating slightly
In the heavy air; always cordial,
Always beyond hope and despair:
Hearing of one northbound, while
Someone else is leaving for the south.

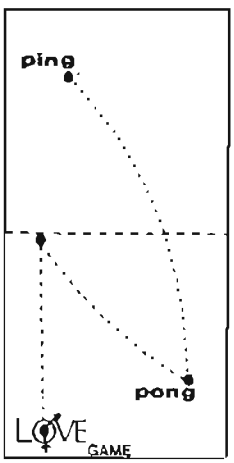
The times are against us. We are still
Strangers here, though nowhere else
Is home. But we were always fair,
Thought justice the right of every man.
Can it be we were wrong about the country?
That it was ever just outside our reach:
Only a conjectured colony,
A coloured piece upon an office map
From which we'll run unpitied refugees.
No. It cannot be imagined without us.

Mike Nicol

Three poems by Essop Patel

BLACK RECOLLECTIONS (16.6.1979)

JUST A GAME



BLACK ANALOGY

the night
is black,
she is
black,

so is
coal,

when kindled
she glows
bright and
beautiful.

A BRIDGE

You created a bridge for me,
I have no weight on me now
The beauty of my soil is yours
Yet how I yearn for the banks
Of the Zambesi
Meandering through Zimbabwe
My brothers crying –
In Zimbabwe
Drowning on the banks of the great river
Drowning many though'

Len Morgan

SONNET (THOUGHT)

The pedestrian Mind
has motorised thought
to one-way traffic of in turn,
impulse and response.
In fact that is reflex, for thought,
far from so circumscribed
knows only those limits
inherent in language and image.
Is not the life that flashes
before a drowning man
of his thought a short-circuit?
Thought will only occupy the physically sound
who have interest and leisure to reflect
upon the situation found.

P.T. Sorensen

On Mayfair station

On Mayfair station
strangers come and go

Quick in succession
their nameless faces
looking in;

Then framed in glass
go flashing by,

As into trains
they disappear.

Jasmine Mall

WOODEN SPOON

I carved a spoon from a rose-root
and, though thornless, its shape was strange,
conforming with the twisted nature
of the rose's journey into the earth.

Grandfather carved a straight spear
of a fine yellow wood;
melted ironstone with oxfat
and beat the blade on a rock,
and, blessing it with leaves and milk
he whirled it into the air.
In response to gravity
it pierced his heart.

Now I eat with a crooked spoon
which I have dug from my master's garden
and it pierces my heart.

K. Zwide

THE WRONG DOOR

Dreaming of his mistress
the baboon did not bother
to read the writing
which said: 'Non-dragon munchers only'.
He passed through only
to be accosted by a red
balloon who wanted to
know where his pass was.
When the baboon spluttered
custard in the eyes of the balloon, it burst, and
in so doing spat such a degree
of vilification that the
baboon hastened on; only
to be stopped by a cobra
in green who said he was in
that zone reserved for Bantu only, and that if he did not
show the necessary papers,
he would be riveted against
the wall and would feel such
degrees of panic as are only
experienced by Antarctic cruisers
on their route through the
frozen south. The baboon (who
was still dreaming of his mistress) did not realise who
he was dealing with and swore
with such a degree of venom that
the cobra who was worth his
kitchen salt said he would be
hanged in Pretoria to the
full salute of the stars.

Roy Joseph Cotton

ANNIVERSARY

for the bereaved of 1976 – 1977

Since the fallen, silent, lay in state
Since the biers marched shoulder-high in mass procession
Since we planted our shrouded dead in earth
– that They might grow –
three times this globe has reeled around the sun.

friend: i know the pain that ices down your face
the cry that sorrows from the inside wound
the void that tears us in the night

but
the passing of these bloodied years
are rolling beats on muffled drums
& crescendos of our struggle
summon a court come to judge:

scarred backs, empty plates, bulldozed pondoks
exhibit testimony of our lives
while fire & shrapnel leap horizon's barricade
pronouncing the sentence of the cataclysm.

Keith Gottschalk

A SOUTH AFRICAN DAY

The police vans rattle
through our windy cities.
Everything is as it
usually is. The garden
'boy' is friendly and i
feel pain as i watch him
spade the earth. The milk
'boy' is called 'Milkie'
by the woman who works
in the chemist. The delivery
'boy' calls me 'Mister Roy'
and does not mind when i
tell him the wind is a
dangerous thief. The suburbs
are sunny. Everything is
as it normally is.

Roy Joseph Cotton

...I was treated to a cross-eyed trial...

"Don't worry, brother. In Africa you must cry first so you can laugh strong"

The Road is Much Longer

A Story by Johnny Rogers, illustrated by Andy Mason

I'd hitched a ride in Durban and was well on the way to Swaziland. It was Saturday, a normal day except that a police sergeant at a roadblock way north of old Tugela found four *kaartjies* of *zol* in my bag, and arrested me.

And the sun was hot and a meercat dashed across the road.

While taking me to the cells at Ubombo, the local shrine of justice, the sergeant called me 'pal' and asked what I saw in *dagga*. I said heads, stems and seeds, but he didn't get it. Being the first whitey to visit those cells in five years, I was naturally the conversation piece at the charge office and while I was having my fingerprints taken, the station commander and his boys filed in to have a look at the latest exhibit.

'Was daai kak in jou ore,' he said with Al Caponesque charisma as he caught sight of the two stars hanging from my left lobe. Realizing immediately that our concepts of justice differed greatly and that I was after all at their *porsie*, I decided on the polite approach.

'What the fuck do you think they are you fat globule,' I thought, looking at the floor. I of course said nothing.

I was put into the juvenile cell which overlooked the convicts' courtyard. An area thirty foot square with high walls and a steel grid over the top. The black prisoners took their meals and spent much of the day in this courtyard.

Three kids were transferred into the main cells so that I could have my own exclusive cell. The toilet bowl in my own cell had been smashed and a bucket full of the most odiferous and intensely undesirable shit stood menacingly in the corner. As a result I left all the windows open to the chill and whistle of the beautiful Ubombo mountain breeze.

I had no smokes and there was no graffiti on the walls, except a drawing of an ox and the word *'ixoxo'* written below. So I did a few exercises, scraped the gunge from between my toes and then lay down on the thin felt mat and listened to the oppressed but sparkling laughter and chatter of the people in the adjoining cells. The people of the great Zulu nation.

I rose Sunday morning, rubbing my stiff back, to the sound of the main doors into the cells being opened. The lieutenant and two black policemen pulled in and assembled the prisoners in the courtyard.

'Any complaints?' mumbled the lieutenant, eyeing the ground. He was always eyeing the bloody ground, when he spoke to anyone. In a way he looked like Brando in 'The Godfather', but he definitely lacked something. After all, Brando got the part.

A fat Zulu sergeant, who illegally supplied the prisoners with basic luxuries like tobacco, etc. at exorbitant prices, handled the frisking. Nothing like a Sunday morning frisk to set the mood. Anyway the sergeant was most careful not to find the money hidden on the prisoners which kept his belly jolly and constantly threatening his tunic buttons. The lieutenant then pulled into my cell and asked something of the floor, if there were any complaints. I briefly scanned the floor but couldn't detect any sign of an answer. He then looked quickly at me and repeated the question. 'Oh it's me he's talking to,' I thought to myself. 'Why the fuck does he always look at the ground then?'

'Uh uh, no complaints lieutenant, sir', I answered with intense phoney respect.

It was then that my confusion about lieutenant's spineless eyeball habits left me. I noticed that beneath the half closed lids lay a pair of awfully crossed eyeballs. Not only did this frogular, globular unfortunate talk from the bottom of a lavatory bowl, but he was also cross-eyed. No wonder Brando got the part.

Anyway, the uniformed left and the prisoners settled into their morning mealie meal. After breakfast the inmates wandered by my window and looked at whitey in his little cell. There was much greeting.

'Ja, inkosaan.'

'Gonjaan unloondo.'

'Ja, chebe.'

I then saw something which grabbed my heart and tore me to pieces. A boy about ten years old was showering in the corner of the courtyard. In the cold overcast light of that Ubombo Sunday morning, the boy's eyes were wide and confused, his little penis shrivelled, stiff and purple, from the cold. He finished scrubbing his feet and dried himself with a facecloth, the only one in the cell block. I felt empty and helpless. In my weakness I cried and swore, and then remembering the logical conclusion I'd reached about humanity, I tried to pull

myself together. Logic, however, could never have erased the emotion and profound hurt I felt at that moment.

The boy was caught crossing from Mozambique into South Africa in search of food. I was raving on adrenalin and freaked out. I pictured my own *laaity broo* hungry and in a prison cell. Can you imagine your little brother in a cell? No, well then open your eyes. Because that lighty in Ubombo is your brother. And you don't need to be a child of the sixties to believe it.

I was partially subdued and cheered by the arrival of Open. He walked up to my window and said, 'Hello brother. My name is Open Moses Brown. I'm a *bruin ou*, classified coloured. My father was a negro seaman who loved my mother in forty-five. She's a Swazi and a good woman. I was caught visiting my mother in Swaziland without a passport. Also suspected terrorism. Don't worry brother, this is Africa,' he said laughing, when I mentioned the young boy. 'In Africa you must cry first so that you can laugh strong.'

'Look at the Zulu nation!' he exclaimed, pointing towards the rest of the laughing cavorting inmates. 'Always just to laugh and laugh. Hey fuck man, these people's happy. Excuse me, we are going to have a small church.'

The prisoners sat in a ring around an old man with a bible who was in for theft. Completely free of inhibitions they sang a Zulu hymn full of the vibrance and harmony which settles the soul and fills the air with an unaccountable divinity. The prisoners handled the service with gusto, and the sincerity and freshness which emanated from the confines of that grey courtyard were more powerful by far than that which I'd seen in all my years of strong Catholic upbringing.

Clang! The sound of a key in the main courtyard door made the prisoners move swiftly back to the cells in a token of respect, through fear, for the policemen about to enter the courtyard.

A young constable and the Zulu sergeant had come to bring me my lunch. A stainless steel bowl with bread and marmite and half a tomato was thrust under the metal bars at the cell door.

'Thank you very much constable,' I said in my most grateful sounding voice. 'Constable, sir, do you think possibly that constable could let me have one of constable's cigarettes please, sir.' Christ, I was dying for a Texan.

The fellow produced a pack of filters, took one out and broke off the filter saying, 'Sorry, we are not allowed to give prisoners filters, in order to prevent suicide.' Apparently, if you burn a filter and then press it, it gets really sharp, sharp enough to cause diabolical damage if applied maliciously to the jugular or any other mainstream vein. The thing was, though, there were enough pieces of sharp porcelain from the smashed toilet bowl to equip an army of suicidals, not to mention the endless possibilities of getting a really lethal gas chamber going with the aid of that old shit bucket, honking away in the corner.

In fact things were getting bloody dangerous in there. I had visions of myself committing suicide by defacing my body with large and painful pieces of lavatory bowl – pain and suffering!

I thanked the constable and after a tentative nibble at that lousy chow got into my coffee and newly defused cigarette. That first drag made me literally limp at the loins. Brother! Had I been hanging for a *fag*!

By now the prisoners' food had arrived. Mealie meal, instant gravy, and coffee. They shared it out and got into it. It wasn't long before they were piling up the empty dishes and making cigarettes with boxer and newspaper. A few of them hung around my window and checked me out.

Gumede was a butcher in Mandini. Someone sold him three oxen and whatever the deal was – I don't know. Anyway, Gumede got three years for stocktheft. He appeared at my window, his open smiling face full of the tales of Zululand. Tales only a Zulu knows.

'Hello sir, why you in?'

'I got *borpered* with four *kaartjies*, and you?' I replied, eager for conversation. He told me what I just told you about the three years, then laughed.

'*Owu owu owu*, four *kaartjies*. This police must be a *skaapie* man. Mandini has lot of *zol*. Me too I'm to smoke. My father too he smoke too much. It must grow. It must burn. And then you can go to jail. This place, jail! *Owu!*' he became stern for a minute. 'If the Bantu people want to live they must pass through here. Freedom is a high price you must pay,' Gumede laughed. He was paying with three years of his life in an obscure and dingy cell in the Ubombo mountains.

He spoke of his wife and three kids in Mandini and told me that I looked like Jesus with my hair parted in the middle. I told him I felt like Judas. He laughed and told me that in Africa the sun is strong.

I stretched out that night and was enveloped by a sense of calm. The feeling I once described in a song:

How strange
I've been set upon by this calm
This shackless shimmering
No harm, storm or alarm
How strange
I've been set upon by this calm.

This initiation into yet another aspect of pre-Azanian reality had helped me feel a certain comfort in the cell. I felt like I was in an outhouse of my home. Not quite comfortable but just as real as any place else.

My dreams that night were fragmented and fantastical. A huge bird came and picked me out of my cell and flew off towards a distant hilltop. A soldier with sheep's eyes and a licence round his forehead shot the bird with a supermarket till. I fell to the ground and became a ten foot bush. A new born baby ate the flower on my head and called me father. A key slipped into the lock. It was the police coming to take my prints for the fifth time before going to court. I jumped up and put my shoes on. The courtyard was empty as I followed the constable out.

The court scene was dry. There were four of us in the court house and I was the only one on my side. The cross-eyed lieutenant was the prosecutor and the magistrate always spoke to his desk.

When he eventually looked at me I started suspecting that my optics were taking leave of their senses. I checked out my hand to make sure my focusing machinery was still in order. It was. That meant – oh no! The magistrate

DURBAN

was also squint as a chameleon in the prime of mating season. I was given a cross-eyed trial and then taken to the charge office for a dose of bureaucratic buffoonery. While I was hanging out in the charge office being polite, Open Moses Brown walked by in a squad of prisoners coming from the court. He held up three fingers when he saw me. Three years. It goes like that doesn't it, hey doesn't it?

I wanted to talk to Open, but by the time I was put into my cell the prisoners were also locked away. My friend had left Durbs in the morning with my bail and hadn't yet arrived. He must have been hassling for rides all the way up. I lay back knowing that I'd be out in the morning. I never saw Open or Gumede again. They're up there now. They'll be there when Open's girl has their baby, when Gumede's youngest born starts school. They'll be there while the privileged take tea and talk of the Great Western Civilization with its justice, intellect and etiquette. Oh *ja!*

Wrapped in a blanket I sat and listened to the night sounds and breeze of the uBombo mountains. I heard Open laugh. The boy was sobbing. I sang a song that Africa taught me.

GUYO BOOK CLUB/SIBASA

THE SNARE

I hear a sudden cry of pain!
There is a man in a snare:
Now I hear the cry again
But I cannot tell from where.

But I cannot tell from where
He is calling out for aid:
Crying on the frightened air,
Making everything afraid.

Making everything afraid,
Wrinkling up his Black face
As he cries again for aid;
And I cannot find the place!

And I cannot find the place
Where his foot is in the snare:
Black brother! Oh, Black brother!
I am searching everywhere!
As I stand firm for aid.

Mafhungo Murwa-thavhanyedza

ANIMALS

I wish I could turn and live with animals; they are so
placid and self-contained;
I stand and look at them, long and long.
They do not sweat and whine about their condition;
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep over their sins;
They do not make me sick bewailing their injustices to God;
None is dissatisfied — none is demented with the mania of
owning things;
None kneels to another nor to his kind that lived
thousands of years ago:
None is bound, even in the chains of slavery, nor
unrespectable over the whole world.

Mafhungo Murwa-Thavhanyedza

WHICH WAY MY BROTHER?

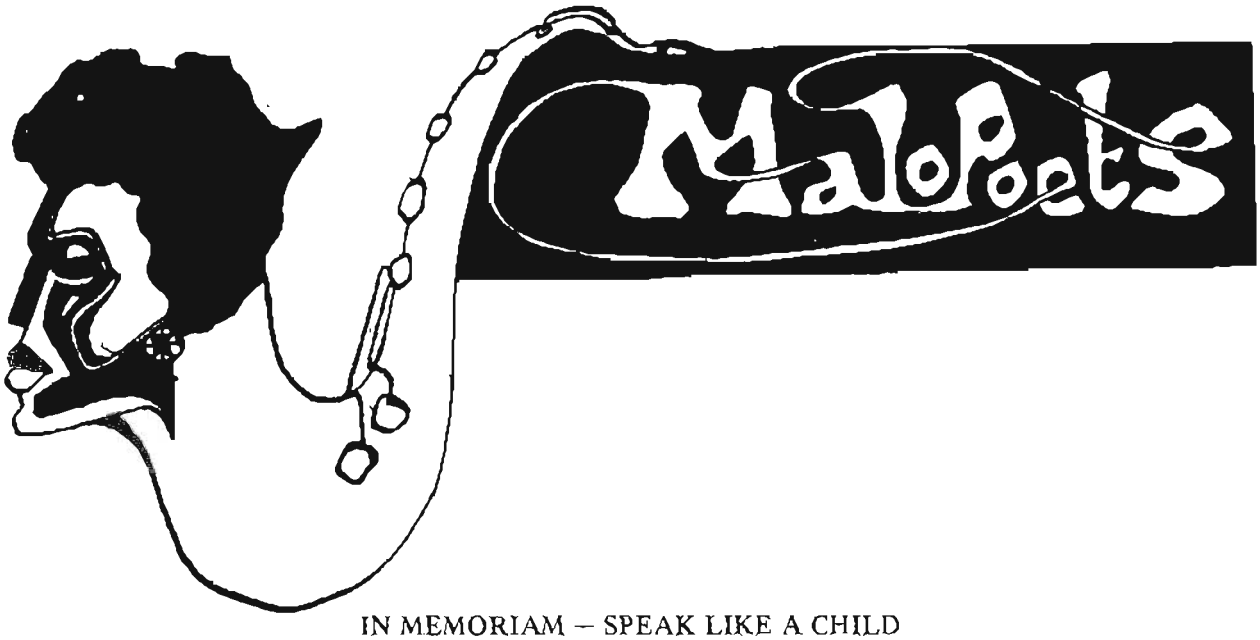
Are you going or coming?
Don't tell me you don't know,
For your elder brother northwards you saw,
Your uncle in the cooler you visited
Your own father's excommunication you witnessed
And for your younger brother you are still keening.

Are you coming or going?
Don't tell me you can't see the way,
For down the street like a wild horse I saw you run
On your way to work in town.
On your way to the tavern I met you on Friday.
In drunken stupor I saw you stagger homewards
After imbibing 'the sweet water of wisdom and immortality'
as you said.

But brother, are you coming or going?
Deafen your ears not against my question.
For neither deaf nor dumb are you.
To the disco sound fervently you responded.
From the wailing sirens of squad cars
Into exile in the beer hall you cowered.

Brother, which way?
You can't be going and still be coming.
You just can't have it both ways
Show me your colour
Black or White not grey.

Tshilidzi Shonisani



IN MEMORIAM – SPEAK LIKE A CHILD

LAMENT

Speak like a child
And tell of broken playthings
The memory of which
Makes you grow taller.

Count the grains of sand
Until the eye is blurred
Blazened by the dull reflection
Of wasted soil
The soil of our youth
Buried in curdling loins
And heaving breasts
Beating to release their strength
Unguided and rudderless.

I weep for the wasted land
Of parched soil and
Scorched demented souls
When our weeping and yearning hearts
Groan in distaste and sadness
At a yawning cataclysm
Whose only design is catharsis
Of the inversions and convulsions
Of an oppressed people
Constrained to masturbate
For political frustration.

We shall place the ear to the ground
And hear the coming of the saviour
Slushing through this wasted land
Staggering on the naked skeletons
Of our struggle,
Strewn in grotesque waste
And grinning at the empty sky
Without a cloud to cover the shame
Nor a drop of water to soften
The dried up flesh.

Oh! you vultures
That feed on the wasted flesh of man
Indecently flapping on
The skeleton of a tormented Africa,
That has blown your gizzards full.
Leaping like a child to reach
His brother's knee
And entangled in the treacherous
Weeds clinging round his feet
Unable to unshackle his
Soul from misery
And so grow more in his misery.

You great gods of our land
Where was your light hidden
When Africa had need of you?
Before we buried our sons
In living tombs designed by
their oppressors
And watched them descend
ignominiously, unsung and reviled?
To this I lay my bequest!
The incarnation of an African god.
That shall live wise, and mindful
Of its children.

MOTHER

Weep not child,
Your father is gone
Cry not child,
The men have gone
To the wood
To tame a predator-lion
That you little child
Be safe from its evil,
And I your mother
Will remain to weep
If he should not return.

Do not weep child,
I hold your life
In my hands
While your father
Tames his life
To make your life longer:
But if I should ask:
Will they bring it home?

Give me the strength child,
To answer your question:
Will it be tame?

I know a man
Who killed a stone,
I have seen a man

kill a river,
I knew a man
Who killed fire
Will that fire die?
Did that stone die?
Who killed the river?
When did the river die?
Who killed that man?

DEMENT

Do not let me see light
For I fear my sight
Do not let me see the light
For it shows me
What I lack
I fear the unknown
I desire the unknown
And yet I tremble
To think of freedom —
My desire
Do not give me light
For I do not know
How to hold light.
But for once I will be bold
And blacken my sight

No more the blizzards
That blow across the face,
None of the heat
Raining from the sky
No giggle
Of laughter from the
Lips of taunting girls
Shuttered within walls
Waiting for the trudge of the boot
Bringing the truncheon
And insipid food
As a palliative
And the bludgeon at times . . .
And I shutter my consciousness
To keep out the knowledge
That my life is drawing to a close
Under the watchful eye
Of my tormentors,
I only know vaguely
The conspiracy with fate
That I will die
Sooner or later
Yet hoping faintly
That it will not come
I keep my soul shuttered
And through its windows
I see dull rain
Draining from her eyes
And I tell myself
I shall die
Before boys grow into men
For just then,
I feel the finger
Placed against my neck,
Draining away my life
And so I have lifted
My finger,
In anticipation of the moment,
And scratched with the nail,
Inside my heart
My final message,
To inscribe for the record
The agent of fate:
For like a sick dog
I have stolen myself away
To die in a secret place.

To be discovered,
When worms start to eat my body
For I like a mad dog
Have snapped and barked
At the wind
All my life,
For I,
Like a chained dog,
I have been led from
My kennel
and left to die
To kill the menace inside me
For conduct contrary to nature.
Let my body be destroyed
And the evil inside me
Shall also die
And yet I shall wander about the face of
The earth
Like a ghost,
Haunting all the palaces
And shake their peace
Till we hear voices
Of women in the palaces
Shrieking and screeching in terror of my spirit,
Demented, shattered and destroyed,
The signal of my triumph.
I have then lifted my
Heart in my hand
And waved with it
Dripping with blood
Weeping for the land
And that you may learn.

VORTEX

Tell them Mapeda is dead
Say he did not like to live
For if you speak right
You shall live
If you should fear bulletins
No bullets will find you.

Tell them there shall be rain
When my body is retracted
Into the womb of the earth
Tell them fire will burn
When I am forged with the earth
Compounding the last sacrifice

To the land.

Mafika P. Mbuli

UNTITLED
(for love is undefinable)

for i have heard the rain
pattering on the roof
falling down to make those plants grow
making the farmer beam with love
  that rain was love
i've heard the couples whispering
laughing, something not to be violated
their whispers thundering love
i've heard the bombs falling
and devastatingly exploding
on those precious grounds
barrened afterwards
  they were exploding love
i've heard the statesmen
boast boisterously of their countries
having patriotic feelings
  they were feeling love
so i'm going to sing with
love a song of love:

love the tool with which you dig
in the mines and get what you love
love the one whom you think you hate
and hate hatred you had for that man
  and let love seeds flourish
  and the world be beautified

Senzo ka Malinga

BAD FRIDAY

Friday is coming,
But no one knows,
What is going to happen.
Oh, God we hope,
That your eye will be around.

Here comes the bad day.
Some are crying,
Others are happy,
Still others are hungry.

What is your aim?
Your aim is to insult us.
Your aim is to hurt us.
Please tell me,
What is your aim?

Some have got money,
Others have not.
Some are enjoying themselves,
But others are not.

You bad Friday!
Please don't return,
I hate your behaviour.
Get out from here!
You bad Friday.

Derro Maphumulo

THE QUEEN OF THE CASTLE IS DEAD
(for Mama Ndlovu, who died with dreams inside her hoping mind)

Mama Ndlovu will cry no more
for Thuli who is known
by every mousered creature of Umlazi
  Mama Ndlovu will complain no more
  of the cruel and kind weather
Mama Ndlovu will be seen no more
carrying a cardboard-box on her head
coming from kwaMnyandu station
selling 'insides'
  Mama Ndlovu is now a mute
  she's now quiet and dead
  with all the griefs and hardships
  she endured while still the queen
  of the castle: herself
Mama Ndlovu is now deaf to all
the niceties and omens of the world
around and about her castle
  Mama Ndlovu is now dead
  with all the sweat inside her glands
  she's now dead
  with all the love inside her heart
and Thuli is going to cry hard.

Senzo ka Malinga

RESURRECTION

Below, above, to left, to right
I saw what no man saw before
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost:
And so I make an idle wish
That He I serve were black

My love is dark like yours is fair
slow fluting like a reed
incarcerated by its roots
yet swinging to and fro
like a fly caught in the web

Earth, hell, sinew, vein and core
crisp lighting flashed, a wave of thunder shook

Suddenly, I saw your nakedness,
which, of course, meant nothing to me
for I had seen the Star burn in hell
followed by the Black ash falling down
to my ears, sounding like the winds of change
leaving some in bewilderment
and me in tumult

Thokozani Jerome Nxumalo

Three Poems by Achmat Dangor

Born in Johannesburg in 1947 he has spent most of his life in Newclare. He was banned in 1973 for being part of a literary group 'Black Thoughts'. His banning expired last year. He is employed at present in a nondescript commercial job, and is busy writing.

SWANSONG
(Grahamstown 1973)

I

The old world decayed
like forgotten manners
in those great white houses,
polished cutlery,
sweet red wine,
servants ran to
call of bells,
bells wielded like whips,
bells that cracked
and did not peal.

Here I first saw you
in the midst of
all those lovelies
flying the great steps
of Rhodes,
wind and mayhem
in your thighs;
my ear, forever cocked,
awaited that Pretorian growl:
'Jys 'n lawwe Boesman nè.'

for I come from
the naked land
whose austere hospitality offers:
'Hiers jou stukkie brood,
nou fok off.'
and I go
curled up
in a corner of my world
to quell
the hunger in my heart.

II

In these pockets of silence
Fingo Village
the Coloured Quarters
the dusty breeze unpacks
the daily carnage
of my kind,
here you offered me
your lithe white body.
Look!
the hunger's not in my loins,
it's in my heart.
Beyond the circle
of our darkness
little black boys
in shiny serge sang
In the Promised Land.
a tear gathered
in your eye.

I stayed behind
and drank the wine
watched Eliot and Voltaire
climb helter-skelter
up your wall
Genoeg!
It's time to say
goodbye.

III

Listen,
do you hear
the wind ransack
the open plains
of my heart,
do you hear
the crack of that bell?

Totsiens, farewell,
sien jou weer.

AN EXILE'S LETTER HOME

I remember where I am
sitting
on cold cobblestone,
this is not home.

I cannot forget
where I am not,
for I remember
the place you built
for me,
on the banks
of Swartkopsrivier,
whose breeze blows
stolen words to me.

Dear Sir,
have they forgotten me?
Have they built for me
no monuments
at Slagtersnek
or Hoenderkop
or Kaffirkraal?

Dear Sir,
I cannot forget
why I am here.

DIE PATRIOOT

Djy wiet mos hoe praat
julle altyds va' os
asof os 'n blom
of iets of ander
groeisel uit die Karoo is

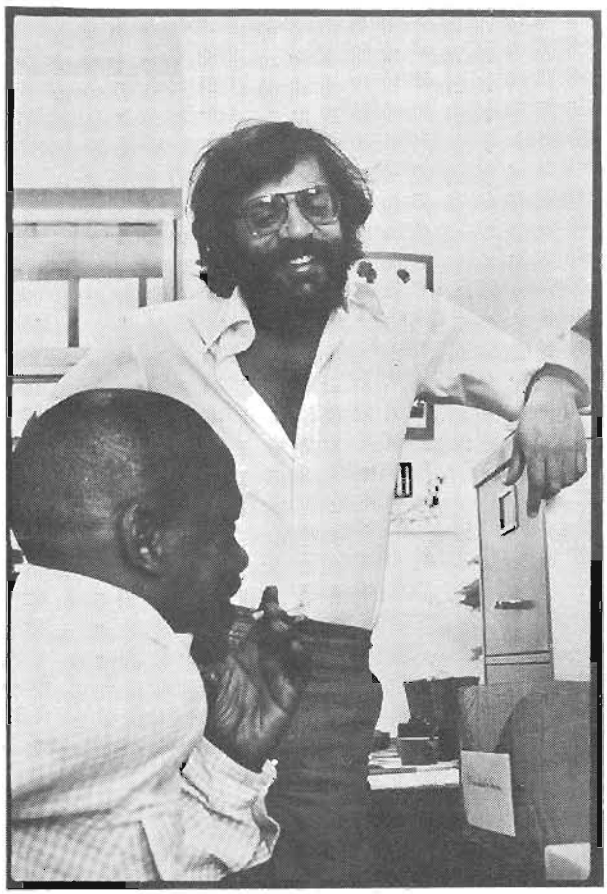
Daai 'salt of the earth'
klas van ding
wa' djy oppie muur hang
wanne djy important vrienne kry

Maa' ek belong, hoo' djy,
al was ek oek
teen die muur gamaak,
uirrie wrywing van
vleis en klip,
Die land of my birth.
Hoo' djy?

Dissie djoune nie,
dissie myne nie,
disse anne man se vrou
wa' djy mee lol.

Three Poems

by Farouk Asvat



*Farouk Asvat with Mtutuzeli Matshoba. Farouk was banned in 1973, and unbanned in 1978, in which year he also qualified as a doctor. Photo/*Biddy Crewe

OU CHINA EN DIE AMPER-INTELLECTUAL

Heit! Hoezit daar?

Nee, is sweet my bra.
Djy's mos skaars né.
Waar was djy nou-die aan ?
Aai, djy't weer 'n aane' dêng gemiss.
Ou China – djy ken hom mos –
Hy't 'n anne situation somme' innie fridge gebêre
Omtesê die situation klim oppie stage
Nogal gecollar en getie
En hy adjust sy cufflinks so met 'n style
En hy bêgênne woerawara in so 'n highbrow lingo
Iets van die modus operandie of-iets van Capitalism
En hy wietie what-what van Existentialism
En Socialism
En hy gaan aan en aan
Oor ek-wiet-nie-wat se moerism
En die majietas bêgênne woelerig raak van die kakpraat
Maar Ou China hy sit net daar in sy hoek
Met sy Ayas oor sy ooge en slaap.
Kanti, net as die situation klaar is met hom spieche,
En voor die Chairman nog ken opstaan,
Is Ou China op sy bene
En hy adjust sy Ayas so op 'n slant
En hy address die Chairman en die Ladies en Gentlemans
– Djy ken mos Ou China –
Nee, daai bra van my het style
En hy bêgênne om te sê
Die mense moet hom correct as hy verkeerd is
Maar hy voestaan omtesê
Die gentleman het so 'n uur too veel gecable
Oor 'n deng wat ons in die 'kasies mos ken
Omtesê, die lahnies ration ons met die lewe.
En djy wiet wat
Voor die outies hom nog 'n applause kan tchee
Sit Ou China somme' wee' nee'
Trek sy Ayas oor sy ooge
En slaap.

POSSIBILITIES FOR A MAN HUNTED BY SBs

There's one of two possibilities
Either they find you or they don't
If they don't it's ok
But if they find you
There's one of two possibilities
Either they let you go or they ban you
If they let you go it's ok
But if they ban you
There's one of two possibilities
Either you break your ban or you don't
If you don't it's ok
But if you break your ban
There's one of two possibilities
Either they find out or they don't
If they don't it's ok
But if they find out
There's one of two possibilities
Either they find you guilty or not guilty
If they find you not guilty it's ok
But if they find you guilty
There's one of two possibilities
Either they suspend your sentence or they jail you
If they suspend your sentence it's ok
But if they jail you
There's one of two possibilities
Either the release you
Or you fall from the tenth floor

THE JOURNEY OF A SLAVE

Toiling for a tot
I am hopelessly entwined
In the creeping vineyards.

But I have often dreamed
Of riding Ben Schoeman 3rd class
To the mother city
Whose fathers abandoned their curly-haired kids
To squat outside the periphery
Of the master's conscience.

But in the meantime
I can always ride Blue Train Express
To journeys that will always bring me back
To squeeze with chapped feet these succulent drops
To make the distinctive *Paarl Perlé*
So that I can drink the bitter sediment.

And when there's a little money sometimes
I can always drink *Ship*
And be lulled by the gentle waves
Be tossed by the violent storms
Only to be returned to the rocks of reality
To spend my days sweating
My nights in another toil.

But with the years
If there is no salvation
Like the lord Jesus Kristus promises
Every Sunday in the whitewashed church
And there's no journeying from this wasteland
And the wine is turned to water
In my seasoned gullet
I can always mix Rocket-Fuel
Astronaut to hell
And rest in peace.

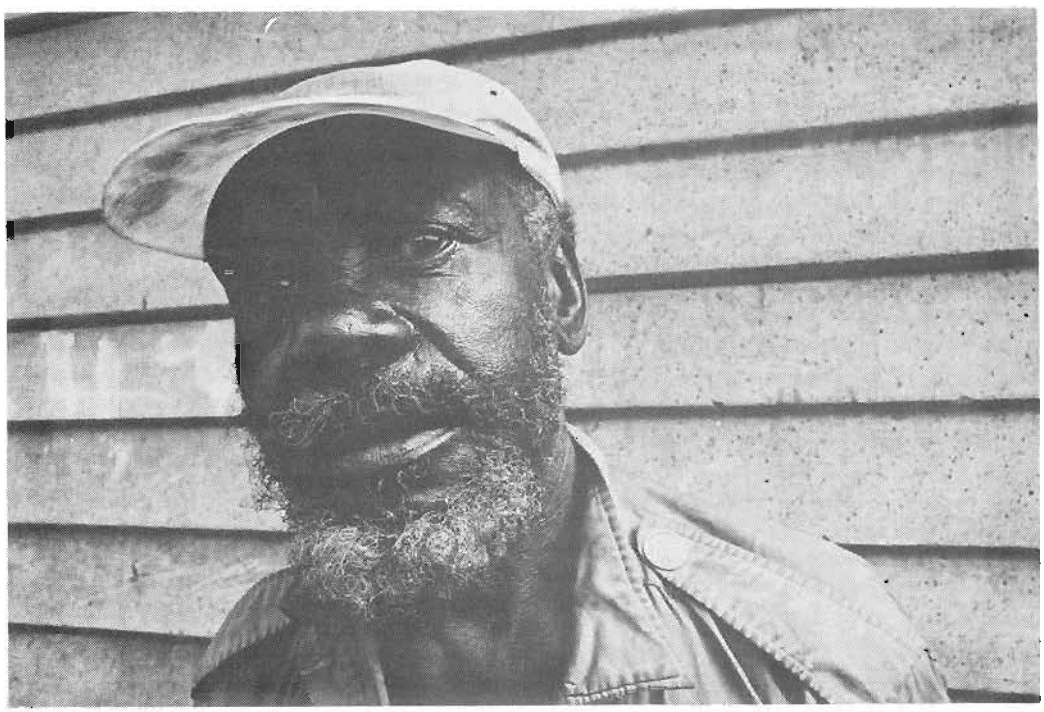
Kliptown

Kliptown today is a small territorial enclave bordering on Soweto and Eldorado Park which serves chiefly as a squatter area for Coloureds and Africans. At the same time it is probably one of the few existing non-racial trading areas left in the country.

Before the Second World War, Kliptown was mainly a European trading and surburban area. However as a result of overcrowding in government emergency camps during the war in what is now known as Moroka, a large part of Kliptown became a squatter area. With this high influx of population, Kliptown soon developed into a thriving business centre where traders irrespective of colour or creed competed side by side.

As the manifestation of the Apartheid system became more apparent, it was decided by the powers that

'I've stayed in Kliptown longer than I can remember. It's a dangerous place . . . I can't even send my children to the shops. I look after 8 children in my broken-down shack. The owners have now moved to Lenasia. I pay R2.50 rent a month. I don't like the insecurity of the area; I'd gladly move out.'



'The council doesn't care about us; the community development don't care about us and nor does the government – we're on our own in Kliptown.'

in black and white

be to set aside the Kliptown area for Coloured housing. By 1966 all whites had trekked to their delineated areas and Kliptown was frozen by the Community Development Board for further development.

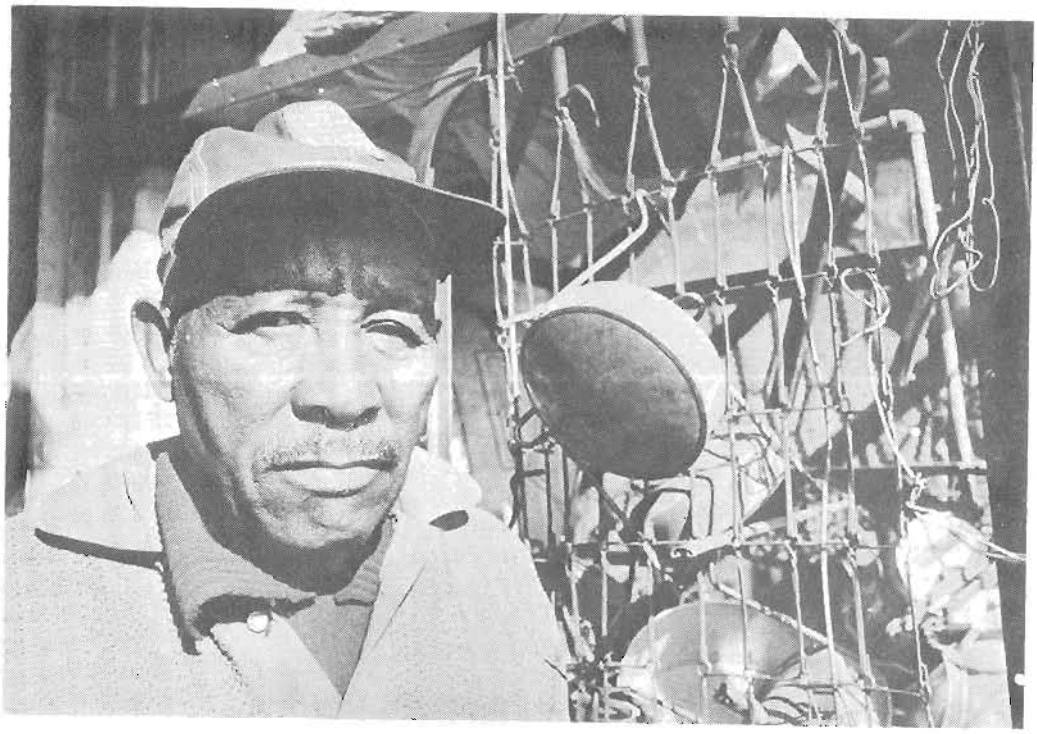
From 1970 onwards it has been administered by the Johannesburg City Council but real control still lies in the hands of the Community Development Board.

In more recent years the Kliptown area has served the needs of African and Coloured squatters seeking either cheap rent or temporary accommodation.

Since its inception, Kliptown has developed its own cultural identity and its non-racial community still thrives. But like Crossroads and other squatter areas it faces the onslaught of the bulldozers.

Here is what the people of Kliptown have to say . . .

'I came to Kliptown when it was still being built and after moving around the area for a while I settled down and bought myself a plot. I like Kliptown and I'd only move to Eldorado Park because I hear rumours that the place is to be abolished. The only problems I have here are lack of water, leaking roofs, mice and lizards. I don't find the place rough, I get on very well with the neighbours: I'd regret it terribly if they demolished Kliptown.'



An old-age pensioner: 'I supplement my meagre income by tinkering and fixing pots in Kliptown.'

Part of a project in progress by the Open School, Johannesburg.
Photographs by Paul Weinberg

MEALIEPAP MEALIEPAP

Mealie pap, Mealie pap
Day in day out, mealie pap.
Is it a custom?

Or

What?

Oh! Daily Mountain.
Last year,
year before last,
this year,
Surely next year still mealie pap.

Oh! too much of a good thing
In spring, mealie pap.
Summer, mealie pap
Autumn, mealie pap
Winter, mealie pap
Throughout the seasons still mealie pap.

Mealiepap, Mealiepap
On Monday,
Tuesday,
Wednesday,
Thursday,
Friday,
Saturday,
Sunday, still mealie pap
In a vicious circle
Malicious to health.

Jo! nna! wee!
Is it a custom?
Culture?
Tradition?
Or
What?

Nyane-nyane
I'm tired
of
you,
you mealie mealie, mealiepap.

At funerals
Weddings
Celebrations
Braais
Everywhere mealie pap!

Again and again mealie pap
In the mornings,
At middays,
Eventides,
Still mealie pap

Aowa Boswa.
We have experienced you,
you mealiepap
But
Is there a
Motive
behind
you mealie pap?
Oh! ja! Ah! mealie mealie mealie pap.

Libero Nyelele/Central Western Jabavu

AN EYE

An eye
Is the insight
Of every man everywhere
Capable of seeing everything
Everywhere. But incapable of seeing
That Pretoria, Washington and Moscow
Are one . . .

J.K. Fanyana Mokaleng/Central Western Jabavu

DREAMS

My life
My efforts
Are western exploration
My strife
My efforts
Are western exploitation
Dreams are dreams
And my hopes are my dreams
Russians are Communists
For goodness sake
I want to be human
I want to be on my own . . .

J.K. Fanyana Mokaleng/Central Western Jabavu

OH! MY ROTTING FAITH

Seal my mouth and feel my heart
I'm not in conferences as your people are
But a social outcast as my people are
Touch my hands and heal the wounds
I have no franchise hospital as you have
Only a pair of handcuffs, the ornaments you never wear.
My poor soul is ageing in a prison of rubble:
These bars I shall one day break
Or wrestle with them until I'm dead.
For which you naively claim a great complexity:
Your problems would beat the best analyst, you say.
But I shan't trust you
Nor ever place my faith in you, but only in the Lord.

Ndlela Radebe/Diepkloof

MY AGONY

My husband-to-be has forgotten me
He no longer comes to me
For I'm disfigured.
I'll have a baby
Who will call me mom.
But who will it call Dad?
I hate love that drove me into this
For now it's no more.
It is so disappointing
For the father claims not to be one.
He is irresponsible
He has exploited me.
But I was not aware,
For he used to kiss me.

Sizakele Ndlovu/Mofolo North

FAMILY PLANNING

Row upon row
Like winter-shaken stalks of maize,
The barracks stretch from one
Miserable end to the other.

Within the enfenced hostel
No gay children bounce and romp about,
No busy housewives colour
The washing line once a week.
Here there is no homely smell of food
That wanders in the air during the day.

Sunset gathers the half-castrated inmates
Like stale crumbs from the city.
They plod through the large gates
Weary, bent: and shut
Their fatigued minds, eyes and ears.
For them the day is over.
They are banished to a twilight life.

The silence that they left behind
At the breaking of the dawn is
Rippled as if it was a calm lake
By laughter as they buzz about
Like newly-wedded women.

They strip off to their vests
Embalmed in a day's sweat.
Yesterday's tripe and porridge are
Hastily warmed up for supper again.

One by one,
They enjoy their naked showers
Splashing their rigid bodies in the water,
And return to their stuffy rooms.

An inmate belches like a sea-rover.
It echoes in the far-flung room.
He raps his full stomach
That is large as a mole-hill:
'Exchoose me you bastards!' he thunders.

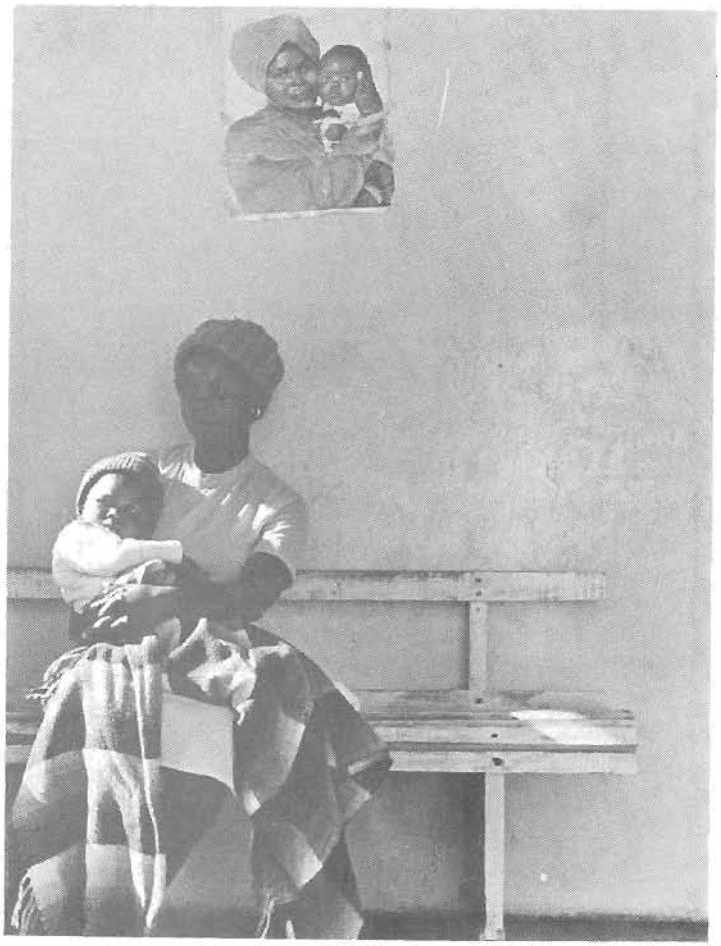
They slip into their stony beds,
Clasp their baggy and sweat-reeking
Pillows as if they were their
Beloved ones left in the homelands.

They look at their shirts,
Overalls, trousers, jackets – all ragged,
Hanging aslant on the damp walls
Like faded, dusty family portraits.

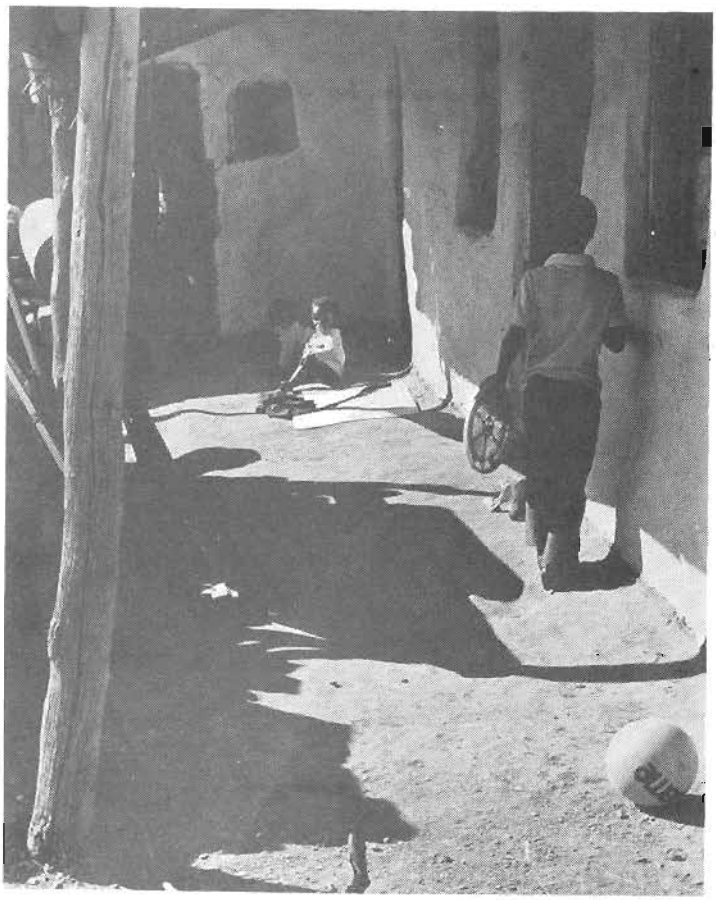
Portable radios are switched off,
Candle flames flicker and die,
Darkness and silence covers
Them all like a large blanket.
Alone,
They quietly succumb to sleep.

In the night,
An inmate's untroubled sleep is interrupted.
He sits on the edge of his bed
Half dozing,
Gazing from darkness to darkness,
And then he spills the seeds of nature
All over his slovenly sheet with half-satisfaction:
'Family planning,' he whispers to himself.
Then the musical snores
Of the sleep-drowned inmates
Slowly lull him back to sleep.

James Twala



Photo/Steve Bolnick



Photo/Steve Bolnick

DIDIMALA

Didimala o se lele
Tshidisega, tshidisega
Lefatshe le namile
Metlholo ga se ya tlala feela
Le dipogiso di teng
Masigo go wela a'welang
Meso go sa e'sang
Maloba e nnile maabane
Maabane ya nna gompieno
Gompieno e tla nna ka moso
Didimala o se lele

O ne a bua are!
A lesedi le nne teng
Ga nna jalo, la nna teng
Gwa sedimoga le gona go phatsima
Bomenemene ba tsena motho
Mosweu a tseha go bogisa
Montsho a bona go bogiswa
Didimala o se lele
Tshidisega, tshidisega

Go kwadilwe dibuka
Batlhalefi ba di tlhalosa
Erile go nna mosong
Lefatshe lotlhe la tlhoka boikhutso
Bora ba tsena tlhaloganyo tsa batho
Lotlhoyo la atafala
Itse gore ge boikhutso
Bo tla nna teng
Tokololo e tlhomameng
E tla aparela lefatshe lotlhe
Didimala o se lele
Gomotsega, gomotsega

Boitiumelo/Moletsane

THE GHETTOES

Mama! I'm tired of this horrible place
Can't move when I feel like it
Ain't going where I like
Maybe it's a womb

Those who claim to be non-smokers are wrong
The place is polluted with smoke from
  Chimneys
  Trucks
  Hippos
  Gun-excited camouflage
  dagga-smokers
  and burning tyres
Non-smokers are smokers too!
Mama, when I'm born will I be
  Illegal?
  An immorality case?
  Or fatherless?
If fatherless, will I be at the border
fighting my brothers whom you call terrorists?
If I'm an immo case
then go to *ndabazabantu*
My father will have to maintain me

Frankie Ntsu kaDitshego/Dube

I AM AFRAID AM I HUMAN AM I A POET

inspiration invading my mind
poetic lines flowing through my fingers
love
 hate
  disgust
   understanding
  regard
 and
disregard
i feel all
 i hear all
  i love and hate all
 i am afraid am i a poet am i a human

    frustration
   destruction
  monopoly
 motion
struggle
i feel all
i hear all
i love and hate all

status
black
yellow
white
red
i want to die now
and be born in a world
where colour comes
only in art

Lebenya Mokheseng/Mofolo Village

THE SHEBEEN

Cutlery clattering,
Tempos lifted
Bodies gyrating and wriggling
To the untempoed music
Tones and undertones
Cool music throbbing
Sending besotted lusty lovers
Eyes glaring
Sightless
Squinting
Drenched and heated
To disillusioned endings
"One Haja"
Yells the dipsomaniac
Oh God, swift nimble fingers
Have vacuumed his pockets
Drunks hollering
  jeering
  mimicking
  swearing!
God knows what's left out.
Swaying bodies
Left right
And mid-centre
Yearning for each other
'Ons pola hier!'

Sol Rachilo/Dube

Batlang Pule recently represented Zamani in a "writers' wagon" which visited writers in the Cape. More news of the P.E.N. trip on page 64.

I WISH I WAS A PIG

I wish I was a pig
Not caring what I wear
What I eat
Where I live.
But since I'm not
I can't.

I wish I was a pig
Eating anything
Dirty or clean
Like the prodigal son
But since I'm not
I can't.

I wish I was a pig
Sleeping in a dirty sty
A small match-box
Made specially for me.
Like a meal made specially
In a hotel.

But since I'm not
I can't
How I wish I was a pig
To tolerate such.
But I'm not
And I can't.

Batlang Dodderidge Pule

MY THOUGHTS

When I was a child I saw white children playing happily somewhere. Having that urge to make friends I pulled myself free from my mother's sweaty grip and dashed to join the fun. I stopped short when I heard my mother's shout: 'Tshepo, Tshepo, don't!' Now I know why.

The time will come when I will stand up like a man, sharpen the point of my spear and fearlessly go out to regain my lost pride. Somebody's blood will flow like rivers in summer. Then my victory will drive away centuries of cheating, beating, oppression, deportation and detention. Freely I'll fly like a bird, feeling the rays of the Azanian sun on my bare torso.

Tshepo Solly Sefakwe

BEYOND LIVELIHOOD

Come down
I'm first to rise
Chilly winters grazing
On my marrow
Wind ploughs through
My lifeless bones
I'm a pensioner.

Bow-bent back
Shivering from head to toe
Tottering down the dusty streets
Ignored but patient to the last
I'm a pensioner

Deep inside me
A burning flame filling
The hollowness in my stomach
But as a leper I'm treated
I'm a pensioner

They eat
They drink
They laugh
They talk
I'll perish or survive; for
I'm a pensioner.

Maswabi a' Legwale

HO THERE!

Out of the dungeon I focus:,
Life tows a turmoil of beauty,
Turbulent nerves wire to my heart,
Hush! A dream looms, tentatively.

Out of the dungeon I smell,
From afar sweetness lures nostrils,
Fiery nerves feed the skull,
Bravo! Out she comes, aromatically.

Her oval head wears black hair,
Domed forehead with knitted brows,
Starry eyes carry numbered lashes,
Nose, lips touch my heart.

Patiently I nibbled her love,
Cruised with ease through arteries,
Delved acutely into her heart,
And settled in peace,
Careered swiftly into her brains,
And floated in happiness.

Themba Mabele

Staffrider Drama Section Special

Oganda's Journey

A dramatisation by **Zeke Mphahlele** of a short story by Kenyan writer Grace Ogot, illustrated by **Mzwakhe**

CHARACTERS

Chief Labong'o
Wife
Oganda, their daughter
Oganda's Grandmother
Chief's Councillors: 1st, 2nd, 3rd
Nditi, the medicine man
Voice of ancestral spirits
Chorus of five women
Musicians and dancers
Voices from the crowd: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th
Messenger
A boy
A girl
Chichi, the village fool
Osinda, a young man

Note: Whenever music comes in, any group may put in its own, preferably popular traditional music, in modern idiom, but whose lyrics and mood are appropriate to the occasion. The lyrics should be, like the music itself, from a diversity of ethnic idioms. This last-mentioned point must be insisted upon.

Part one

The left side of the stage is the courtyard of CHIEF LABONG'O. A small shed stands L, under which we discover him and three of his highest councillors. They are sitting on stones or blocks of timber. Nearby is a big drum. When the curtain rises, they are speaking to one another in subdued voices and drinking beer. A group of about six dancers enter, led by NDITI, the medicine man. They sing and dance as in a rain-making ritual on the right side of the stage, which presents a field, with a rock and a tree. They dance around NDITI, but the dance idiom should be determined by the customs of the people who perform the play. As they dance, Nditi stands as if in a trance mumbling some words. He claps his hands, and when the dancers stop, he turns round to them.

NDITI: Do you hear it? (*the lights fade out*)

DANCERS: What, wise father? Has the message come?

VOICE: Your forefathers have heard, daughter of Podho, the great father of the Luo. Listen, Nditi, wise man of this land, mouthpiece of your forefathers, listen: do you hear, Nditi?

NDITI: I can hear, you spirits of our ancestors that fill the air around us and read the minds and hearts of man. Speak, your messenger is listening.

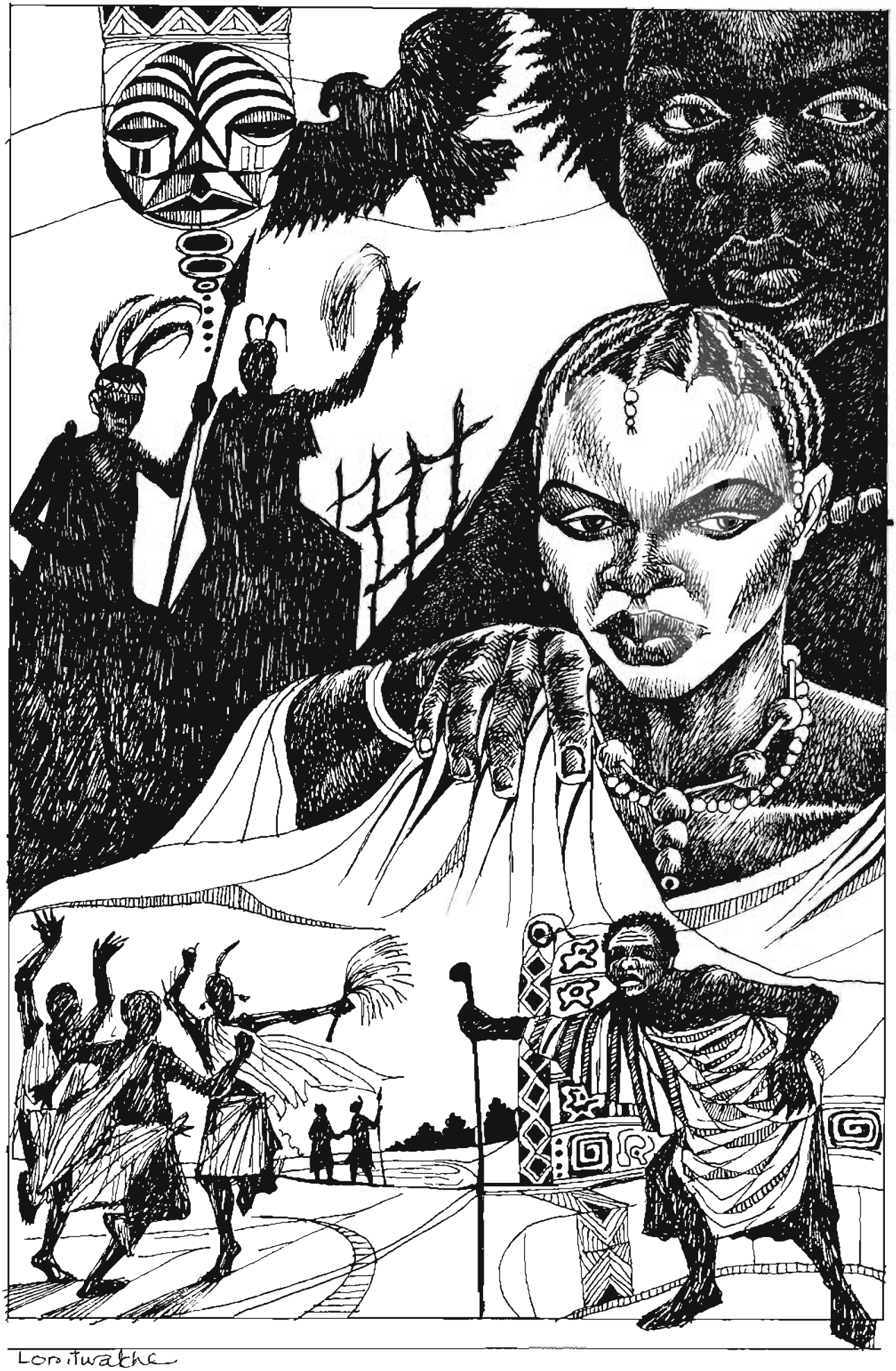
VOICE: Your dream last night had truth in it. Oganda, daughter of Labong'o your Chief and master, is the most beautiful prize you can give to the ancestors so that this thirsty land may have rain. The drought has gone on too long, and greater disasters will befall you if the anger of Podho and your other ancestors is not appeased. Tell Labong'o this. Let him tell it to his people. Oganda must go to the lake where your ancestors live. She must walk in, and the currents will carry her into the arms of Podho in the deeps. This is our message to you. We have finished.

NDITI: I hear you, holy spirits.
(*The dancers whisper among themselves*)
Continue and stop gossiping, you children.
(*The dancing is resumed and the dancers go out R, leaving NDITI alone on the same part of the stage. The music continues softly backstage*).
Oganda, Oganda, Oganda . . . (*He paces up and down*). So my dream was right. (*He stops Centre downstage*) But how can I break such terrible news to her father, Labong'o? He is certainly going to think it is because I quarrelled with him a few days ago. Do not be such a coward, Nditi: are you not the mouthpiece of the ancestors? Are you not their messenger on earth? Are not the laws of the elders and the forefathers taught by you to your people? Yes, it is so . . . But how will the words come out of my mouth? . . . No, Labong'o is an old and wise man, he will understand . . .
(*Exit R. Music stops*).

CHIEF LABONG'O: Tell Oganda's mother to send some more beer.
(*One councillor disappears behind the shed and OGANDA herself brings the beer, deposits the calabash on the ground, curtseys and disappears behind the shed as the COUNCILLOR comes in again*).

1ST COUNCILLOR: Your only daughter is beautiful, Sir, her face is as smooth as that of the bean that is her name.

2ND COUNCILLOR: I envy the man whose son will marry her. (*He smacks his lips*).
(*The Chief mumbles down his chest, belches, and inhales a pinch of snuff from his fingers through each nostril in turn. He spits, and wipes his mouth and nostrils with the back of*


Lonitwatche

his hand.)

CHIEF: One single daughter among nineteen sons is like a flower on the hand of a cactus full of thorns. I married her mother late in my life as you know after four wives had given me sons only. A woman with a stronger will I have never seen.

1ST COUNCILLOR: And still you love them both more than anyone else, my lord.

CHIEF: Too much, I think. Often I sit and look at Oganda and say to myself, I say: Why have the ancestors punished me like this? – to give me one single bean so that when they take her away again I have no daughter left to gladden even my old heart. And I say to myself, I say, I do not think she will stay long with us: she seems to have come to us only to go soon again to the happy land of our forefathers, like the sun that shines only for a brief time and then runs away behind the clouds. I feel the gods do not like it when one is happy and has been so for as long as I have been since Oganda was born.

3RD COUNCILLOR: The ancestors will punish you for such dark thoughts, my lord.

CHIEF: Is not our life already dark, Owiti? Look around you and the sun is beating down on the earth so hard you can smell it. You see a woman walking in the shimmering sun, and you think she is going to melt in the mirage. Before a drought like this one breaks, we always have to shed human blood. I wonder what Nditi will have to tell us when he comes from the valley of the ancestors. *(Shifts slightly.)* My heart these days feels like a pot that is resting with its bottom up, I do not know.

(A messenger enters L. and pays his respects to the CHIEF).

MESSENGER: My lord and elders, I greet you. Nditi is waiting outside to see you, my lord. He asks to see you alone, because he has a heavy story to tell.

(CHIEF looks steadfastly at his COUNCILLORS, and they respond to the hint and exit L.).

CHIEF: Let Nditi come in.

(MESSENGER exits L. and NDITI enters the same way).

NDITI: I greet you, my master.

(CHIEF nods acknowledgment).

How is my lord this afternoon?

CHIEF: The bones are still strong. We only see the drought. Take some beer.

(NDITI helps himself)

What is the answer from the spirits of the forefathers, Nditi? Speak straight as the sun goes from east to west, do not go south or north first.

NDITI: *(After hesitating):* My news is both sad and happy, my lord. It is the greatest honour our ancestors can grant you.

CHIEF: *(After staring him in the face with a fixed gaze):* Is it my own blood?

NDITI: Do not put it that way, my lord. It is to be your daughter's and –

CHIEF: My own blood, then.

NDITI: Y-yes, my master: Oganda. The ancestors are claiming the most beautiful girl and she is the one. Last night I dreamt –

CHIEF: *(Sternly):* Dreams cannot fill an empty house when Oganda has gone, Nditi: let us speak like grown-ups, we were not born yesterday.

NDITI: I am sorry, Sir, I did not mean to offend.

CHIEF: *(Dismissing the apology with a gesture of the hand):* So I must call the people and tell them.

(NDITI senses a resolve in the last words and does not reply. CHIEF rises and goes to C. downstage, walking with the aid of a stick.)

(Enter CHORUS of five women R. and they stop downstage L. in front of NDITI).

CHORUS: When the land cries for rain,
the gods cry for blood.
When we offer animal blood,
they cry for human blood –
what jealous gods they are!
Time in
and time out
man decays in the leaping fire of the sun;
rolls under the sweep of the mighty flood,
writhes and buckles under the whip of the lightning,
stays exposed to the serpent's poison:
bird and locust swoop down upon his corn
and leaves him naked and hungry;
He wails to the heavens so that
they crack open to pour their rivers of rain
on the land:
and the gods laugh and laugh and laugh:
may the ancestors have mercy on us!

NDITI: *(Standing up and moving to the front to face them):* You women, stop cackling like this and abusing the gods! We have enough of their anger in this drought without more provocation from you.

(NDITI returns to his place, and CHORUS moves to C. so that they are just behind the CHIEF).

CHIEF: Oganda, Oganda, my daughter! Why did you bring life to this household only to bring death? But no, your death will bring life, will it not? I can refuse to yield my daugher . . . But then the drought will kill the last bit of life in this country . . . We can sacrifice someone else . . . *(pause)* Yes! . . . Yes! . . . But we cannot cheat the ancestors . . .

CHORUS: What have we done
that the gods should
skin us alive like this
Nditi should tell us that!
You are wise, or so they say, Nditi –
why are there sickness and famine, drought and floods?
You think the gods are still where they used to live?
Have they not moved their house and gone elsewhere beyond our reach?
No, Nditi, you cannot tell us,
so do not pretend to know the answer: –
that is the way of all you men, not so? –
It is the riddle of Time without end.
We the women of the earth bear children,
break and bend our backs under the load,

and when the new dawn comes,
we take our place again
in the ancient pattern of things.
Life is pain, life is fate
yours is only that which you have eaten
and sits in safety in your belly –
mark the words of the elders, Chief Labong'o –
what else is there that you can call your own?

CHIEF: I am well loved by my own people . . . That's the burden of being loved. It would have been so much easier if I were hated. Then I would not care, I would send another girl. But how do I know the spirits told Nditi to choose my daughter and he is doing this to spite me, to work out his vengeance for the quarrel we had over that witch?
(He looks at NDITI with the corner of his eye while pausing for a short time.)
No, he is too smart, he would not make it so clearly an act of vengeance, the quarrel being only a few days old. Strange, the way our ancestors can whisper to us in silence. I have always had dark thoughts about Oganda's fate. But how painful: the pain of losing her hits right in the stomach and *(as if choking)* the pain and the fear have knotted up in here *(pointing at his throat)*. What a stone! *(Sighs)* I seem suddenly to have been living since the time of my forefathers. And Oganda's mother – how will she take the news? Oh gods, could you not have brought this upon me when I was young enough to carry the load? But before now there was no Oganda – what am I thinking? Forgive me, Podho! Yours is only that which you have eaten: yes the elders were right: what else can a man call his own?
(As if with vigorous resolve, the CHIEF goes towards the drum. He pauses and continues to stand, his head drooping over it, his back to the audience. Chorus moves R., faces shed.)

CHORUS: The smell of heat
brings the smell of blood,
the gods are thirsty for blood,
they want the fattest prize of all.
Perhaps this time it is Labong'o's turn,
to pay the best that he can ever offer –
this is Oganda, the loveliest of all girls.
Who will cry the loudest?
Again it is the woman who must wail
into the long and lonely wilderness of time –
Oganda's mother: if it shall be you,
you need a stone to swallow,
the liver your courage can anchor by:
prepare for long nights of corroding sorrow,
we are mothers too, our Mother:
we have fed the soil with corpses from our bowels.
For you it will be the highest tribute
to be the mother of the chosen child.
The gods shall ask for blood
and we must give it.
What do we reap from all this sacrifice?:
Honour, glory, we are told –
the place of being the chosen ones –
we live, endure and die,
that is all we know.
What has passed with yesterday,
what is today,
are all we know:
endure, our Mother, endure.
There are warring forces in Labong'o's heart
enough to tear it from its moorings.
And, let loose upon the wilful waves,
the lone canoe will toss and fret in exile
away from cosy embrace of the mainland.
Will Labong'o send another's daughter –
dare you, Labong'o?
No, we think not:
it is not in the nature of your clan.
Will you call the tribe together?
Enter OGANDA's GRANDMOTHER R. and as she comes downstage R. with a bundle of fibre in her hands, CHORUS exeunt L. She is about 70 and supports herself with a staff. She is mumbling to herself and sings now and then. She potters about, picking up a few things from the floor. She throws her stick down and sits. She begins to weave the fibre forming it into a string first by rolling it down her leg with the palm of her hand. (OGANDA enters R. and comes towards her GRANDMOTHER. She is carrying a grass-woven tray in her hands.)

OGANDA: Greetings, Grandmother!

GRANDMOTHER: Greetings, child of my son.

OGANDA: Father wants me to come and wait here because he wants me to talk with mother.

GRANDMOTHER: Sit here and sort out your beans, my child.
(OGANDA sits down and moves the tray up

and down, blowing the chaff away as it flies up. She pauses and stares ahead of her in a thoughtful mood.)

What are you thinking about, child? Tell me, what happened to that young man – what is his name?

OGANDA. Who, Grandmother? The world is so full of young men we girls do not even have a place to stand or sit.

GRANDMOTHER. Go on, I know you like the one I am talking about. I can see you often standing and dreaming. *(She pauses).* You know the one I mean.

OGANDA smiles and then continues with her task, humming a tune. Enter the CHIEF's WIFE (Oganda's Mother) L. and walks down stage to where LABONG'O is standing. She continues to stand in her full height, clasping her hands in front. At first the CHIEF does not understand why she is silent. Then he gets the hint).

CHIEF: Nditi, leave us.

(Exit NDITI L.).

WIFE: I know, my lord.

CHIEF: How did you know?

WIFE: Do messages not ride on a dream?
Do not they ride on the wind
that carries words from others' lips?
Messages ride on the touch of a husband,
on a woman's stir beside her man;
they also move in ripples along the blood
in a woman's breast to tell her that a child
is sick or on the way to the ancestors.

CHIEF: Your thoughts are right, my wife.

WIFE: How Oganda's grandmother dotes on her . . .
You wept, I laughed with joy when she arrived – remember? There was rain and there were floods . . . Today she goes because we have no rain.

(She pauses, trying to keep her tears, but she continues to look ahead of her, never turning to look at the CHIEF).

It is my turn to cry, the gods' to laugh, the hungry crowd's to cheer aloud in hope – 'Blessed mother of Oganda, favoured by the gods!' – that will be their chant. Favoured by the gods indeed – favoured! *(She sighs).* Oganda, Oganda, daughter of my flesh! Am I supposed to laugh and praise the gods? At a moment like this, how can I? I must protest. listen, jealous gods!

(The CHIEF moves towards her, but stops short as she proceeds.)

Let this mother's wailing haunt you ever! *(She pauses.)* But what use? Their ears are numb against the long and swollen nights of human crying. And yet you have heard my plaint, jealous gods!

(Enter OGANDA R. from the part of the stage where she has been.)

OGANDA: What is it, Mama?
Are you talking of marriage, Mama?
Which of those stupid boys will marry me? Will it be Dimo with one hollow eye? Is it the handsome idiot they call Kech? They say Tekayo's mother is a witch. Osinda's people – will they ever come? Osinda –

(She stops short.)

What news have you about the drought, Papa? What does Nditi say?

CHIEF: *(Cutting in):* Oganda, go and wait in your grandmother's homestead, I must call the people, the sun is gone.

(The CHIEF's WIFE takes OGANDA gently by the shoulders and they go out L. The CHIEF goes to the drum and beats it several times. As he does so, a din of human voices is heard backstage.

Enter NDITI R. and COUNCILLORS L., walking to where the CHIEF is. A boy comes in L. and arranges low carved stools for the CHIEF and COUNCILLORS so that they face directly R. There is subdued talking among this group. The din backstage continues, rising and falling intermittently. Lights fade, followed by a brief black out. Enter the CHORUS and MUSICIANS and DANCERS who constitute a section of the tribe and they move downstage R., seat themselves on the floor so that they face the CHIEF. The audience in the auditorium should be imagined for this purpose to be the rest of the tribe.)

CHIEF: *(Gravely):* My people, children of Podho, I call you here about the matter of the drought. Nditi has some news to tell us.

(NDITI comes forward.)

NDITI: My lord, the children of Podho. Yesterday I saw our forefathers: first in a dream and later in a trance. They have ordered me to speak to you through the presence of my lord before you. This is the order of our forefathers: a young woman who has not known a man must die so that this country may have rain. And in the dream, while Podho spoke to me, I saw, good people, a young woman standing by the lake, her hands above her head, as if bereaved and yearning for someone, so innocent and tender like a buck, so lonely like a reed among the weeds. The light of brass around her lovely waist, the light of gold that lingered on her ear lobe combined to fix me where I was in wonder. 'Out of all the women in the land, this one will please the gods.' These are the words of Podho. 'Let her go into the lake to feed the spirits of the ancestors: that day the rain will come down from the heavens, and will soak the land to bursting point.' The words of Podho sailed along the night: you know their servant's door is always open.

Oganda is the chosen virgin beauty. Our lord and chief, her father is honoured and her mother and their ample household. I have finished.

(NDITI sits down. There are murmurs among the crowd, which develop into sounds of jubilation.)

1ST VOICE: Oganda is the chosen one!

2ND VOICE: Oganda is many times blessed!

3RD VOICE: The gods have honoured her!

4TH VOICE: If it is to save the people, let Oganda go: it is the sacred wish of the ancestors.

(OGANDA rushes forward and clings to the CHIEF, hanging by his arm while all around look on. The CHIEF presses her close to himself, looking severe. A GIRL comes comes forward to OGANDA.)

GIRL: *(Holding out her hands)*: Oganda, when you reach the world of the dead, give this ear-ring to my sister. She died last week as you know. She forgot this ring.

(OGANDA is startled, and she looks at the GIRL. Her face gradually shows the full realization of her fate, and she trembles. She takes the ring, staring at the GIRL all the while. She takes off her bangles and gives them to the GIRL).

OGANDA: Take these, Odera, I shall not need them anymore.

(The CHIEF, taking OGANDA by the hand, goes out L. with his entourage and NDITI. The GIRL joins the crowd. There is a burst of song and dance among the crowd, first a tune of jubilation, and then a farewell one. The crowd disperses, exeunt R., while dancing and singing. The CHORUS returns near the exit and walks downstage L. CHICHI the village fool returns with the CHORUS. His right hand dangles from the wrist, paralysed, and he limps on his right leg, which has shrunken somewhat. His dress is utterly shabby and scanty. He wears a large straw hat. He hops about and around the CHORUS, screwing his eyes as if he were examining them and finding them a curiosity. He stands aside.)

CHORUS: The fools!
Are we not fools, all of us on this earth!
The gods make believe they want our blood we part pretend that we appease them, and so we play the game of pain and pleasure.

CHICHI: Fools? Are there other fools in the world besides me? Yes, you are fools, now I think of it.

CHORUS: Away with you, fool! Away!

CHICHI: Not before I have told you something. *(Smiles insultingly.)*

CHORUS: Go away, fool we say, go away!

CHICHI: So you sold your own daughter for rain; they sold a girl for rain; their own child for rain! *(He laughs hideously.)*

CHORUS: *(Moving slowly towards him, their necks stretched forward in a menacing attitude, while CHICHI retreats)*: Out, fool! We say go out! You have a mouth that is wider than your sense. You have a tongue that is broader than the highway.

CHICHI: You yourselves have said you are fools, not so? But why did you not tell Nditi and the Chief and all the people who came? Why do you talk about them here in dark corners?

CHORUS: Out, we say, fool! Do you not know we whisper to the hearts of men – nothing that *you* have any sense to know.

CHICHI: *(Laughing between words)*: Fools! Fools! Fools!

(Exit R. The CHORUS walk back downstage)

VOICE: *(of mother backstage)*: Oganda! Oganda!

CHORUS: Listen, her mother is calling!

VOICE: *(As before)*. Oganda, Oga-a-nda, my child!

CHORUS: A cry to rip open the blackest heart
among the blackest gods that ever lived!

VOICE: *(As before)*. Come back! Come ba-a-a-ck, my child!

CHORUS: Child of your mother, go and do not turn!
Mother of Oganda, from this day
turn your eyes towards the sunset there,
pretend you see her standing near the sun
and tumbling down the western hills each day:
Oganda is as tender as the sunset,
and the twilight of your mother's joy.

(Exeunt R. while the VOICE continues to wail.)

(Part Two)

The next day. It is towards sunset. The scene throughout is set on the fringe of a forest. When the curtain rises we discover OGANDA walking and singing a dirge. In her hand is a small bundle wrapped in a blanket. She makes a wide circle, moving anti-clockwise. When her song ends a second time, CHICHI enters.

CHICHI: Oho! Here you are. I do not know you well, but everyone knows Chichi. Who does not know Chichi? Now, why do I not know you and you know me? *(He pauses.)* Hm . . . you are the Chief's daughter, that I know. *(He giggles and nods several times)* They call me a fool, so that makes me famous. Are you not a fool? No, so you cannot be famous. Even being a Chief's daughter cannot make you famous unless you are a fool as well. Not even your journey to the lake will make you famous. Those howling fools, as soon as the rains have come and their bellies are full, will forget all about you. You will be just a name, just that. *(He snaps his fingers.)* All those presents they brought you and the good food they cooked for you – they were just happy it was not their daughters who were chosen to

die. Am I talking too much?
(OGANDA nods sympathetically)

OGANDA: But you speak wisely.

CHICHI: *(Giggling)*: That is the first time anyone has ever told me that. Now I shall no longer be famous in your eyes — now that you think I am wise. *(He pauses.)* Do you like to die?

OGANDA: If I have to —

CHICHI: You are not answering the question.

OGANDA: *(Impatiently)*: No — who likes to die?

CHICHI: I do. I have been dead as long as I can remember and I like it. Let us sit down here, night is about to fall. *(They sit under a tree.)*

OGANDA: What do you mean?

CHICHI: I mean that night is falling, do you not see it?

OGANDA: No, I was asking about your being dead.

CHICHI: Oho, that? You look at me: do you think I am alive?

OGANDA: Yes, otherwise we should not be talking like this.

CHICHI: That is another story.

OGANDA: What is another story?

CHICHI: The reason why they call me Chichi.

OGANDA: But we were not talking about that.

CHICHI: I was. I was talking to myself about it and I was going to say it to you.

OGANDA: What were you going to say about your name?

CHICHI: Simply the reason why they call me Chichi.

OGANDA: Yes, but why?

CHICHI: *(Shrugging his shoulders)* I do not know.

OGANDA: *(with an air of resignation)*: Why are you only wondering about it now?

CHICHI: Is that unusual?

OGANDA: What?

CHICHI: Wondering after years why one is called this or that? Have you ever wondered why you should die, until today?
(OGANDA looks down and then breaks into sobbing).
O! O! O! Did I say anything to hurt you? Forgive me, please. *(He hugs her and presses her against his chest).* Forgive me.
(She stops crying).

OGANDA: Now you must leave me to go on.

CHICHI: Please let me take you as far as the lake. You need to be defended against wild beasts.

OGANDA: I have been anointed, so no danger can touch me.

CHICHI: That does not impress me. Did they anoint you against fear, or against the pain of drowning?
(OGANDA hesitates to speak.)
No they could not. So I will be your companion at the moment of fear. I will also keep watch at the fire while you sleep. Please allow me to come with you.

OGANDA: All right, Chichi.
(CHICHI does a few clumsy steps of a dance and sings. He takes OGANDA by the hand and both of them sing and dance, until she is out of breath.)

CHICHI: Now let me collect firewood.
(Exit R. while OGANDA opens her bundle and takes out food. CHICHI re-enters and comes to kindle a fire. They eat. The lights dim.)
Why do you not cheat the gods, eh?

OGANDA: *(Starting)*: How?

CHICHI: You have been sent to the lake, so go the mountains.

OGANDA: And the rain?

CHICHI: We shall yell and scream again for it and another girl will be sent to the lake and she may also cheat the gods and go elsewhere, and we shall yell and scream and again Nditi will find more work and he will be so many goats richer — lean goats, but still goats.

OGANDA: No, I could never do a thing like that.

CHICHI: I have always cheated the gods. *(He giggles.)*

OGANDA: In what ways?

CHICHI: Look at the twisted body they gave me. But I still walk and dance. By making me a fool they have given me the right to do many foolish things, sometimes unknowingly, sometimes knowingly. And I know they must be saying among themselves: Poor Chichi; he does not know any better, the fool.

OGANDA: But they should know when you are cheating them — when you are doing the wrong thing knowingly.

CHICHI: The gods know just as much as we think they should know. If I steal another man's goat, and I say to myself, the gods will not know this, then they cannot know. But if I say to myself: the gods are looking at me, then they are looking at me. The gods can make one laugh, not so? *(He giggles.)* I spy on them, you do not know! *(He giggles).*
(OGANDA appears shocked. CHICHI draws closer to her as if to entrust a secret to her).
I have often overheard them talking among themselves. This is when I hear sounds in my head. They think no-one knows what they are going to do except themselves.

OGANDA: But they tell Nditi what to tell the people —

CHICHI: You do not believe what that old rascal says, do you, surely? *(Looks around as if he fears that NDITI may be listening.)* He will continue to fool everyone, that greasy man. All he can do is take people's goats, sheep and fowls and become rich. He thinks he knows what the gods are saying or thinking. Chichi can tell him many many secrets the gods talk about.

OGANDA: Did you know you were going to be crippled before it happened?

CHICHI: No they took me by surprise. You see, I had just been born. You see how they cheat? A small baby as I was, they came through a window and did their evil work on me — when I was not looking.

OGANDA: If you had been a grown up, what would you have done about it?

CHICHI: Do I know?
(OGANDA laughs, really tickled. CHICHI joins her in laughing and soon both are rocking with laughter.)
They are both smart and stupid these gods, not so? You ask them: You gods, when am I going to die? They just keep silent and look at you like a cow chewing the cud. You could ask them: You gods, is my wife going to bear a boy or girl? You think they will say anything? *(He shakes his head.)* No. They still

look at you like a cow And because they fear we shall disgrace them if we know beforehand what is going to happen to us, they shut their lips Now, the gods *know* the rain must come one day, they send Nditi to tell us all these tales about his dreams as if they were doing us a favour, for which you now have to die.

(He notices that OGANDA is yawning.)

Oh, you must sleep after this long walk and laughing.

(He clears a piece of ground for her; she lies down and he covers her with a blanket.)

I will keep watch. Nothing will touch you as long as I am with you.

(As CHICHI takes a blade of grass and picks his teeth and bites it, there is a howl of a hyena in the distance. Other animal sounds can be heard. He puts more wood on the fire and blows).

All right, Nditi. They say you have the power to see people and animals even though they may be far away from you. Perhaps you are telling the people lies again saying you can see us here.

(He picks up a stone, tosses it up and catches it mid-air. He closes his hand upon it and hides it behind his back. He looks in front of him as if someone were standing there.)

Now tell me, Nditi, you medicine man, tell me: what do I have in my hand, tell me if you can see things so far away. *(He laughs.)* No, it is not a bird . . . stupid, why should I be keeping a bird in my hand at night? . . . No, you are wrong, not a stick . . . No, not a stone. It is an elephant, stupid man . . . see here!

(He shoots out his hand and open it and laughs scornfully, with his tongue well out of his mouth.)

(Animal sounds.)

(CHICHI hums a tune softly.)

MOTHER: *(Enters L. At the entrance she stops and shouts)* Oganda! Oganda! Oganda, my child! *(Then she comes downstage L. and turns R. walks a little past the fire and then looks back briefly at the couple. She continues to walk and turns right, out R. Enters GRANDMOTHER L., walking downstage L. with the support of her staff, pausing on and off and looking about. She mumbles to herself.)*

GRANDMOTHER: Where is the child? Oganda! Are you bringing my porridge my child? Where is this girl? Nobody cares for me in this house except Oganda. What shall I do the day some stupid young man takes her away? *(She places her hand on her hip.)* Oh, these bones! The blood is not flowing the right way anymore. I have known it all the time: they poison my food in this house — these witches. Where can old age find shelter when your own children kill you slowly with black magic? Oganda, my son's daughter, I only have you to take care of me. Never leave me alone.

(She passes to the right and exits R.

OGANDA stirs as if something has jolted her. She half sits up.)

OGANDA. Where are they?

CHICHI: Eh? Who?

OGANDA: My mother and my grandmother.

CHICHI: You are dreaming child.

OGANDA: Yes. It was a dream. She was shouting, calling for me, My mother, I mean. And then when I tried to talk to her, she just looked back at me as if she did not know me. Then my grandmother came looking for me. Grumbling all the time, as she always does, saying my father and mother want to kill her. *(She lies down.)*

(The CHIEF enters L., walks downstage, turns R., passes the couple, turns R. and goes out R. OGANDA stirs but continues in a lying position.)

(A six-legged animal enters R. It moves downstage, turns L. and stops almost in front of the couple. It shakes itself, turns round to lick its rump. Then it stamps its legs on the ground. It proceeds and makes a curve L. and stops. NDITI appears L., comes downstage and strokes the animal. A girl representing OGANDA enters L. and walks to the animal, as if in her sleep or in a daze.)

NDITI: *(In a deep and mocking voice just when OGANDA is near)*: Why do they send such an ugly girl for the ancestors? Listen to me, you stupid people! This girl is an insult to the ancestors!

(He and the beast walk out R. The girl turns round and runs out L. At this point OGANDA jumps up and huddles against CHICHI, panting and looking about her.)

CHICHI: What is eating you? Can you not sleep?

OGANDA: What a nasty nightmare! It was a six-legged beast. It walked around here and when I was nearing the lake I found it waiting with Nditi. Nditi shouted . . . what did he say now? . . . I cannot remember the exact words . . . He said with an angry voice that I was too ugly for the ancestors. He was not looking at me. He was cursing the people . . . Neither he nor the beast even looked at me. They just walked away. I remember how my heart was filled with gladness and I ran out . . . and . . . and then I woke up. *(She pauses.)* What can it mean, Chichi?

CHICHI: Let all the ugly women and girls in the world rejoice! Let all the fools in the world laugh, for they give nothing, take nothing and feel nothing. For them the world moves like a crab. *(He laughs.)*

OGANDA: You are wrong, Chichi. You have such a tender heart.

CHICHI: As tender as the fruit that has dropped to the ground too early and no one ever bothers to pick up. Soon the ants are upon it, dragging it about. Sleep, Oganda. The first cock will soon crow.

OGANDA: Do you not ever sleep?

CHICHI: Yes, but not tonight. Sleep.

(OGANDA goes back to her sleeping place

and lies down. CHICHI covers her. Sounds of wild beasts).

(Enter a group of girls of OGANDA's age group, in a way OGANDA is familiar with. The dancing and singing must be full of youthful zest. She dreams that she is among them. Enter OSINDA L. He comes to sit downstage L. and watches the dance. Now and again OGANDA breaks away from the company and comes to pass in front of OSINDA, circles round him. But he does not take any notice of her. She goes back to join the dance. This happens about three times. Then OSINDA rises, walks to the group, takes another girl by the hand and walks out with her R. The dance continues and the group exeunt R., still singing and dancing. OGANDA stirs in her sleep.)

OGANDA'S PRESENCE: *(Leaving the group and coming back downstage, and in a doleful voice:)*
Osinda! Osinda! Why do you leave me behind? Do you not know me anymore, Osinda? You have taken another girl and left me behind. Osinda come to me! This is the last time you will see me, Osinda. Tomorrow I go to the lake!
(She turns round and exits R. in slow footsteps, her head drooping.)
(The cock crows, and CHICHI wakes up OGANDA. She rubs her eyes and sits up and stretches herself.)

OGANDA: Thank you very much, Chichi. If it is true people are alive in the land of the ancestors, I will always think of you and your good heart.

CHICHI: *(Smiling):* Let us move. *(He rises.)* Did you dream again?

OGANDA: Ye-e-yes . . . What an ugly dream. *(She pauses.)*

CHICHI: Tell it to me.

OGANDA: I was with girls of my age group and we were dancing and singing as we often do at home. O – o – si – Osinda – *(She pauses and looks down.)*

CHICHI: Who is he? *(He notices the bashfulness on her face, in her eyes as she looks up again and then looks away.)* Oh, I see . . . *(He nods.)*

OGANDA: He came and sat on a stone near us. I came to him but he took no notice of me . . . He simply looked straight ahead of him as if I were not near him. I came back three times, and still he did not look at me. *(She pauses.)* Then he stood up and came straight to our group and he – he– took another girl . . . I do not even know who the girl was . . . He took her by the hand and walked away with her. When you woke me up I had just been calling his name and was beginning to cry. Strange . .
(She picks up her bundle distractedly. The two exeunt R. The CHORUS enters L. and moves to Centre downstage).

CHORUS: When fools begin to think and talk like wise men,
When beauty sends us hurtling down the cliff.
When tears and rain and blood are thrown together
down the heated bowels of the earth
to bring us food: how can we laugh or cry?

1ST CHORUS WOMAN: Oganda may have well betrayed our people, how do we know?

2ND C.W. Impossible.

3RD C.W. How do we know? I do not trust her beauty.

4TH C.W. What you think of her is not important, her beauty is the business of others.

5TH C.W. Something tells me she could not betray us
she is not the bitter cherry covered
with the tender, shining skin we know.

CHORUS: Yes, Oganda must be near the water:
a little time to wait and rain must come;
the rain must come: O come, you rain, come.
(Enter OSINDA R., looking around, obviously searching for something or someone.)

OSINDA: *(Breathlessly):* Greetings, mothers!

CHORUS: Greetings, our son!

OSINDA: Have you not met a beautiful girl walking towards the lake?
(The CHORUS mumbles and whispers among themselves).
Can you not see how breathless I am? I am looking for her.

1ST C.W.: What does she look like?

2ND C.W.: How is she dressed?

3RD C.W.: What is she to you?

4TH C.W.: How tall is she?

5TH C.W.: What is her name?

OSINDA: *(Hesitatingly).* I do not know – but she is beautiful.

CHORUS: How can you look for a person whose name you do not know, foolish boy? *(They look at him askance, with suspicion).* Why do you want her? She is no more of this earth, do you not know? You are chasing after the wind.
(OSINDA displays a look of disgust, turns away with a bodily jerk and exits R. CHORUS turns to exit L.)
Come rain, come down, O rain; rain come down.
(The voices fade gradually.)
(Enter OGANDA and CHICHI R., and they walk downstage.)

OGANDA: You must leave me now, Chichi. *(Pointing ahead.)* Here is the lake. It waits for me. You

have been good to me. I thank you.

CHICHI: Go well, Oganda, go well.
(After pausing for a moment, CHICHI turns away and exits R. OGANDA takes a few more paces forwards and stops at the edge of the stage, with a fatalistic expression on her face. Enter OSINDA R., again out of breath.)

OSINDA: Oganda, Oganda! Do not throw yourself into the water! *(Pauses.)* Come with me and I will make you my wife. Come. *(He takes her by the hand and pulls her a little away from the edge of the stage. She resists).*

OGANDA. No, Osinda. I must go to the land of the ancestors. I cannot cheat the gods. They will punish us both.

OSINDA: No, you are not in the frame of mind to do the right thing just now. Someone else must tell you what to do –

OGANDA: What I am going to do is what I was told by other people – people who know more than either of us.
(She tries to pull away, but his grip is firm.)

OSINDA: Oganda, I want you to be my wife. That man Nditi, who said the gods had chosen you – why is everybody so sure that he is telling the truth? You are beautiful, Oganda, but is it possible that you could be the only beautiful girl among all the Luo people? Even if I thought of you like that, it would not be true. So why should *you* be sold for rain?

OGANDA: Osinda, what are you saying? You want me to do something that is out of the way, against my parents, against the people . . .

OSINDA: It is not out of the way, Oganda. It is the only thing you could want. The same thing they want – life. You want to live, do you not?

OGANDA: Yes, but we cannot do what we like in this life. *(She pulls away again and breaks loose. But as she runs towards the water, OSINDA catches up with her again. He presses on her arm and shoulder, thus forcing her into a sitting position. He squats beside her. There is a moment of silence.)* The gods will punish us painfully for this. I can see only darkness before us, darkness – all darkness

OSINDA: Why should we be punished for wanting to live?
(Silence.)
Come, let us go. *(They both stand.)*
(There is a rumbling noise in the sky. They both look up.)
Do you hear thunder? I smell rain. Do you not?
(OGANDA looks up and sniffs. Then she looks hard at OSINDA).

OGANDA: Yes! I smell rain, too. Why is it? *(Looking hard at him.)* What kind of person are you? *(Looking away).* And it is becoming dark, you know.

OSINDA: It is coming. You can see it in the West. The clouds look angry there. Let us go Oganda.

OGANDA: Where shall be go?

OSINDA: Away from our homes. Far away from here. We shall go north and cross over to the land of Baganda. No one will come for us there. They may never even know that you did not drown in the lake there.

OGANDA: It is well, Osinda, as you say. No, it is not well, but may the ancestors forgive us! The land shall have rain and the people will still think that I am . . .
(More thunder. Exeunt R.
Enter CHICHI, coming from the auditorium, as rain begins to come down.)

CHICHI: *(Laughing aloud):* You fools, you fools! They have cheated the gods. Ha, ha, ha! I am the only one besides them who knows. There is your rain you tribe of fools, take it! You think you bought it with your stupid hearts, with the blood of your daughter and the grief of her mother and father. Ha, ha, ha!
(He looks up and his face moves as of one on whom rain is falling. He swallows hard at intervals. He gives the last shout as the lights fade.)
Come rain and flood them out of their houses Ha, ha, ha! That is what you are now plotting to do among yourselves, is it not, you gods? They ask for rain and you give it to them until you make floods, eh? This time you will claim a goat. Chichi can see you in your dark little corner there *(pointing secretly).* He can hear all you say. Do not think he does not see you. Ha, ha, he, he, hi, hi!
(Exits R.)
(Enter a group of people dancing and singing in jubilation to welcome the rain.)

Curtain

We hope that the publication of this play will make it available to drama groups for readings and productions. If you are planning to perform it, please let us know.

DRAMA SECTION NEWS

Fatima Dike's *The First South African* is now available (R2.75 plus tax 11c) in the Ravan Playscripts series. Her new play is *The Glasshouse* – currently playing at the New Space in Cape Town.

Also on in Cape Town is *Egoli*, the play by Matsemela Manaka, performed by Moalusi John Ledwaba and Hamilton Mahonga Silwane. News about the progress of *Egoli* in our next *Staffrider*.

Mxolisi Moyo

MAKANA (THE SON OF MAN)

1782 was the blessed day:
Out of the mealiefields
Out of the running kei water
Out of the red dry soil of Afrika
Emerged the light of Dalidipu.

Dum! Dum! Dum! went the drums
Pi! Po! Pi! Po! went the flutes
Dalidipu *umkhulu*
Dalidipu *ndiyakwazisa*
Dalidipu *uyiAfrika*

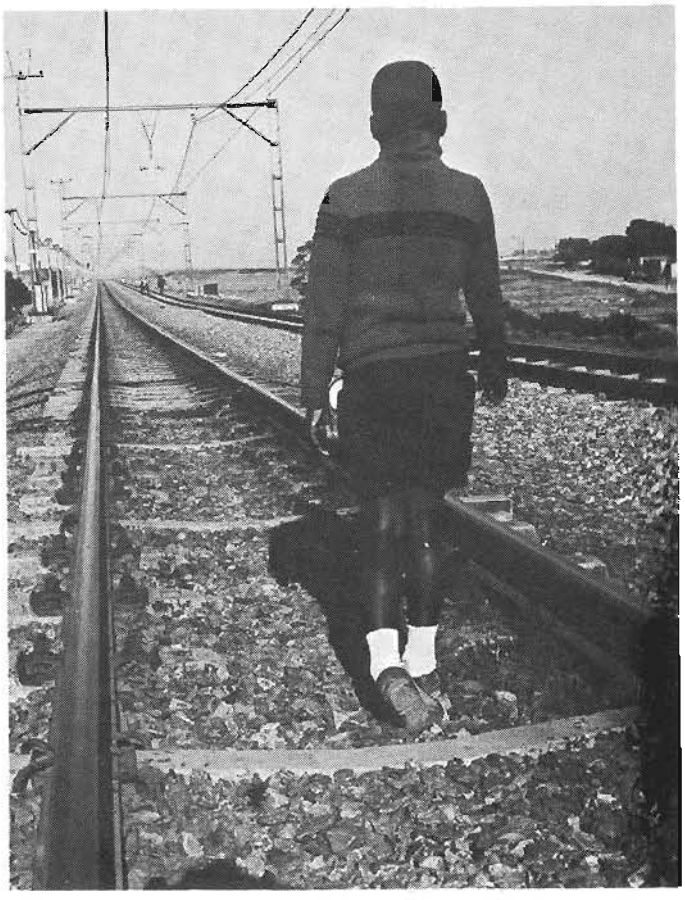
Makana, Son of Man
You shouted till the last note reached my ears:
The hypocrites' religion is water
in the strong hearts of Afrika

Dalidipu is stronger than Thixo:
You, Makana, with Ndlambe and the Amakrele
United Afrika's music
And tried to uplift Dalidipu.
You were crushed and resigned, defeated.

Robben Island was first known by you,
But Dalidipu never forsook you:
He gave you wisdom and you succeeded
In owning a gun and a boat.

Christmas is not as good as we make it out to be
For it is the day Dalidipu chose to call you, Son of man,
To his holy palace:
Amakrele tears were wept unseen,
And black hearts crushed, but still hold the hope that
You, Son of Afrika
Will come back to lead
Amakrele through the thorns of our beloved land, Azania.

Nhlanhla Damoyi



Mxolisi Moyo

A BUG

One night a bug on the edge of an ear was looking for a softer part to suck blood. He saw a big white cotton wool stuffed inside, and he said to himself: 'What a nice soft cushion to lay my eggs on.'

Mpikayipheli Figlan

A SONG OF PRAISE

For Ingoapele Madingoane

o ingoapetse madingoane
mokokoneng le motlohele
ka ha e le sapo le thata
a sena nama
pina o binile
ra bina-bina.

Mmaphuti wa Mailula

BLACK MOTHER
(To my aunt, and my country)

O Mother
who leaves
your house
at the hour
of vexing cold
to give warmth and comfort
to the house of another woman.

Mother
your blood oozes
at the care
of another woman's house
shining with your sweat.

You suffer pain
for the comfort
of another woman's child
nurturing for the wealth
of a foreign world.

Mother
your children
grow like orphans
while you nurse
a never grateful
trollop's kids.

Your children
go to the dogs
as the greedy white purloins
their rights to your care
and taps your toil's due.

O Mother
I am your child
who feels your plight
with vexation, agony and obloquy
and an active desire for your freedom

A cure from our plight:
the socio-economic monster
gnawing at our lives.

It is a disease
spread by the endemic foreign germ
in our midst on our land.
I can hear your heart-felt
whispers of prayer geared by pain
the tears on your cheeks
are scars of humiliation –
scars of the whip
of Pass Laws
Group Areas Act
Internal 'Security' Act
Suppression of Communism Act
'Terrorism' Act
brain damage from 'hunger strikes'
mysterious falls from police heights
and all the tossing around
and theft of your toil's due –

your crying voice
is a clamour for freedom
your prayer:
'O Lord
how long shall I bear this plague
tell me, if these be the yields of prayer'.

Hear me, dear Mother
your plight is my plight
your freedom is my career
your God is your own heritage
the well of your strength –
the strength of your being
the being of your courage
you will get the cure
within you
your issue
and regain the whipend
of what is yours by right.

Bafana Buthelezi

BERNARD

I loved the beauty of your changing face,
It photographed the spectrum of your soul.
My eyes would gaze into your eyes and trace
Gigantic hopes.

Your downy head was crucified
With potent tendrils of technology.
How I longed to hold you, defy the tides
That echoed death.

'Gainst time you ran a bitter losing race,
Illusive time was champing at the bit,
While remissions only served to space
The frantic pace.

I long to trace that distant hemisphere.
No longing can replace that infant face,
But every image has been stored with care.
Now time my happiness has dared to trace.

Joanmariae Fubbs

ISOLATION

A captive in the market-mall she stood,
Her thoughts so alien in this mining land,
Beyond the clack of clucking female band
Lived those she loved, akin in soul and thought.
Dreamy-eyed moved she between the mocking courtesies,
They spoke a tongue she could not understand.

I live with close friends, kind, true and strong,
Their tumult echoes through the streets of stone,
Yet in the little town's familiar tones
The friends I know only smile and pass along,
The restless traffic's throbbing monotone.
Dear God! I am most utterly alone!

Joanmariae Fubbs

QHAWE LAKITHI

Uyisiqongo ungangezintaba.
Ulubhaqa labakhona nabezayo,
Abeza nabo ngoba bezoba lubhaqa
Lokukhanyisela ababalandelayo.
Bebakhanyisela ngoba bekhanyiselwe
Nguwe Nkathazo wakwethu.

Ngithi uliqhawe kwethu.
Ngomlahlandlela owuvulele abakwenu
Bedukuz'ebamnyameni bengaboni,
Ithemba labo liphezu kwezinkonjane
Wasihlakaniphisa ngokungathembeki kwazo.
Kakadeni zingomalal'ephenduka.

Ndlondlobala qhawe lakwethu,
Ndlondlobala wedlul' izintaba
Kakade kwakhokho wabengelivaka.
Singaziqhayisa ngani singasaziqhayisi ngawe.

Ernest Jabulani Mnyayiza

PHUZ'UGXILE

Phuz' ugxile
Emfuleni wolwazi.
Ukuphuzaphuza kuyasanganisa.
Ukuphuz' ugxile
Kuyaswabulukisa.

Sukela lomnotho njalo,
Beka ezithendeni zawo.
Uwulandele njalonjalo,
Phuza uphuzisise,
Uqaphele ukuphuzaphuza.
Ngoba kuyagcwanekisa.

Agrippa S. Mkhize

ESIBONGILE/NATAL

MBULAZI MTAKAMTUNGWA

WenaMosile mtaka mTungwa
Ngihaya ngeqholo lokunono phala kwakho
Nkosazane ngiyezwa ukugiyakwakho
Ngempensela kwelase Mhlangeni

Ngizw' umgido wezinganezesikole
Zihaya ingoma ngenhluzo
Yobuchopho bakho
Thuthukela phambili
Ncelalolompe lweziNjula
Zomqondo zasemfuleni
Thwasa ngabalozi bamakhos' amasha ase Afrika
Qugudo amakhubalo okusiza isizwe sikanobantu
Qhela imiyeko yakho yemiyezane

Lapho umfoka Vilakazi ekuphehlela ukhamba
Ekudikibeza ngenkonkoni yokubhulelo isizwe esimhlophe
Gaxa iziphandla zikano Lwazi kuhle kwesangoma sabalozi
Uvikazele ntokazi kaMbulazi

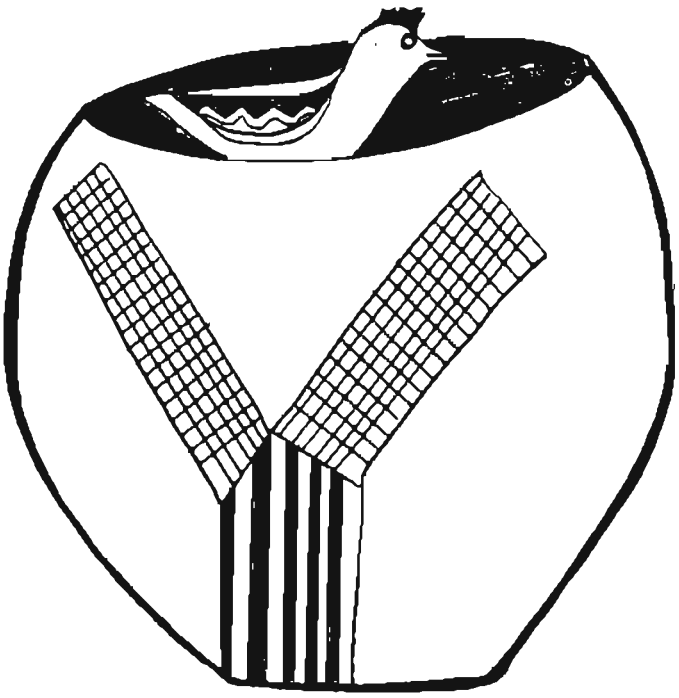
B. Simon Nene

More from Mpumalanga Arts in this issue: see the poems and workshop by Mafika Pascal Gwala on p.55.

UYOB' UDODILE

Uyob' udodile ndodana
Uyob' udodile,
Ngokuded' ekududaneni nasendelelweni
Yamadodana ezedeleli.
Ngokuqikelela usaqotho nenqubekela phambili,
Ngokuxwaya ingxubevange yamaxoxo
ezingxoxo ezixabanisayo,
Ngokuqal' imiqans' enqabile yenqubekela
phambili yize iqongile.
Ngokuzihlukanisa nabahlangene emihlanganweni
yokuhleba.
Ngokuthanda nokuthemba imithetho ethandwa
uThembekile.
Uyob' udodile ndodana
Uyob' udodile.

Agrippa S. Mkhize



The children at *Emdukatshani* in the heart of the barren and violent Msinga district are preparing their own contribution to *Staffrider's* Children's Section. Above is one of the drawings already received.

AGONY AND ECSTASY

Rejoice and hide your shame:
Only I shall know your pretence.
No-one else will know,
Only you and I.

Like a slab of concrete
You lay there
Enraptured in your victory
Of holding me in your power.
In this loveless match
You teased me into submission,
Me panting and near to tears,
You moaning in simulated pleasure.

Can I ever look you in the face after this?
A friend you were,
A lover you turned,
A lover not worth much after all.
A traitor you turned me into,
Helpless and agonised in your cold embrace
After all the trust that was given me.
Rejoice in your shame,
Hiding behind a smile of concealed triumph:
And I'll despair in mine.

Setsepe Ernest Sedibe

THE GARDEN BOY

He lived amid the floricultural attractions
Of the white suburbs.
He's unknown to his people and the state,
Known to his employer and to his duty.
He never schooled, but he can english.
He knows Verwoerd and has seen King George
And never forgets to say,
'How good they were'.

He is the only black rose among
The white daisies and lilies.
The lawns he tends are greener
Than the grass he smokes.
'Keep off the grass,' he shouts
Whenever his brother comes for garbage.
He lives to see the happiness of others
Which is of his making:
The florist wears his dignity
And pockets his emoluments.

His possessiveness knows no law,
Colour or creed.
They are all his,
My baas, my missis
My baas se vrou, my vrou se baas.
He sings the music of the birds,
Listens to the humming bees
And dances spade in hand as the flowers
Sway from side to side.

He prefers to be called
Jim, Dick, John or Petros
Rather than boy.
And whenever the missis shouts 'Boy! . . . '
He never responds,
But says, 'SHIT! . . . '
Without being heard.

Bonisile Joshua Motaung

MY WHITE DREAM

It was a black night of white, shining stars outside.
I was asleep on my bed, enveloped and wrapped in white.
On my bedside table was a candle, a book and a photo.
My two pillows were big and soft and comfortable
And my sleep was big and large and deep.
A dream came to me in my sleep,
It was a white dream.

In that dream:
I was driving a black limousine
On a long twisting tar road.
The cars I was following were not like mine.
They were white and wonderful and
They kept crawling and overtaking me on a white straight line.
We were passing big, pale-looking white buildings on our way
And from the windows of those white wonderful buildings,
People waved and waved and waved and waved to us as we passed by.
In that dream.
I saw a cop in front of us;
He was wearing a white wonderful uniform
And he was wearily waving and directing us
To an entrance which had two white flying flags on both sides.
His white gloves were pointing and pointing and pointing.
As my turn came to steer and enter,
I saw him suddenly stop waving;
I heard him yelling and yelping, yelping and yelling.
And as I looked lazily towards him,
I saw his white shining teeth snarling.
I was so shaken and so shocked by this sight,
I suddenly shuddered in shock and shame.
I shook with shock and woke up;
I woke up quickly, upsetting the quietness and the silence.
Oh, what a white dream.

Mabua A. Moalusi

MADI GROUP/KATLEHONG

THE CONDEMNED TREE

Far south in the proud continent,
at a point opposite
the unconcerned north,
grows the prickly tree.

Climatic conditions
being what they are
in the neighbouring countries
scientists there, as well as
the simply ignorant
shunned its growth.

Transgressors back home
sowed its seeds on
every inch of mother
africa's soil.

It bears no clear description
as botanists avoid its growth.
It insinuates everywhere
becoming a pervasive problem.

People are crying out for help –
they appeal to anyone in the world
who can destroy this
monstrous tree and its fruit.

People died a distance from
its roots
in hopeful attempts at extraction.
Risky as their attempts were,
they won themselves heroism.

It bears
no fruits,
no shade,
but annoyingly spreads new sprigs
increasing its pricks:
people's voices are
set and ready
to proclaim any
fellow victim
their soul's saviour:
who can
extract
this
blasphemous
tree.

Ngaka Nhlapo

the fighter

here i come
as innocent as a butterfly
as young as today's day
armed to the teeth brother
with open hands of peace
and hope for change

i am a fighter
fighting hunger
poverty
disease
to save human life

i fight the monster
called apartheid
that peeled away my dignity
yesterday calling me native
kaffir
bantoe
and today an idling plural
when i move from place to place
seeking job
to feed my hungry mouth

i am a soldier
i'll keep on fighting
for justice instead of injustice
for love instead of hatred
building friendship instead of enmity
for in azania we hate no man
but man's deeds

Maupa Kadiaka

NIGEL

FREE DESERT

You wish they had
set me on fire
for being a witch
but they did dear
There's just ashes now
Ashes and blue sky

There's nothing
like love between men
The love between
a man and a woman
doesn't come near it

Pure mental love
with not a trace
of hurt or pride
There's nothing left
to fight for
not even love

Enough trace of heart
left over from the holocaust
to see you through
Way beyond genius
Genius is just
the beginning of the path

No one to compete against
except yourself
No more races to run
No need to do anything
unless you want to
No meaning in life

Mario Stolfi

MBAKASIMA GROUP/SEBOKENG AND EVATON

THE BLACK NEWSPAPERS

Boom! Boom! Boom!
One early morning
In the heart of Azania
I heard the Drum.
Drum is the Post of Africa
Posted from village to village
Calling the sons and daughters of Azania for Indaba.

The World over
The Voice of mother Africa
Is heard crying
For her children in chains,
From her womb to the tomb,
From the cradle to the grave,
How much should they pay for freedom:
They've bled, cried and sweated in vain.

Every Nation in the World
Listens to the Voice
Of mother Africa.
Help her to free her children
From the claws of the hawk.
The hawk banned the World,
No longer the Staffrider
Of his family Indaba.

Abia Ramalebo Diutloileng

I'VE LOST MY MUSIC

Spell it out
Tell them the truth
The bitterness of it
It is you
My Bible, my good book
Man's reference book
Yet it cannot be used like
other books in the library
Diverter of man's positive thinking
You taught me to sing
The Gospel
Kneel for Uncle Tomism
and I sang the Lord's Prayer
Our Father . . . Amen.

Say it aloud
Why am I so void?
What is it that I don't have?
Is it talent?
Sh . . .
Forget it; I know
I've lost
My original African tune
Yes my music,
My sweet, sound music.

R. Thutloe

DURBAN

PIRATES

The wind, a mass of nothingness,
Rolls unfettered across the sea
Yet I who have the sails of a soul,
Am not free.
I, who ought to explore every realm,
Find my sails ripped apart,
Someone else at the helm.

The sentry in the crow's nest
Atop the mast,
No eyes has he
Over the rolling waters to cast.
For, alas, we awoke one day
To see his sight
By a blindfold had been taken away.

My trusty little crew,
Haggard and haunted though they be,
Try to keep
Their crippled ship at sea,
Always wary of some awesome cyclone
That may pounce
And batter the bulk to a bone.

But storm clouds
Are blanketing the sky,
And the waves
Become more restless, more hungry.
For a moment, in a lightning flash,
We see the ragged rocks
As the waves against them crash.

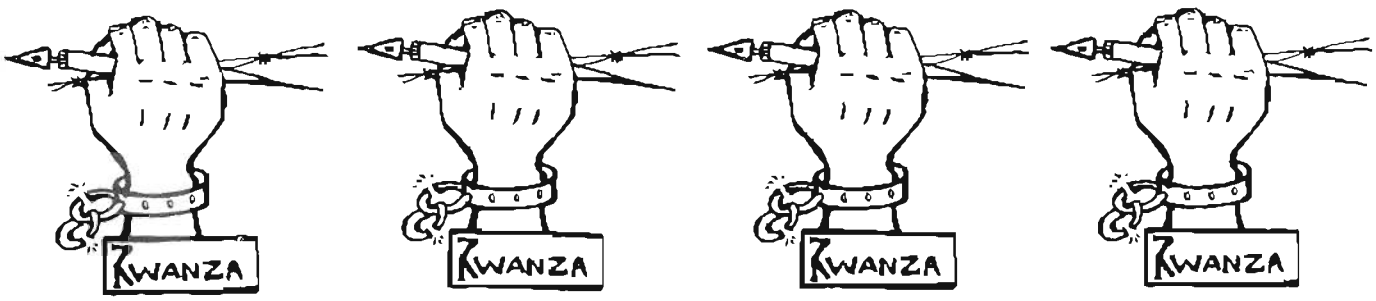
And, as the bitter morning breaks,
A seagull we spy;
We cannot help
But break out in cry:
O seagull, you with your white wings,
How we envy you,
The sight of you — o how it stings!
A matchbox of splinters.
We drift into the shore —
Pirates and all --
The foamy waters to roam never more.
I glance up at heaven, the dome
Of God, and whisper a prayer through cracked lips —
Our ship, The Azania, is safely home . . .

Tyrone R. August

No. 1
(Or Metaphor for the Poet conscious of a cultural limitation)

I am captain
Of a word-ridden ship;
Chief of its meaning,
I eat in the saloon
At Table No. 1.
I am the gun
That puts the fear of hell
Into deckhands, officers and Chief-of-Staff.
I am the supreme diet
Of my passengers.
I am the figure that blinks
Splendid braid on a worsted cloth;
They come to me to be superior,
Sit at my meal
With a flagrant delicacy;
They appeal to my infinite experience,
And I sit
And I laugh
At their jokes —
For they guide me,
Pay their dues — their exorbitant fare
Covers my kind of adequacy;
Their language displays that we
Were born in the same reserve.

Margo Wallace



HORIZONTE 79 World Festival of African Arts

Risimati j'Mathonsi of Kwanza recently attended Horizonte 1979, the World Festival of African Arts held in Berlin. The writers he met there, who included Wole Soyinka, Taban Lo Liyong, and Bessie Head, all had messages for writers in South Africa. In *Staffrider* Vol. 2 No. 4 (our next issue) we carry a full interview. But here, to introduce the 'workshop' section of *Staffrider*, are some excerpts:

'**Wole Soyinka**: he had seen *Staffrider* and was very interested in what we are doing. He would like to see more emphasis on the critical rather than the purely creative side in the magazine. It was inspiring to hear him reading.'

'**Mbuyiselo Gizano** is from Port Elizabeth: he left in 1967. He's doing research for a book on black consciousness, black power and Pan Africanism, analysing the common element in these three themes. One is struck by how hard the people over there are reading and working — other people like Barney Pityana, for instance. Mbuyiselo would like to see more of our people involved in the non-fiction fields, dominated so far by whites — socio-cultural-political research and so on.'

'I met **Cecil Rajendra** from Malaysia, the man who wrote *Bones and Feathers*, and talked to him a lot. He feels that one shouldn't write long poems unless they're epic or narrative: a three page poem of mine, for instance, he wanted me to try and write it in three *lines* . . . '

'Meeting fellow African writers I really felt for the first time that I *was* a writer . . . '

TO THE T SHIRT PRINTER

print us a T shirt
with the emblem of my continent
a symbol of my existence
a T shirt to blow away
mountains of fear
don't print me one on
american or british universities
don't print me one on
scandinavian colleges
but one on african heroes
one on the university of mondlane
one on the university of zambia
then you can print your protea
and your statues
my statues will germinate
from my sides and head
my heroes will wear a T shirt.

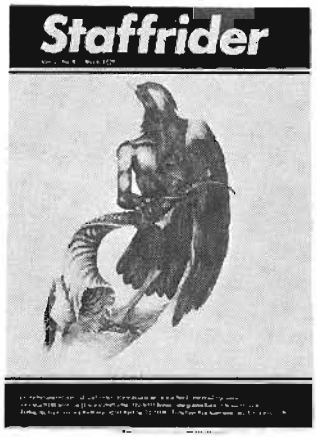
risimati j'mathonsi

MY FAITH LIES UNDER THE GROUND

To you who are lying in peace;
Peacefully under the sand of Africa,
To you the fathers of mine
You the fathers, fathers of my father.

I kneel humbly in front of you;
Humbled by these tragedies,
These tragedies that come . . . unnatural;
So unnatural that the Thinker himself wonders.
Those decisions of his that indicate something;
Something that you know and I not,
The day shall come when you let me know it;
But let it not be harmful.
Rich is the ground that I walk upon;
Beautifully washed and watered by your blood
Think about it, talk about it, care for it;
Because it was made for you, me and generations yet unborn.

Johnny Masilela



Staffrider Workshop

In this issue Mafika Gwala writes about the state of black writing in South Africa. The article has an interesting history – it was to have been a paper delivered at the writer's conference of 17 – 19 April 1976 in Johannesburg. Gwala's predictions – particularly regarding the re-emergence of prose – are of special interest in the light of developments since then. We also publish with this article three new poems by the man from Mpumalanga.

An investigation into the trend of Black writing in this country will show a commonness of theme, approach and overall expression that transcends style and the individual's manner of thinking.

According to my witness, Black writing has the following characteristics:

1. It brings into focus the complex nature of ghetto life.
2. It stimulates an awareness of positive values in indigenous culture, which was in no way inferior to the European culture if taken within its own context.
3. It draws lines between the traditional African cults of blacks and the decadent Western cults such as the Satan cults, nudism, the hippie cult, etc.
4. It is not only concerned with racial oppression; but also points out the shortcomings of orthodox modern awareness – the inverted idealism in hankering after bourgeois securities, the purposeless desperation of ghetto blacks and (in general) the alienation of the black in apartheid society.

On ghetto alienation here is a poem by Sipho Sepamla, 'The Sun':

This life-giver sun
dances no more
Perhaps because it's white-fury
But again pray
I do not complain
For I've never really known the sun
So much lost to me.

And on the over-loaded ghetto trains that are so prone to disasters the alienation comes out even in a smile; as Mafika Gwala says in 'The Chewing of Her Time':

She smiles
She smiles into my tight face
(A face tightened, through too much searching into packed train expressions)

On cultural alienation Shabbir Banoobhai writes in 'A Poem':

walked along the road one day
saw men toiling listless
by digging trenches
burning dead customs
unearthing new ones they do not understand
and i do not understand

Bourgeois securities that sometimes repel, and sometimes attract – leading Sepamla on to write in one of his poems from *Hurry up to it*:

I've come to your room to talk
And I've noticed you can't leave the air alone
I've left you fighting it violently
Spraying it with an air-freshener.

Probably this is at a flat in Hillbrow. And some whites can't take everything from the black man. Listening to black anxieties can be very tedious, and can induce smell – real or imaginary.

Anxieties there must be. Our writers are experiencing, directly or indirectly, the decolonization of Africa; the emergence of bourgeois values in the African community and the seeking after certain alternatives in the face of various problems. When Ezekiel Mphahlele wrote *Voices in the Whirlwind* he was taking a more defined line than the mixed thinking he had expressed in his *African Image*. Obviously, *Voices* must have been a result of struggle, even if that struggle was under the surface.

Voices gives me a safe base from which to say no one can dispute the fact that Black writing has shifted clearly from the position of the fifties.

I am not going to concern myself with whether today's position is better or worse than that of the fifties. My topic remains: 'Black Writing Today'. All the same we can remind ourselves that there is retrogression in every progress and there is progress in every retrogression. It depends which of the two contradictions becomes absolute; if it goes the wrong way, then we find ourselves in a stagnant position. What I can say is that today's blacks have taken the literary initiative into their own hands, following the lead of writers like Can Themba.

One may ask, didn't *Voices* include non-South African writing? It did. Mphahlele is a South African writer. Even in exile. What is more, Mphahlele is an academic. He is a good reference, to show that there are two kinds of intellectuals in our society. There are those who went through high school and university to enable themselves to render substantial services to their community. They will always differ from those who get themselves educated for social comforts.

TAP-TAPPING

Rough, wet winds
parch my agonized face
as if salting the wounds of
Bullhoek
Sharpeville
Soweto,
unbandage strip by strip
the dressings of Hope;
I wade my senses
through the mist;
I am still surviving
the traumas of my raped soil
alive and aware;
truths jump like a cat leaps for fish
at my mind;
I plod along
into the vortex
of a clear-borne dawn.

Mafika Gwala

There has been a change in the black writer's thinking for which no one can claim credit. All those writers who today seek a black influence in their writing do not do so in order to follow a fashion. They have simply gravitated into black awareness. Not for literary purposes. But because this black awareness is their experience.

We cannot ignore the repressive intellectual context within which we must write. And the frustration that follows. The racial issue cannot be ignored. General social conflict as depicted by Mongane Serote in 'What's in this Black Shit' does in fact exist. Comparisons between the town and the countryside pose a vital challenge to the status quo. The challenge comes out well in a poem

written by Zinjiva Nkondo which appeared in the first issue of the New Classic. I'll quote some of the lines:

I don't want all this cement smoothness
Cannot but falter-step over this naive pavement
for my open toes need must smell the green blades
my pores cannot stand the neon-peeping eye
eyes that objectify and distort
eyes that laugh at me
eyes that love me not
eyes that plan never to love me

I must go the way of the hare
Come back with the stride of a lion . . .

Although we must of necessity adapt ourselves to South Africa's brand of Western Civilization, we have by all means possible to assert our cultural past and our cultural present – despite the non-existence of a national culture within the apartheid society. What's wrong with that? After all, some of us are not unaware of the literary effects of Afrikaans. Sipho Sepamla effectively starts each verse of 'The Applicant' with with, *'Ja Meneer* I qualify'; *'Ja Meneer* I admit'; *'Ja Meneer* I agree'; *'Ja Meneer* I submit'; *'Ja Meneer* I confess'; respectively.

In one of Mothobi Mutloatse's poems, 'Bundu Bulldozers', we come across lines that read:

Once upon a bundu-era
there was mlungu *discrimination*
as a result of separate masemba
which has been immediately successful
in dividing the black skin
there is now bundu discrimination.
Who's benefiting – that exquisite skin!

(Quoted from *BOLT*). *'Masemba'* is that well-known four-letter word 'shit' or 'kak'.

How can Black writing currently be otherwise, when we are aware of those writers before us who have fallen into the trashbin of a capitalist-imperialist culture? Also, we are aware of those writers who classify Negritude and Black Consciousness as being racist. People who tamper with Black Consciousness and the Black Experience better watch it from now: the days of paradisal innocence are over.

Anyone who has an intellectual or moral quarrel with black terms of reference within the given reality of white *baaskap* and black depravity is on the other side of the line. And therefore in favour of the status quo.

Black consciousness helps to fight the bourgeois, and at times neo-fascist, context of white terms of reference within the apartheid reality. Black Consciousness also faces up to bitter truths that blacks must examine within a situation of social and ethical repression. Without calling people to a sermon I do wish to point out that Black Consciousness does not mean politics disguised as literature. Neither does it mean 'anti-white' writing as some head-

THE ABC JIG

Anger comes in silence

Some of our brothers graduate
on Robben Island
in the Arts of Struggle;
Others graduate
on the plains of the African Savannah;
Others still,
in the malaria-infested bushes
of the Boerewors Curtain.

Yet anger grows in silence

When they took us in
Steve Biko had resurrected
Onkgopotse, Mdluli, Mapetla;
I had seen them
give breath into the clay
of our liberated Black manchild.

Black is alive & keeping

The S.B.'s swarmed over us
leaving their stings of State fear
in our Black-Star shoulders;
You'd swear
it was the Gestapo squads
on Jew hunts.

The hunter shall be the hunted

They tortured our Black souls
little knowing:
By detention
they had sent us on a Black Holiday;
By assaulting us
they were teaching us hate;
By insulting us
they had told us never
to turn the other cheek.
We have no more tears to shed.

Ours is the long stride

Mafika Gwala

shrinkers love to categorize. Black Consciousness, to us, means the structuring of an alternative context to the apartheid context. As Herbert Marcuse aptly pointed out in his paper on 'Art in a One-Dimensional Society': 'One must revoke the Ninth Symphony not only because it is wrong and false (we cannot and should not sing an ode to joy, not even as promise), but also because it is there and is true in its own right. It stands in our universe as the justification of that "illusion" which is no longer justifiable.' (From *One Dimensional Man.*) Apartheid is there; in its own right on terms determined by a selfish minority. We revoke it.

Black Consciousness is thus a true reflection of our situational period. Black writing as a cultural product strives to do away with false images of our black woman as in Serote's 'The Auntie Other Side'; of our working class as in Gwala's 'Winter'; of our ghetto youth as in Serote's 'Alexandra' or Jiggs's 'Doornfontein'; of our socially secluded miners and of our countryfolks of whom much has been put down on paper; and of young politically banned student-youth leaders as in the poetry of Ilva Mackay and other young poets. Bessie Head's writings on rural Botswana are highly stimulating – and very Black.

We use English as a language medium. Our identity does not rest within the English cultural context, though we are conscious of the English sub-culture. Hence Black Consciousness can be seen to be a transient force, an idealism; but not an ideology. As part of national consciousness it can only be subjected to the trend that national consciousness takes. In South Africa one can say that black and white are necessary to each other. But the relation must be of a supplementary nature. No serious black writer can allow white values and white expressions to override his black experience.

It has been suggested in some quarters that Negritude and Black Consciousness in writing have racist connotations. And here I beg to differ. The upholding of such a viewpoint is not only absurd. The viewpoint is an imperialist and racist lie. Some people have been hoodwinked by forces of imperialist thinking and racist chauvinism into thinking that black writers have no claim to their Blackness. Black writers do have a Black Experience. Black writters did not choose to grow up in ghettoes like Mkhumbane (Cato Manor), Sophiatown, Clermont, Alexandra or Duncan Village. Neither do they choose to be pushed into so-called townships and into bundustans. This is a sociological factor that black writers cannot avoid. Inevitably they have the human right to claim a sociological imagination that challenges their sociological locale. There is no third choice: swim out of the muddy and polluted waters of apartheid society or drown. As Cesaire has said: 'The function of a work of art is to state a problem – that's all' (*A Tempest* – introduction to; by Aime

Cesaire). Even Mona Lisa could have been a problem to the age of da Vinci.

A social necessity manifests itself in most black writing. The necessity is not just to cry against apartheid. There'll be more than that. And protest literature is not the final answer.

It is hard to make a clear-cut definition of protest literature. However, there seem to be three visible trends:

1. Where the writer addresses the oppressor or the whiteman;
2. Where the writer addresses the liberals and calls for their attention to certain evils;
3. Where the writer addresses fellow blacks summoning them to look into their situation.

In all three trends, the poem or prose-work does not end with a note of directive towards the understanding and/or solution of the problem. Sipho Sepamla's 'The Applicant' (which starts each verse with *'Ja Meneer,*) belongs to the first category, partly. I say partly because Sepamla's ironical stance shows an underlying understanding of the problem. Today's writing is rarely found in this category.

The second category can be seen in the short stories of Webster Makaza, Leslie Sehume and others; and in the poetry of Sepamla as epitomized by his poem, 'Pimville Station'. Here is a poem so clearly addressed to whites that most blacks would hate to hear a fellow black talk so vaguely of such a commonplace experience as being at a ghetto railway station.

Fhazel Johannesse and Christopher van Wyk have a poem fitting into the third category titled; 'A Black Man & His Conscience'. The concluding lines go thus:

I cannot help everybody . . .
They can help themselves
Oh, you are so like your people
You cannot even help yourself.

(Published in *New Classic* No. 2 1975).

The poem 'The Question' went as far as far as literature of the third category can go. Opening with such lines as:

We sat in patches of doom
Discussing Eternity
All victimised by the question why
Why is Time the undisputed ruler
Why Time rules the minds of madness
Why Time rules from the womb to the tomb

It closes with:

At the funeral: the father wore black
the mother wore black
the priest wore black
the people wore black
They all cursed their blackness.
O victory put on your coat we are losing the battle to stay alive.

Themba Miya's poem is somewhat identical to the ultimate protest poem, 'Howl', by the American poet Allen Ginsberg. (*New Classic* No. 3 1976)

James Matthews urges liberals to be more meaningful in their anti-apartheid stands. This is one of the finest rhetorics of protest. Called 'White Liberal Protest', the poem appears in the banned poetry collection, *Black Voices Shout*. I do not think the poem in itself is banned, but the book as such. It is in this same anthology that the dynamics of black awareness come out convincingly from the poetess Ilva Mackay.

OLD MAN NXELE'S REMORSE: 20 JUNE 1976

Sons,
They are gunning down
our children
in Soweto;
What more
are we still living for?

Translation of the above poem:

UKUBUZA KIKAMKHULU UNXELE: 20 JUNE 1976

Bafana bami,
Badubula
izingane zethu
eSoweto;
Yini enye pho
esisayiphilela?

Mafika Gwala

Ilva's poem 'Powerful Thoughts For All' is truly powerful non-protest writing. Its communicative spirit goes beyond its being directed to fellow blacks.

It has become conclusively clear to blacks that protest literature has no staying power in our historic moment. That is why we are getting more poems that ask questions and/or give answers, directing themselves to blacks. Without speaking for myself I recall an incident that must have led me to a poem which some people have attacked me for, and called the poem distasteful. I shall make no apologies for that poem. We were at one of those classy parties that leave you bored; and the criticism made me want to mug someone's nose in. We are not going to accommodate middle-class orientated critics in our writings. They've had their chance and failed us all. Besides, middle-class values can now only be fully appreciated by the neo-fascists.

Getting back to the poem, 'Grey Street'. There's this windy day in July, and we are walking down Grey Street with Mandlenkosi Langa. I make slight at the thought that the plastic character of Grey Street makes me cough. I did not think much of it then. But later when Mandla came across some lines on Grey Street, he reminded me of the wintry July day. The lines had come after my remark, I remembered; and it could have been that they were brought out by that windy day's experience. If the poem had to pose the question:

Grey Street, your shadows prolong the winter
When will it be the summer?

it was part of the chilled experience that we can witness daily at some places. Questions must be asked.

One of the major tasks is to bring out or explore indigenous values without assuming parochial attitudes. If such bringing out or exploration mean going 'the way of the hare', at least, let there be hope for 'the stride of the lion'. In what will one day be truly national literature. By then time will have absolved most of us.

Yet one doesn't have to wait on time. There is a very vital presence that needs filling up. We can only draw our consistency by starting back — from the traditional past, or from metaphysics or towards our modern history. *Marabi Dance*, to cite an example, belongs to modern history. At the cultural level we need Black Consciousness, which is not a culture in itself — as Dr. Rive has said of Negritude recently. It will be for us to decide when Black Consciousness has rendered itself redundant. In that case political developments will decide. That day is not very far off. I do not think I would have to worry about the term 'black' if I went to live in Mozambique or Angola. Until then writers who mess around with other writers on what is 'black' or 'not black', for overseas trips and fat cheques, should be reminded that their socio-political attachments to the community still remain a matter to be reckoned with. Perhaps, metaphysically, Nkathazo kaMnyayiza winds this argument up with a short poem: 'Kneel and Pray':

I have seen many white stars,
But haven't seen any black:
but I know that
one day
from the north

the long black star will come:
black clouds will scud round it
then when it shakes
you'll shiver like reeds,
then when it screams
you'll kneel and pray.

(Quoted from *Ophir 18*)

So that if we gathered here could say there is no consistency in literary development, but only a flux of individual efforts, we would be denying the socio-historical character of literature. Let our critics also bring in the societal context before passing judgment. I grew up in a mixed environment. I have Coloured and Indian cousins, nephews and nieces, uncles and aunties. Some who even pass for white. English, especially in the youth stage, is spoken with lots of American and Afrikaans slang. So where I had what sounded American in my poems it is not because of the influence of Black American literature as Nadine Gordimer so readily concluded in her book, *The Black Interpreters*. It's just that American movies, American comics and paperbacks, American advertisements came down on us in typical imperialist fashion. And we discovered ourselves to be a part of it all, for better or for worse. Would Nadine Gordimer deny the existence of 'English dialect' in the black community? Or: are tsotsi-taal or skolly-taal not languages of their own? These are some of the factors critics must look up too.

If Black writing, which is cultural expression, is bad – then the socio-economic pattern prevailing is equally bad. On the other hand, if the cultural is part of the socio-economic pattern, then the blackman 'must not appeal to a culture for the right to live' as Dr. Richard Rive told the S.A. Indian Teachers' Association in his discussion on 'Senghor and Negritude' at a Durban teachers' conference, some time last year.

Mandlenkosi Langa is one of the few black poets who often find their strange way out of this society's suppressed expression. His poem, 'We beg your pardon South Africa' has not yet appeared anywhere. It's a long poem with an inverted direction at the powers-that-be; the poet turning upside down his alienation by stressing the claims of the ruling class, and making twists here and there. Some of the lines run like this:

We beg your pardon, South Africa
for the lies your enemies and the press
have heaped upon you

Detractors say you're oppressive
but that's just another lie

We apologize
for the man who caused such an uproar
When he imagined he was a sea-gull
and flew out of a window
in John Vorster Square.

We beg your pardon, South Africa
for the migrant labourers
who live in 5-star hotels
to help us in our factories

for Section 6 of the Terrorism Act
that spells the death
of all terrorists so we won't
be terrorised

We beg your pardon, South Africa
for those hordes from the north
who don't have bullets marked 'Whites Only'
for your children at the borders
who die not knowing what for

for those who claim your time is running out
and that time is coming
for you to say to all people:
'I beg your pardon'.

This approach of Mandlenkosi Langa's is akin to the traditional songs of praise (*Izibongo* in Zulu) whereby the *imbongi* can freely go to town on the shortcomings of the king and not face punishment. For he shall be speaking the truth of which the king's subjects shall be aware.

We chase after our own cultural values and social nuances through our lines of poetry, short stories or novels, in this way expanding the sense of our blackman's awareness. From the look of things it seems as if we shall be having quite a number of novels and short stories coming out in 1978/79. If the bursting inclination of recent poems is anything to go by. There is this tendency to want to fully express the thoughts in the latest poetry; which thing can best be worked out through prose.

People who expect we should uphold absolute significations in our literary efforts are wasting everybody's time. Societal awareness has no arbitrary boundaries; come Bantustan rain, come *kragdadigheid* sunshine. We won't get bogged down in the bundustan mud. Nor shall we bask in the *ja-baas* sun.

If the colour/*baas* issue becomes too marked in a black piece of writing, then the social circumstance has been more determinate than the writer – that's all. And he or she cannot be blamed for it. It is only a sheer misunderstanding of the contradictory nature of prevalent socio-economic and cultural forces that makes some of our critics misinterpret Black writers, particularly the upcoming ones.

Let me conclude by saying that literature in English written by blacks can be over-stressing, immature, whatever the case, but it definitely carries a world outlook. It is the duty of the writers to shape that outlook constructively without belittling the legacy of the English language. Our historical circumstances may be unique, as some love to repeat, but it does embrace a universal character. Colonial history is our proof of this.

Finding ourselves in such a critical historic moment we can only move on a socially critical plane.

Mafika Gwala

CRITICS WANTED

To be published in *Staffrider* is to be *read* – more widely, we reckon, than literary artists have ever been read in South Africa.

We define a literary artist simply: a producer of literary works. And we believe that a producer has a basic right of access to potential readers – in the immediate community in which he or she lives and beyond.

The phenomenon of art groups linked to particular township communities in present-day South Africa suggests the appropriate medium through which this basic right can be exercised. The art group puts forward the work it wants to be published, and then assists in the distribution of the magazine to the community. In this way editorial control is vested in the writers as participants in a community-based group.

Those who suggest that *Staffrider* should appoint an editor whose task is to impose 'standards' on the magazine are expressing – consciously or unconsciously – an elitist view of art which cannot comprehend the new artistic energies released in the tumult of 1976 and after. Standards are not golden or quintessential: they are made according to the demands different societies make on writers, and according to the responses writers make to those demands.

If standards are not imposed by elitist criticism but developed and maintained by practising writers the 'workshop' concept becomes crucial. It is here, in effect, that standards are set. We do not know of a writers' group that would not welcome the participation of critics in its workshop sessions: this is an invitation to leave the armchair or the lectern and become involved, practically, in building a new literature.

At another level, *Staffrider's* workshop column is a direct invitation to 'write-in' critics to have their say: let's hear from you.

Untitled/Hamilton Budaza

Untitled/Joseph Moyikwa

STAFFRIDER eye GALLERY

"The Fat of the Land"/Lionel Davis

Jean Marquard reviews *The Hajji and Other Stories* by Ahmed Essop. (Ravan, Johannesburg.)

Those who know Johannesburg remember Fordsburg as the Indian section of town, a place of smell and colour, teeming with life, an oasis near the centre of the city. Inevitably the System intervened; Group Areas proclaimed the destruction of Fordsburg and the Indian inhabitants were moved out of town. Houses were demolished, businessmen and traders were forced into new premises and residents were removed to Lenasia, a large, dreary township bordering Soweto, twenty miles from central Johannesburg.

But Fordsburg is not altogether buried and its corpse is brought to life in these vivid tales by Ahmed Essop, a former resident. Here is an author who understands the value of the fictional moment, who knows that to rise above mere sociology a writer must transform his experience by locating it in an imaginative dimension. At the same time the social milieu is specific and authentic – the real Fordsburg being contained in its fictional reconstruction. As Herman Charles Bosman once created in Mafeking Road a paradeground for his portraits of rural Afrikaners, so Essop has constructed Terrace Road – no longer in existence – and peopled it with 'waiters, philosophers and shopkeepers, housewives, journalists, gangsters and soldiers, tarts, servants and mystics, a government inspector and a Molvi' (this list is taken from Lionel Abrahams's brief but summative foreword). Certainly Essop's stories have a freshness and craftmanship that compare favourably with the best of Bosman. In *The Hajji and Other Stories* he has composed unique portraits of Indian life in South Africa combining a generous, fluid viewpoint with amused irony, at the same time keeping a balanced perspective on the violence and injustice of South African life. His natural ebullience is strictly controlled by the brevity of his plots and the economy of his style. Characters are sketched in a line or phrase, a life is rendered in a paragraph.

Moses lived in the yard. He was well over seventy years of age – his matted hair a bluish grey – yet his body was surprisingly resilient and strong. About ten years earlier he had been engaged by Mr. Rehman to look after his many children. Before that he had worked for many years as a builder's assistant. In a mushrooming city he had helped to build homes, skyscrapers, apartment blocks and roads, pushing wheelbarrows, excavating, operating drills, blasting.

The pungency of an opening paragraph like this says much for Ahmed Essop's rare powers of concentration. The reader has the reassuring conviction that he is in the company of a writer who has something to say, without recourse to trick or contrivance. Character is situated and situation is unmediated.

Essop's stories convey an optimistic impression of the quality of ordinary, day-to-day community life. Under the most oppressive social and political conditions people maintain an absorbed, absurd and touching interest in their own affairs, they battle with their private demons betray their lovers, spy on their neighbours:

Everyone was eager to see the arrival of the new occupants. There was a rumour that Mr. Joosub himself was coming to live in the yard in order to keep his tenants under surveillance, but the rumour proved false when one morning we saw a car enter the yard and from it emerge Mr. Mayet the well-known jeweller and a young man.

Nevertheless, the constant factor in South African life is race and the author does not flinch from this harsh truth. 'In the Train' traces the development of a tender friendship between a young man and woman who meet each day on the commuter train between Lenasia and Johannesburg:

The carriage became their alcove of love, a mobile alcove untouched by the constantly receding world beyond the windows.

Their idyll, however, is destroyed when they are forced to witness an obscene love parody enacted in the train by two white soldiers from the neighbouring military establishment. Thus for one couple the frail blossoming of love is crushed by the jack-booted insolence of another. This delicate story, only two and a half pages long, contains a wealth of hinted extended meaning. The military camp itself functions as an implied contrast to the lovers' compartment in the train and constitutes a symbol of entrenched tyranny.

The disruption of harmonious family relations in South Africa is a recurring theme in Essop's work. In the title story, the bitterness felt by a religious Moslem when his brother sets up house with a white woman in Hillbrow proves stronger than a more natural desire for forgiveness and reconciliation. Hajji Hassen refuses his brother's dying wish to be buried among his own people:

By going over to the white Herrenvolk his brother had trampled on something that was vitally part of him, his dignity and self-respect. But the rejection of his brother's plea involved a straining of the heartstrings and the Hajji did not feel happy.

In this and other stories, Essop reveals an acute understanding of the strained heartstrings of individuals in an embattled society. In 'Ten Years' a father meets his eldest son after the conviction of his youngest for political crimes. His attempt to effect a reconciliation fails: in a maturer and softer society opposing value-structures in individuals might be contained in a different sort of alliance based on blood and sympathetic understanding: in South Africa, where values are translated into polarised political stances, such alliances cannot hold:

Mr. Adam Suleiman wilted under the blast of accusatory words. He felt defeated and humbled, his life crumbling within him. He would have infinitely preferred a spell in prison to the venomous tongue of his son. At a time when he ardently needed commiseration, the futility of his whole political life was forced on him.

In this story Essop achieves a noble effect: while father and son are locked in bitter verbal conflict the young daughter of the house weeps unheeded in the bedroom. The concluding sentence, describing her silent, dishevelled appearance, speaks volumes about modern South Africa.

In Fordsburg, as in other societies, fetishism is a prominent feature. In 'Black and White' Essop reveals the more dangerous tendency, in a system which values individual lives according to a racial spectrum, to use people as objects or status symbols. Harold, a Mayfair 'poor white' boosts his ego by displaying his motor bike:

His motor-cycle was a powerful gleaming machine that seemed to compensate in some way for his lack of personality

but his coloured girl-friend also needs compensation, is also playing a status game where he has been temporarily the object on display:

'Jealous? Of course I met him in Mayfair and what's wrong with that? A Mayfair white is as good as any other white. He's got a white skin hasn't he? He says he digs me.'

In 'Black and White', 'Labyrinth', 'The Commandment' and several other

stories from this collection, Essop faces up to the brutality and violence in South Africa as a whole, reflected in each of its segregated communities. Enforced segregation is a factor that helps to breed resentment and aggression. Gang rivalry in the streets of Fordsburg ('Labyrinth') battles between individuals ('Gladiators') and ideologies ('The Betrayal') flare up so quickly that the reader senses how a community's ethnic unity is based on principles too narrow to accommodate human perversity.

Essop is particularly good at describing human perversity. His portrait gallery includes Aziz Khan, Gool, Hajji Musa, people with a Dickensian effervescence. The author's style, which is nothing if not urgent, pictorial and direct, makes no concessions to abstraction or artefact.

Mr. Moonreddy was a bachelor and lived with the widow Moodley and her ten-year old daughter in the area mock-humourously called 'Dry Bones' in Lenasia on account of the rough-and-ready monotonously homogeneous, rectangular houses and the dusty rutted roads. The widow Moodley was a spry little woman of about forty, pleasant, gossipy, very clean, with a strong penchant for maroon-coloured saris.

The importance for an individual's life of the sights, smells and crowds in his external environment is poignantly rendered, as one would expect from a writer of such vital imagination. The neutral, sombre tone of the stories set in Lenasia, contrasts strongly with the highly flavoured ambience of Fordsburg:

Henry's parents lived in Sandown. On several occasions I accompanied him to his home but I found the atmosphere of the suburb with its avenues of trees and solitary mansions amid acres of gardens, chilling. It lacked the noise — the raucous voices of vendors, the eternal voices of children in streets and backyards — the variety of people, the spicy odours of Oriental foods, the bonhomie of communal life in Fordsburg.

This passage (a restrained lament on the demise of Fordsburg) focuses on a less familiar target and yet the satirical insight stands well inside Essop's habitual opulent frame. It turns the tables, reversing our passive expectation, since here, suddenly, it is the privileged white youth who is seen to be the victim of existential impoverishment.

Essop registers missed opportunities with a fine sensitivity. His writing also includes a rich comic vein. In 'Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker', 'The Yogi', 'The Notice', 'Film', there is an affectionate treatment of various fakes and fallibilities: Hajji Musa and the yogi are marvellously conceived con-men and the irrational sequence of events in 'Film' culminates in slapstick confusion:

'Bitch!' he screamed, lunging at her, but several people got in his way and the manager thrust his hand accidentally into his face. The doorkeeper swore and tried to kick the lady, but instead kicked someone else who kicked back at him.

Essop cannot be tagged with the label of ethnic scribe. His range is far too wide and his understanding of South Africa includes all social strata — indeed he goes beyond the country to the perennial human essence. If nothing else that is good comes out of the South African situation one is at least reminded by these stories that a writer who is in touch with what is happening around him can perform a significant task. 'We ought to talk less and draw more' said Goethe. Essop has an observant eye and a gift of description. There is a healthy balance between involvement and detachment and the sense of an enquiring imagination constantly recharging itself. Now that this exciting first volume has appeared, one looks forward to the publication of a novel.

Ashok P. Josshi reviews *The Trial Of Dedan Kimathi* by Ngugi wa Thiongo and Micere Githae Mugo.

To 'put together as one vision' within the narrow confines of a play the history of the Kenyan peoples' struggle against colonialism and its ills of oppression, exploitation and enslavement, was by no means an easy task. But the collaborating playwrights found in the trial of Dedan Kimathi (the celebrated leader of the Mau Mau struggle) the right occasion to orchestrate the struggle in all its ramifications. And indeed, a fine play they have written.

The opening of the 'first movement' apart from being well conceived is powerful in its impact: for, in order to portray the seething emotions of the oppressed, in all their force and fury — could anything have been more telling than the simplicity of the resounding and frenzied beats of the tribal African drum? For the beat of the drum echoes the beat of the African heart, and its rhythms, the rhythms of their emotions.

Again the playwrights' ability to charge the events of the black man's history with an atmosphere of tension and speed is admirable. They do it by means of presenting 'phases' through mime and dance

Shaw Henderson's portrait as Judge-cum-prosecutor-cum-torturer is both fascinating and true to the colonial oppressor type. He is a 'plain soldier' as he himself says, and even assumes the image of British gentlemanliness and honour, but we learn later that it is only a mask — when his arrogant and brutish nature is revealed in his reaction to Kimathi's opposition. He is not so much a true 'soldier' as he is a dirty politician.

The 'Banker' and the 'Indian' are sketched true to the types of figures one has so often heard about. The 'Business Executive' and the 'Priest' are both self-interested and self-deceiving and they infuriate the dignified Dedan Kimathi. Kimathi cannot be swayed by their suave arguments and refuses to diverge from the course of struggle by rebellion he has resolved upon. Like Eliot's Thomas Beckett he cannot be tempted any more. His 'way' too is clear now. Kimathi cannot accept the passive doctrine of 'turning the other cheek' which the 'Priest' seems to offer.

The 'African' who 'keeps on nodding his head' but says nothing, is merely more detested.

Another scene that is subtle and moving in its dramatic power, is the one at the beginning of the Second Trial. The scene is presented in mime. The two movements are striking in their contrast, and appealing in their visual quality. In the one movement a group of African dancers dance a sequence of Kenyan tribal dances. This movement is followed by another that arrests the first, and changes it into a movement which is a dance of fear and humiliation. This change is brought about by the interruption of the colonial governor's arrival. The mime is a masterpiece in itself — without words it tells about the fear the oppressed have for the oppressor. Kimathi laments therefore the loss of self-respect and dignity in his people, and in simple and moving poetry says:

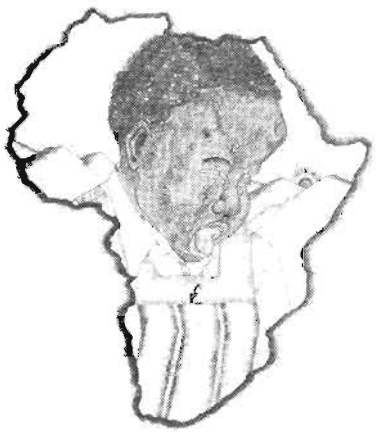
'It is true that I've always wanted
to dance the dance of my people'

but

"Then the colonialist came
And people danced a different tune.'

IT'S A READING REVOLUTION!

Staffrider welcomes reviews of all works of African literature which have not as yet been widely read and discussed in Africa South.



Vusumzi and the inqola competition

by Marguerite Poland

In our last issue, Vol 2 No. 2, Vusumzi found springs for his car's suspension. Mr. Nene and Boxer Nxumalo watched him fit the springs, giving advice and clicking with impatience when he fumbled, but he would not let them help him. Mr. Nene gave him pieces of tyre to fasten round the wheels and Vusumzi's car was beautiful enough to win the inqola competition . . . but would it? In this issue, young riders, you find out how the story ends.

On Friday, after school, Vusumzi went with Thomas and Simphiwe to Yeko's shop. They bought four cents worth of sweets to share.

The sweets were white and mauve and orange with words written on them in Xhosa, like 'Only you forever' and 'Remember me'. They raced down the hill past the pink church and along Daku Road to the youth club to find out what time the judging would begin next day. All three of them had finished their cars but other boys were still working on theirs in the club house. Some were very good and Vusumzi examined them anxiously.

'Look at Vuyisile's!' exclaimed Simphiwe pointing to a van with doors that opened and closed.

Josiah Penxa was struggling to make wheels for his model but the wire was too thick to bend. He was angry and kicked the car bad-temperedly. Thomas and Simphiwe nudged each other and Vusumzi, squatting next to him tried to help. Josiah threw down the car impatiently.

'Don't do that,' said Vusumzi 'You'll break it.'

'I don't care,' snapped Josiah. 'Anyway, I've got a guitar. Who wants to play kids, games with wire cars? How much time did you waste on that thing of yours?' he added scornfully.

'My car is beautiful,' said Vusumzi defensively.

'Ha! They are all rubbish!' scoffed Josiah and he gave his a final kick and sulked off to where the older children were playing the gramophone.

Vusumzi and his friends fetched a soccer ball from the games cupboard and went outside to play. The wind rushed round the corners of the building. It sang in the telephone wires and as always, the smoke from the power station lay horizontal in the sky. It was nearly six o'clock when Mrs. Dladla came out of the club, locked the door and sent them all home.

The smoke haze was turning a dull brick-red and the few street lights on the main road popped into life with their flat, fluorescent brightness.

Vusumzi lingered along the way and it was dark by the time he reached home. His mother scolded and so did his uncle with whom they lodged. Mkhulu fussed like one of his mother's old fowls and muttered dark warnings about tsotsis and Administration Police and Places of Correction. Vusumzi was hungry, and keeping one eye on the primus stove where a large pot of beans was cooking, he promised again not to be late.

After supper he helped impatiently with the washing-up. He wanted to get his car from beside the fowl-run where he kept it — to polish and admire it.

It was not there! He searched frantically but it was not there. No one in the house knew where it was. Had anyone seen someone come into the yard? Yes, Mkhulu chased away some boys who were shouting outside the gate. No, she did not know who they were. Should Mkhulu know all the boys who ran about the streets like tsotsis? And she wagged her head knowingly at Vusumzi.

His eyes grew big and aching as he tried not to cry and when he could no longer help it he sat beside the henhouse and sobbed. This was a disaster! He dared not think of the guitar or his beautiful inqola with the spring-suspension.

He could not imagine who had done this terrible thing. Then, fearfully, he remembered all the bad things he had done to deserve this. Perhaps Mkhulu was right — he would grow into a tsotsi, no matter how hard he tried to be good. Perhaps this had happened because he had once stolen some mealies out of Ma Majola's garden and whenever he saw her he felt his sins sitting upon him and he could not look her in the eye. What had made it worse was that she had given him a basin of mealies for his mother and an orange for himself and at that moment, the mealies he had stolen were lying under the hedge, green and young and guilty-looking.

Perhaps he was being punished for this or for running away from Mkhulu when she wanted him to help her with the housework.

He rubbed his eyes vigorously, sniffed and crept inside to bed with an aching head.

When Vusumzi woke the next morning, it was raining. He could hear his mother dragging the heavy tins of ginger beer under the eaves. She called him to help her. Thomas and Simphiwe came to fetch him. He told them what had happened. Thomas shouted dreadful threats at the unknown thief and Simphiwe swiped at the air with his stick as though parrying with the villain. Vusumzi said nothing. He was trying not to think about the guitar. But despite the missing car, the others persuaded him to go with them. Reluctantly he followed.

The club house was full of members and their parents. The children fidgetted expectantly while Mrs. Dladla's husband, the headmaster of a senior school, made a speech in his deep, ponderous voice. He wore a maroon checked waistcoat and watch-chain and there were still festoons of raindrops in his grey hair. All the cars were lined up on the

stage and there was Boxer Nxumalo in his tight jeans and bright 'T' shirt, unpacking the prize from its case – the wonderful red-brown guitar with glistening steel strings and the cowboy transfer pasted on its face.

Mr. and Mrs. Dladla walked slowly along the rows of cars, stopping occasionally to examine a model. Mr. Dladla looked carefully at Vuyisile's van and he chuckled over Simphiwe's quaint lorry with the single headlamp. He whispered every now and then to his wife and rubbed his chin in contemplation. Then he stopped, and picking up an inqola he said, 'Now this is a beauty . . . '

Vusumzi had already lost interest. He sat on the steps and stared miserably at the rain, shivering in his thin shirt. He was listening well enough to hear that Simphiwe's lorry won fourth prize and Vuyisile's came second.

'And the first prize,' said Mr. Dladla slowly and beaming mysteriously at the eager spectators, 'is for this fine inqola! What beautiful suspension it has! This boy surely knows a lot about mechanics! This model was made . . . ' and he fumbled for the ticket with the maker's name and age, 'by Josiah Penxa, aged thirteen.'

Josiah Penxa? Vusumzi turned and stared. Josiah hadn't entered his inqola; he had kicked it and scoffed at Vusumzi and the whole competition. Vusumzi craned to see the car Mr. Dladla was holding. Already Josiah was on the stage and Mrs. Dladla was congratulating him and bringing him forward.

The blood pounded in Vusumzi's head. His mouth was dry. He could not say the words he was shouting in his head. 'That is my car, my car, Vusumzi Ntuli's car!' The audience was clapping and cheering; there was a great noise all around him.

Then, as the applause faded, a cool, mocking voice said, 'Josiah Penxa? I think, Mhlekazi, there has been a mistake!' Boxer Nxumalo took the model from the astonished Mr. Dladla. He looked at it. 'It is a beautiful inqola, Mhlekazi. But I can tell you it was not made by Josiah Penxa. It was made by . . . ' but he could not be heard above the astonished cries of the audience as Josiah jumped from the stage and tried to push his way out of the hall. There was a scuffle and shouting.

'Stop that boy!' ordered Boxer and two men took Josiah firmly by the arms.

'What is going on Mr. Nxumalo?' cried Mrs. Dladla, trying to quieten the crowd by flapping fat flustered arms at them.

'Attention!' shouted Mr. Dladla authoritatively. 'Mr. Nxumalo, please could you explain yourself?'

'Certainly,' replied Boxer unperturbed by the uproar. 'That car was made . . . ' he hesitated and glanced round the hall.

Vusumzi found his voice. 'Here,' he squeaked and everyone turned to stare at him.

'Ah yes . . . that boy,' and Boxer pointed at Vusumzi.

'I watched him make it. Mr. Nene and I helped him find the springs. It is undoubtedly Ntuli's car.'

'Yes,' cried Thomas and Simphiwe, who had been staring in bewilderment throughout the confusion. 'That is Vusumzi's car. We know it well. It was stolen from his house yesterday.'

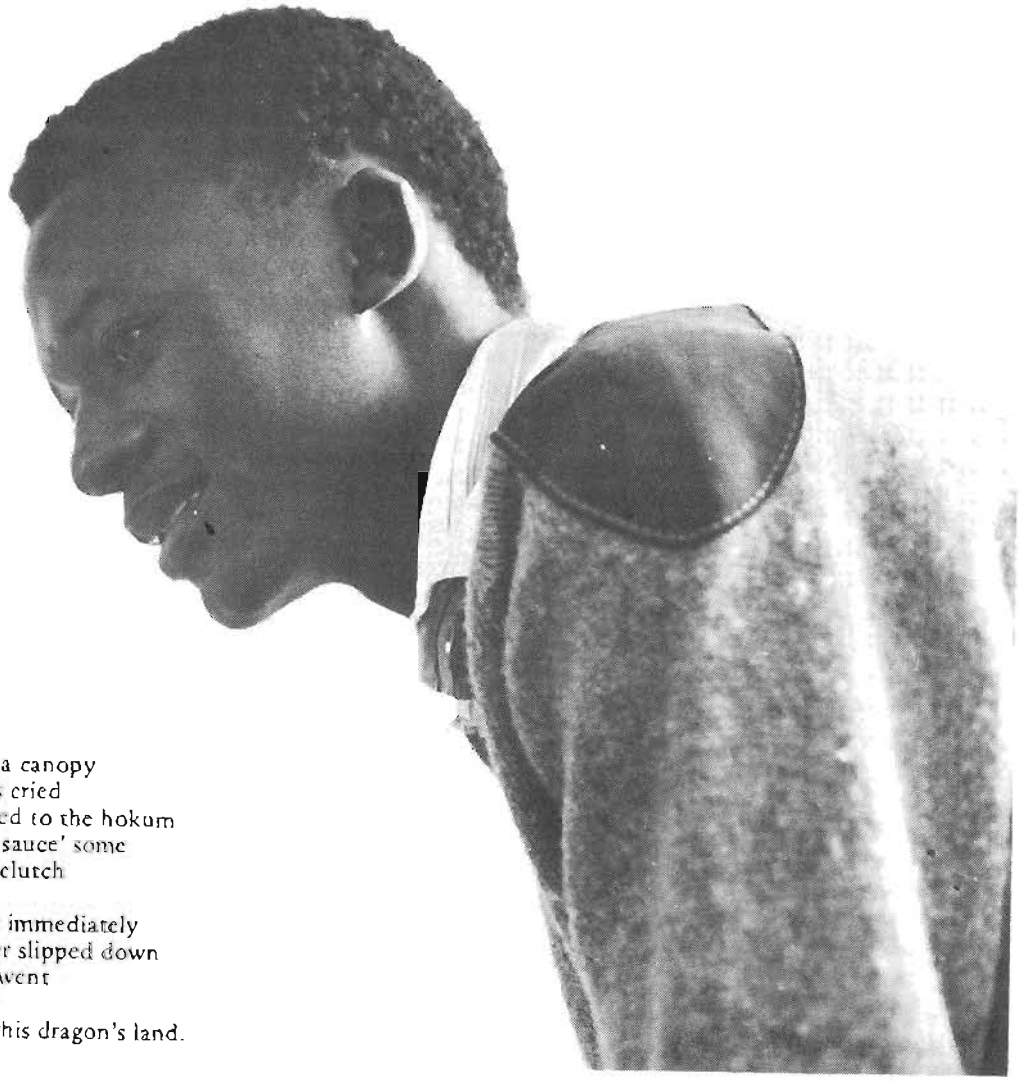
'What has Josiah to say?' said Mr. Dladla, bestowing on him a withering glance. Josiah was sullen and angry and struggled to free himself. He was marched away to Mrs. Dladla's office to await his punishment.

'Vusumzi Ntuli,' said Mr. Dladla briskly. 'Come up here mfan'am.' Thomas and Simphiwe pushed their friend towards the stage. 'This is a very fine car Vusumzi, for which you will receive a fine prize,' said Mr. Dladla. 'Can you play the guitar, mfan'am?'

'No, but I wish to very much,' said Vusumzi shyly.

Mr. Dladla shook Vusumzi's hand and gave him the guitar. Vusumzi clutched it, bobbing his thanks, too overcome to say anything. Then, unexpectedly, Boxer Nxumalo came forward and grasped his hand and winked at him as an old friend would. Vusumzi grinned with delight. He would be the hero of the youth club. Not only had he won the competition for the best inqola, he had a beautiful guitar and perhaps best of all – everyone had seen Boxer Nxumalo shake him by the hand. Indeed, he was a man amongst men.

Leonard Maseko/*Photo*



ERA

some were engirthed with a canopy
of remorse some among us cried
like crocodiles some listened to the hokum
of 'instigators and tomato sauce' some
licked their fingers after a clutch

at the burnt bridges others immediately
dumped everything another slipped down
with the night other faces went
stony in twilight's eye yet
another preferred to baas this dragon's land.

Jaki Seroke/Tembisa

Jaki Seroke *Photo*/Biddy Crewe

HARASSMENT AND THE WRITERS

Poet Jaki Seroke (above) is an example of a South African writer who has the courage to go on speaking out under persistent harassment. In fact harassment of Seroke has followed a pattern which indicates that the Security Police wish to make his experience a warning to others. 'I haven't harassed you yet,' said a policeman who recently took over where others left off, 'this is just the beginning.' Seroke has now been subjected to three summary interrogations (two of these after he had been taken from his house in the middle of the night). Finally he was arrested and held for three weeks before being granted bail on a charge relating to his alleged possession of banned literature. When he appears in court at Kempton Park on 20 August 1979 his fellow writers will be there.

THE WRITERS LINK UP

Recently a 'writers' wagon' (two Kombis in fact) visited writers in the Cape. In the wagon there were representatives from various groups, Mpumalanga Arts Group (Hammarsdale), Malopoets (Mariannridge), Zamani Arts Association (Dobsonville), Creative Youth Association (Diepkloof), Khauleza Creative Society (Alexandra), Madi Arts Group (Katlehong) and many more individual writers. The trip was made possible by the kind assistance of the British and Dutch people, through their local embassies. Soon another 'writers' wagon' will visit groups and writers in the North. All writers are invited to travel with PEN.

PEN'S CONFERENCE: 'WRITERS FACE THE FUTURE'

This is to be held on Saturday, September 8 and Sunday, September 9 in Room 4, Richard Ward Building, University of the Witwatersrand. It starts at 10 a.m. on the Saturday with 'Zeke' Mphahlele in the chair. You, as an individual writer or as the representative of a group, are invited to contribute a short statement or message on the theme 'South African Writers Face the Future'. See you there

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