Staffrider

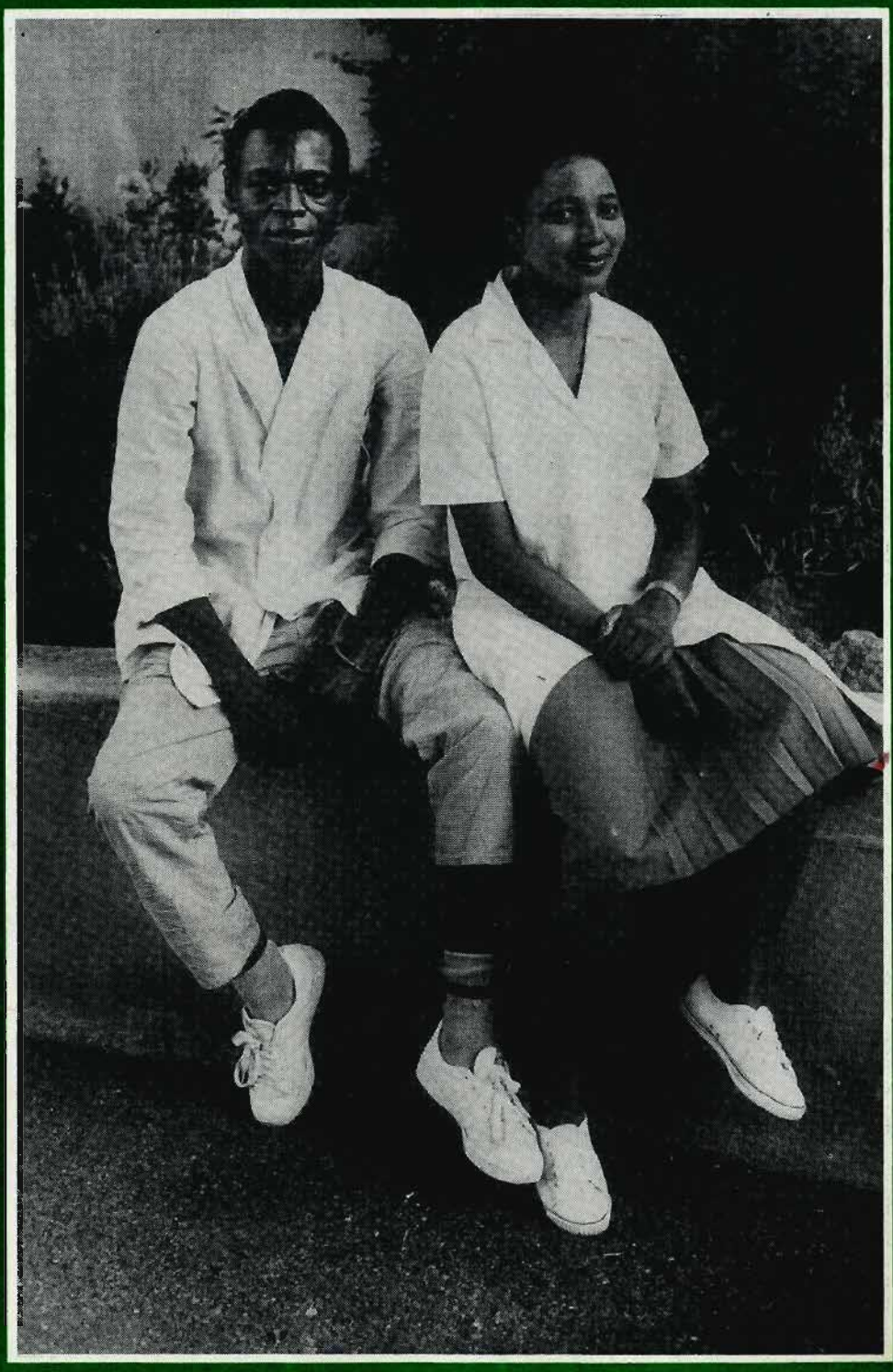
VOLUME 6 NUMBER 1, 1984 R1.50(excl.GST)

THIRD WORLD WRITING
Introducing Yashar Kemal

NDEBELE:
Some
thoughts on
South African
fiction

Lawrence
Mshengu:
The
Workers'
Struggle

CAROL MATHIANE
THERESA QUEIROS
P. J. PETERSEN



NEW BOOKS FROM RAVAN

SHADOWS OF A SUN-DARKENED LAND
by Shabbir Banoobhai

Readers acquainted with *echoes of my other self* will not be disappointed by Banoobhai's new collection. Deeper currents of experience (marriage, the death of a mother, the birth of a child) are matched by real advances in a technique which led Douglas Livingstone to remark (of *echoes of my other self*) that 'almost every line of the work was subliminally ignited by the ancient great Islamic poets'.

Here, quoted in full, is one of the shimmering arrows from Banoobhai's new quiver:

hide, hide the soul's torment
its deepest doubt
its grief gone wild

perhaps, a further day will find
among the rushes of the mind
pharaoh's other, bright-eyed child

R6.50

APARTHEID AND EDUCATION
The Education of Black South Africans
ed. Peter Kallaway

Education provides a central focus for anyone concerned about the future of South African society. The revolt of the youth in 1976 and 1980 brought the school and the classroom firmly into the arena of change.

The challenge is for parents, students, educationists and business people to understand the nature of our educational history and our educational present if we are to press for informed policy initiatives in the future.

This collection of essays lays a foundation for such an understanding by providing the reader with a variety of viewpoints in current education research. It seeks to provide analytical perspectives on our educational history and to inject some of the excitement of current research in the social sciences into the field of educational thinking.

R16.95

TO KILL A MAN'S PRIDE
and Other Stories from Southern Africa
ed. Norman Hodge

In this collection seventeen writers look at their society from a variety of perspectives. The selection includes the *Drum* writers of the 1950s and 1960s (Motsisi, Themba, Nakasa), the *Staffrider* writers of today (Mzamane, Matshoba, Ndebele), and writers who span those generations (Paton, Mphahlele, Gordimer, Essop, Rive, Abrahams, Head). Jacobson and Lessing left their mark on the Southern African story before they left these parts, while classic stories by Bosman and R R R Dhlomo lead off the collection.

R8.95

O EARTH, WAIT FOR ME
Staffrider Series No. 22
by Frank Chipasula

Many South African poets see their country as a mother. Chipasula regards his Malawi as a lover from whom he is estranged. He makes an impassioned appeal to his country not only to love again, but also to become once more a country worthy of his deep devotions: 'My country,' he exhorts, 'if this separation is forever/then for heaven's sake, say so. Already/my body forgets the warm caress/of your sun though your rivers/still leap through me.'

O Earth, Wait For Me is a cathartic journey through Malawi's corridors of power as well as down the path that meanders through the lives of the dispossessed. Reaching beyond his country's borders, he yearns for a free South Africa ('The Beauty of Anger') and in 'A Small Black Bird Singing' exults in that country's culture of resistance.

Poetry R6.50

THE EMPEROR
a novel by Ahmed Essop

When the legend 'Ashoka High School' goes up on a granite slab at the gates of what was formerly the Aryan High School, Mr Dharma Ashoka assures parents, teachers and pupils that the new name honours the Emperor Ashoka (286-232 BC). Not everyone is convinced. The new principal is an egotistic authoritarian whose career and bleak educational notions are predictable products of the apartheid school system he slavishly serves. Once again – as with the merchant Sufi in *The Visitation* – Ahmed Essop has chosen a protagonist and a setting rich in satiric and ironic possibilities. Just as characteristic is the slow, unwilling growth of our sympathy for 'the emperor' as his enemies – noble and ignoble – conspire his overthrow, and the amiable Prince Yusuf weaves his enchantments.

R7.95

ANGLO
Anglo American and the rise of modern South Africa
by Duncan Innes

Anglo American is a household name to most South Africans. Yet, despite this and despite a welter of press commentary on the Group, there have been very few attempts to explore Anglo in depth.

Here for the first time is a major academic study which seeks to analyse the nature and extent of Anglo's power. What are its primary bases in mining, industry, finance and property? How were these achieved and what was Anglo's route of expansion? These are some of the key questions the author addresses as he unravels the economic history of South Africa's largest privately-owned group of companies – whose operations today embrace five continents.

As the story unfolds we become aware of the important role Anglo has played not only in shaping the South African economy, but also in the political life of the country. What role did Anglo play in the emergence of apartheid? Has this controversial political system benefited Anglo and, if so, how? The answers to these questions throw new light on the issue of political power in South Africa.

This book is also important reading for those who want to know more about Anglo and its relation to other major companies like De Beers, CDM, JCI, AECI, Barlow Rand, LTA and Barclays Bank.

R14.95

'Womans Day' 1983 Outside St Anthony's Church. Durban. OMAR BADSHA

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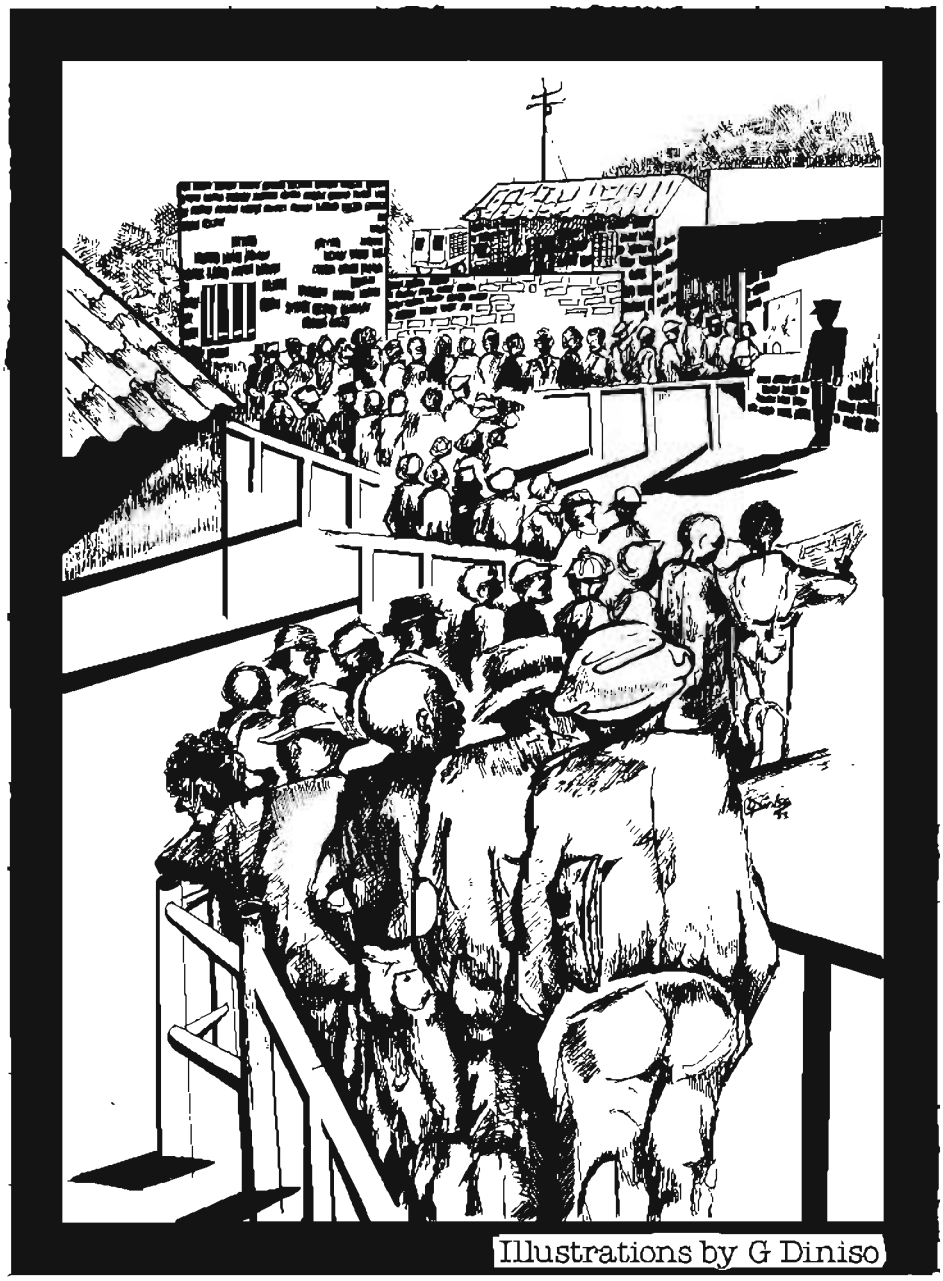
THE TENANTS

by Mpumie Cilibe



Illustrations by G Diniso

Mdange had just obtained his driver's licence. Because he desperately wanted to gain experience as a driver, he sought work at a car-transporting firm and got it. His job was to fetch cars from a local car-manufacturing firm and distribute them to dealerships all over the country. There would be a convoy of about sixty or more cars at a time with the pilot van bringing up the rear. The pilot van was the vehicle he and his work mates would be returning in after delivering the cars.

The travelling suited Mdange very well, for he was still a bachelor staying with his elderly parents, brothers and sisters. In the cities they visited they met and made love to a lot of women. The excitement and adventures seemed to be unending for Mdange. He wished he could work for this firm for the rest of his life although the wages they worked for were very low.

It was in Bloemfontein that he met and fell in love with a girl by the name of Tsepiso. She was a beautiful woman with dimpled cheeks and sparkling white teeth. Whenever she smiled, Mdange would hold his breath and move towards her, holding her in his arms. He would kiss both those dimpled cheeks, cupping them in his hands, looking into her sleepy eyes. On his way back home, in the pilot van, he would brood about her. And then, strangely, he found himself thinking seriously about marriage for the first time in his life.

When Mdange arrived home his parents noticed the change in his behaviour. Often he would fold his arms and stare vacantly into the distance, smiling to himself. The neighbours started gossiping that he was aloof. The reason was, they would pass and greet him but he would not respond, unbeknown to them that he was forever deep in thought. They thought he was aloof because of his new job as a convoy driver which took him over the land, to places they had never seen.

His father, urged on by his mother, approached him and inquired about the source of the new behaviour. He did it in the fashion of elders.

'Son, only a fool seals his lips when a serious matter gnaws his brain. Your mother and I are perturbed by your silence and this keeps us awake night after night.'

Mdange was at a loss. He had not seen his father coming. He had been standing outside, leaning against the chimney, looking at the top branches of the fig-tree in the yard of the house next door. His father's words stunned him – to learn that they, his parents, had been studying him. He licked his lips scratched his head and hesitated. How was he going to tell his father he was in love? Since when had he ever discussed girls with his father? Anyway, he thought, this was a different matter, it involved marriage.

'Er . . . father, I was thinking to tell you. But I was not ready yet.'

'What is it? Tell me then?'

'As you know, I am constantly out of town. I have been to Bloemfontein twice already in the past month. That is where I have met a girl . . . er . . . I was thinking of settling down.'

Mdange had by now broken into a sweat, his eyes cast to the ground, unable to meet his father's gaze.

'What you are saying is, you want to take a wife?'

'Yes, father.'

'You see now, you would have gone on worrying yourself because of this matter. A man does not act like that – you must learn to speak up like a man!'

The old man turned and went back into the house, leaving his son standing

'You have been drinking,' she whispered. 'Just a few beers, sweetheart,' he responded rather loudly,

there looking at his back. He went to the bedroom, where his wife, maMpondo, was sitting on the bed waiting for him.

'So, what is biting him?'

'He wants to take a wife.'

'A wife!'

'Yes. He met a girl in Bloemfontein, now he is considering marrying her.'

'But, it would seem he has not taken long enough to know the girl.'

'What can we do? He is in love with her.'

The matter brought the old man closer to his son. At first Mdange was embarrassed. The question his father posed to him and his words of advice made him feel uneasy.

How many women did he have? It went on for hours on end. What made him choose this particular one for a wife?

'A man does not marry a woman because he enjoys her buttocks. A woman must be industrious, obedient, kind, generous, warm, faithful and full of charm. Most important of all she must be intelligent, for, such qualities as I have mentioned, become useless in a brainless creature.' Mdange found it difficult to respond to this kind of talk. If anything, it made him feel uncertain as to whether the step he was taking was the correct one.

Eventually, he married Tsepiso. For a while they stayed with his parents. After a few months they were forced to move out of his parents' house. The three-roomed house was overcrowded. Besides, the Makoti had fallen pregnant. Mdange started looking for a place to stay. Also, he asked his colleagues at work to help him find a place for them. It was not long before they found one.

The man stayed alone. Yes, he would be willing to let them occupy one bedroom of his four-roomed house in KwaZakhele, provided they paid him monthly rent for the whole house. Mdange and his wife agreed and almost immediately took occupation of the room.

Madala was a widower. His wife had died two years ago. Both his sons were serving five years in jail for murder. His only daughter was a wanderer. The last time he heard of her, she was staying at the single-men's hostel. He cringed to think of her.

Most nights he would lie awake, listening to the creaking bed in the next room. He imagined what the young people were doing and began to puff and sweat. Eventually, sleep would seal his eyes. In the morning he felt bitter when seeing Mdange, though he tried hard to hide it.

Tsepiso hated the way the old man looked at her. He avoided looking her in the eye. She always felt naked in front of him, for he always looked her in the pubic area. Alone with him she felt unsafe but did not want him to notice it. She told Mdange about this, but he dismissed it as petty woman-talk.

One Friday evening, Mdange had gone out drinking with his friends from work. It was after eight o'clock when he came back to find the gate locked with a chain and padlock. He fiddled with the chain, furiously. It was in vain. He decided to jump over the fence. He regarded the fence, looking upwards his hands on his hips. He clambered up, hooking his hands onto the wire-mesh. He fell on all fours with a thud on the other side of the fence. For a moment he did not get up. When he got up he was breathing heavily. Dusting his hands and knees, he staggered towards the door. Leaning against it, he knocked softly.

'Who is it?' Tsepiso asked from behind the door.

'It's me!'

'Who?'

'It's me, Mdange.'

The bolt shot back and Mdange stepped into the partly dark kitchen. Light from their bedroom streaked through the open door onto the kitchen-floor. He bolted the door and turned to face his wife. She stood there looking at him, her hands holding together the front of her night-gown. Mdange leaned with his back against the door.

'You have been drinking,' she whispered.

'Just a few beers, sweetheart,' he responded rather loudly and followed her to their bedroom.

In his bedroom, Madala was fuming. He writhed on his bed and thought up all sorts of things he would like to say to the young man. Lying on his back, he pulled at his grey streaked beard, his eyes fixed on a leak in his room's cardboard ceiling. He decided he would wait until the following morning. His mind drifted off into sleep.

Very early the following morning, Madala was up and about. He stood in his vest and underpants next to his bed, his bow-legs astride. His left hand touching the back of his head, stretching his right arm, he yawned. From beneath the chair over which his clothes were strewn, he removed a water jug covered with a saucer. He drank a mouthful and gargled walking towards the window. Holding the jug in one hand, he pulled back the curtains, opened the window and spat into the garden below. He replaced the jug under the chair, covered it with the saucer and picked up his white shirt with its frayed collar from the chair, inspected it, and put it on.

Then followed the pants. They were chaffed between the thighs. He thought: 'I must get myself other clothes.' He decided that when next he received his pension money he would visit the used-clothes-hawker of Njoli Square. Having put his trousers on, he tip-toed to the front room.

'Mdange! Mdange!' the old man called, facing the young couple's room. Mdange appeared from the door, quivering, his eyes bloodshot. He had babalaas.

'You were calling me, Bawo?' asked Mdange rhetorically.

'Yes. I want to talk to you. How did you come in last night, because the gate was locked?' Madala was glaring at Mdange's face as if expecting to find the answer there.

'I jumped over the fence.' Mdange's face registered puzzlement as he answered this.

'Aren't you going to topple my fence if you keep on jumping over it? I want to warn you that I am not going to tolerate this type of behaviour. I expect you to be indoors by eight o' clock every night! And if you must drink, you will have to do that in your room! However, I would not like to see you bringing in more than a nip.'

Mdange was speechless. He had not expected this tirade from the old man. He dovetailed his hands in front of him and studied them, his head bowed. In his thoughts he vowed to look for his own house. He imagined what his wife was thinking in view of what the old man was doing to him. He felt humiliated. He failed to respond to his words. Anyway, Madala had not expected a response for, after he had spoken, he glowered at Mdange for at least a full minute before retreating to his room. Throughout that weekend, Mdange was morose, sighing intermittently.

Monday morning Mdange was standing in the queue at the Daku bus-stop. The queue was long and taking its time to move on. Then an idea hit him. He would report late for work. He

broke away from the queue and walked slowly in the direction of the 'Bantu Affairs Administration Board rent office. The weekend's encounter with the old man had removed the spring in his step.

He walked slowly, his jacket hung over his left arm, his lunch clutched firmly in his left hand, the right hand in his pants pocket.

When he arrived at the rent office, he found the place crowded with people standing in long queues. Queues! He hated queues. Whenever the black man has a problem he has to stand in a queue before it is attended to, he thought. Be it the pass office, that is the commissioner's office at Africa House – Kwa Ndaba – Zabantu, the Labour Bureau or even the hospital, It struck him, where had he ever seen white people standing in a queue except in the banks at month-ends? Never! He wondered, do they carry passes and if they do, what do those passes look like? Do they, maybe, have their own commissioner's office, Labour Bureaux or rent offices? He was shaking his head in wonderment when a voice called, apparently directed at him.

> 'If you piss, I can make things a little easier and faster for you.'

'Hey! Hey! Bhuti, stand in the queue!' The caller had on a headman's uniform. Mdange looked from side to side at all the queues to his utter confusion. He did not know which queue to join, so he went to the man in uniform and explained his predicament. The man had bloodshot eyes and yawned continuously, wine fumes escaping from his mouth. He scratched his bulging stomach, listening disinterestedly.

'You must stand in this queue, here,' the man pointed, 'there your name will be put on the location Superintendent's list. Let me see your passbook.' Mdange gave it to him. The man ran his thick fingers through the passbook, pausing in between pages. 'Ja, your pass has to get the Superintendent's stamp first; about your house problem,' he scratched his stomach and tugged at his moustache. 'You will have to get a lodger's card, for which you must pay a small fee every month.' He looked at Mdange searchingly as if watching for the impact of his words, and then, 'if you piss, I can make things a little easier and faster for you.' He said these words in low tones, looking around for eavesdroppers, his red eyes moving like search-lights in the dark.

Mdange was prepared to 'piss' as the man in uniform had suggested. This was nothing new to him. For fast service at places like this, one had better 'piss'. Even to get his present job, he had to go to the black employment officer's house and 'piss'. So Mdange left the man and disappeared for a short while before he reappeared with a nip tucked under his belt. Red eyes saw him, nodded and moved clumsily and hurriedly to the toilet. Mdange followed him seconds later and handed him the bottle. The man held the nip between the thumb and the index finger of his right hand and uncapped it with the other hand. He stood with his legs astride, craned his neck and literally poured the liquor down his throat! He did not gulp or guzzle the stuff, he just poured it! To think Mdange had made the mistake of imagining that he would get some! He wiped his mouth dry with the cuff of his uniform coat, demanded Mdange's passbook and left the toilet, smiling broadly.

Mdange left the rent office the proud possessor of a yellow lodger's card and with the knowledge that his name was on the housing waiting list. At work he told his work mates about the confrontation with the old home-owner. He brandished his lodger's card for all to see and explained to his wide-eyed audience how he had got hold of it.

In his room that evening after work, he held his wife in his arms, kissed her and displayed the card.

'What is it?' Tsepiso inquired, frowning.

'A lodger's card!' he answered triumphantly and sat on the bed. Seeing her puzzled look, he explained the meaning of the card and went on to narrate the happenings of that day. On hearing all that her husband had to say, she became jubilant and they cuddled and kissed. That night the bed went on creaking and creaking into the small hours, to the fury of the old man in the room next door!

The following morning Tsepiso was unwell by the time Mdange left for work. Their love-making of the previous night had been a little violent for a mother-to-be. Mdange was a worried man at work.

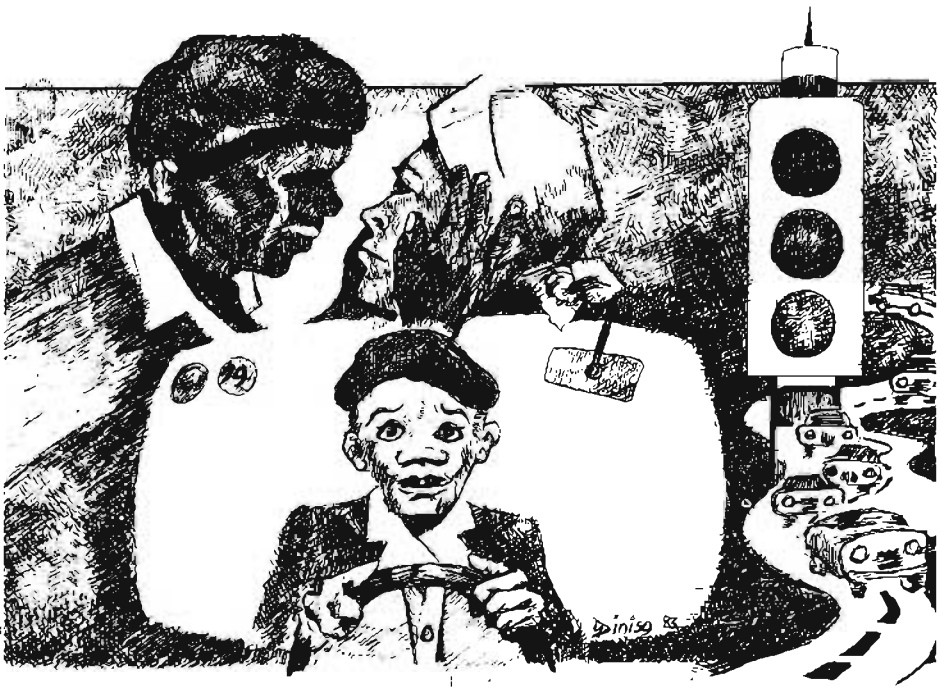
On arriving home late that afternoon Mdange learnt from Madala that his wife had left almost immediately after he had gone to work. She had suffered stomach cramps and decided to take a bus to hospital. He thanked the old man for the information and departed, heading for the hospital.

Having arrived at the maternity section of the hospital, he inquired from the sister in charge. A junior nurse was summoned to take Mdange to his young wife.

Mdange squinted and blinked. He stood there, completely numbed by the sight. She smiled at him and beckoned to him to come closer. Tsepiso lay on her side, the side of her head resting on her hand, her elbow sinking close to a bustling bundle. He was a father, and he had not even expected it, at least not so soon! When he came close to the bed, she took his hand into hers.' 'It's a boy,' she told him smiling.

'A boy?' he asked, peeping behind his wife curiously.

'Yes, our boy!' she explained possessively and went on telling him about what had happened after he had left for work. 'As soon as you had gone



in the morning my condition deteriorated,' she explained. 'The baby kicked desperately in my tummy and the pains were destroying me. I started passing a lot of water. That was when I decided to take a bus to the hospital. Fortunately for me, nothing happened in the bus, but on my arrival here I felt very weak and dizzy. The nurses realised my condition was serious. They hauled me on to a stretcher and rushed me to the labour ward. Minutes later, I gave birth to our son.' At this she laughed weakly. She noted that Mdange was tense, his hands balled into fists, beads of sweat masking his forehead.

'You know you are not supposed to be doing that!' 'If it's *my* child, then I must look!'

Mdange heaved his chest and sighed, asking, 'when are they discharging you?'

'I do not know yet, it's still early, I think,' she frowned, teasingly. He uncovered the baby's face to see what it looked like.

'You know you are not supposed to be doing that!'

'If it's *my* child, then I must look!' he ventured authoritatively. He looked at the baby's face intently and then, as if realising for the first time that the child was his a smile bathed his countenance and his heart floated with joy. He bent and kissed the baby on the cheek and did the same to his wife. He bade them goodnight and left the ward reluctantly, his wife watching him, smiling. She knew he was happy. She detected the spring in his step. Also his shoulders were squared and his chin was thrust forward. He was proud and confident. A happy man indeed.

Mdange took a bus from the hospital to his parents' house in the location, where he broke the good news.

His parents were happy to learn of their grandson's arrival. He did not spend much time there, thinking of Madala's padlock and chain. However, he arrived in good time. He informed the old man of the developments. The news was received in good spirit, after which Madala went outside to lock the gate.

Two weeks after Tsepiso and the baby had arrived from the hospital, the atmosphere became tense in the house. The old man would not tolerate the baby's cries at night. His day-time complaint became the napkins. They were wetting his yard!

Madala's tantrums maddened Mdange. A fit of rage would seize him each time the old man confronted him with a petty complaint. But he would always manage to subside before laying his hands on him. The situation prompted him to pay another visit to the Kwa-Zakhele rent office.

Exactly three months after acquiring his lodger's card, he paid the rent office another visit. Red-eyes welcomed him with open arms, He had news for him. Good news! But Mdange had better 'piss' first. Mdange knew what his duty was. Having returned with the nip, the headman did justice to it in his usual style.

The news? Red-eyes wiped his mouth. Mdange had done well to arrive then, for Red-eyes and his henchmen were going by van into the location to evict a man. That would be the fifth time they were removing the man, but the man kept on re-occupying the house as soon as they left. Now that Mdange was around, it would be the last time. They were going to evict the man and declare Mdange the new occupant! The van sped through the untarred streets of the location, its wheels leaving a cloud of dust in its wake. Mdange was aboard. It came to a halt outside a house in the section of the location known as 'Ko-four-rooms'. There was nobody home. Red-eyes backed off towards the closed door. The others backed away from him, electing to stand aside. He took two quick steps towards the door and kicked it in. All this in broad daylight! Neighbours' children were watching in excitement. Their mothers chose to watch behind lace curtains. They hated the sight. Nobody knew to whom it would happen next.

'What self-respecting thief would want to steal this shit!' he said, spat and moved into the house.

Red-eyes' henchmen followed him into the house while Mdange stood at the door. They dragged, pushed and tossed goods out of the door, onto a patch of maize shoots, immediately outside the door. There was a bed — a big square self-made and rudely constructed affair — and a mattress. These two items produced giggles from the neighbourhood children, to the embarrassment of their mothers. The evicted man's clothes were piled atop the bed and mattress. A passerby protested that the men should not leave the goods out there as they would be a target for thieves. Red-eyes looked at the protester standing over the fence and slowly moved his eyes towards the goods. 'What self-respecting thief would want to steal this shit!' he said, spat and moved into the house.

He stood in the middle of the front room, arms akimbo, looked around the dark house and suddenly felt tired and thirsty. The walls of the house, all around, were painted in dark-green and the bottom part of each window was whitened. This weird interior decoration gave the house the feeling and appearance of a cave. Red-eyes decided the house was smelly, dirty and dark and seemingly confirmed this when he spat and said, 'Sies! let's go, gents.'

'It's all right with me if you sleep here tonight,' sympathised Mdange.

That afternoon Mdange went home and, in whispers, broke the news to his wife.

It was early evening when the evicted man came home to find his belongings dumped in front of the house. Instinctively the sight told him what had happened. He muttered under his breath as he inspected the pile. 'Bloody bastards, how dare they dump the stuff on my maize!'

Mdange arrived on the scene and introduced himself as the new occupant of the house. The evicted man lit a candle and glared at Mdange in the semi-darkness of the house. He was drunk. Double-vision compelled him to move closer to the stranger. He lifted the candle to the level of Mdange's face and peered at the candle-light-bathed countenance. Slowly, the stranger's words sank into his wine-drenched brain. So eventually they had succeeded in effectively evicting him. 'I don't care,' he volunteered, 'I don't care! They removed me from Korsten. I got into that house in the corner. They evicted me from that house and I got into this one. I know I will get another house!' The man's brand of philosophy amused Mdange. He felt sympathetic towards him.

'It's all right with me if you sleep here tonight,' sympathised Mdange. He left the man after receiving a shower of

thanks from him.

After the man had vacated the house, Mdange spent his spare time cleaning it, painting the walls, erecting ceilings and flooring it until it was habitable. He also burglar-proofed the windows and installed locks on the doors.

'Awu! Madala, is it you?' Mdange was shocked. 'Yes, son it's me.

Madala was standing in front of his ancient wardrobe mirror appreciating the reflection. The set of clothes from the Njoli-Square hawker had cost him almost all his pension money for that month. The knock at his bedroom door surprised him. Very quickly he took off his hat, threw it on his bed and went to open the door. When he saw it was Mdange his facial expression turned mean. 'Yes, what do you want?' he inquired.

I came to tell you that I am leaving,' Mdange informed the old man.

'You are leaving, so what?'

'I mean we are leaving you for good and wish to say goodbye,' explained Mdange.

The words jolted the old man. Madala seemed to be ageing faster on the spot. He stood there opening and closing his mouth. A number of thoughts criss-crossed his feeble mind. He felt like begging the young man to stay on, but his pride got the better of him. Mdange noticed something had left the old man's eyes. That piercing coldness was missing from them. Suddenly they seemd soft and appealing.

Mdange gave way and Madala moved into the dining-room. Outside the window he saw a truck. People were loading Mdange's possessions onto the truck. Tsepiso came out of the next room, holding the baby. She went to the old man and held out her hand. Weakly he took her hand and shook it. His hand, she thought, felt like a cloth. And so they parted.

About two months after Mdange had left Madala's house, one bright Sunday morning, he sat in his front room reading the racing page of his Sunday newspaper. He jumped with joy to learn he had won a thousand rand on the jackpot. He stopped in his tracks. Through the window he saw a stooping figure entering the house without knocking. At first Mdange did not recognise him. And then, 'Awu! Madala, is it you?' Mdange was shocked.

'Yes, son it's me. I argued with those dogs that I am a pensioner, but they would not listen. The one with the red eyes kept on saying I should 'piss'. I told him I had no money, so they evicted me from my house . . . . '

Mike Nicol — Poetry

THE ALSATIAN SUBURBS

Here they lived out the last days:
unconcerned, secure in their ways.
These hills were swept with suburbs.
It was a time of great prosperity
amid hostile neighbours and restless
natives. The people were rich,
their houses lavish, loud parties
rocked the streets. The suburbs sang.
But note the precautions: tall hedges,
solid walls. Night bolted
the wrought iron gates with their
stockades of spears. All windows
barred. Thin nerves in the panes
wired to a pitch. Spotlights swept
the garden, flushed darkness
from frangipane, hydrangea or teabush.
In their swimming pools
mechanical mouths devoured
all foreign bodies, leaving no trace
of a struggle, no embarrassment
of questions. Silence was absolute.
Artefacts suggest a siege
was imminent. Revolvers snuggled
beneath pillows, tinned stocks
safely stored. All the experts agree
the worst was expected
but hope was strangely high
Historians record hostilities
in the north, perhaps a war,
more likely barbarians, stock raiders,
low key operations. In a banker's house
an R1 came to light. Here and there
bayonets, badges, live ammunition,
a photograph of a young airman
and his girl. But it was too
distant to cause concern. Clearly
no one was ready when the troubles
came. Many died in their beds,
only the most vigilant put up any fight.
The end came quickly. The dogs
were asleep or poisoned in their yards.
A fact still unexplained
as in their heyday these were called
the Alsatian suburbs. Here even
children were sacrificed to the dogs.

Mike Nicol

RETURNING

Who returns to his winter suburb
walks familiar streets in the brown afternoons,
another itinerant passing wide of Alsatian and Doberman.
No-one looks up: children chase their fantasies
across brittle lawns. A year's growth has thickened gardens
and spawned a new generation for the nannies on the
pavements.

Gardeners lurk behind hedges; a woman
shifts her chair to catch the moving sun.
The air carries intimations of despair:
a shower of ash lodging black in the curtains,
bodies massacred in room after room.

Mike Nicol

The Storytellers: a new *Staffrider* series of stories 'from afar' introduced by 'home' writers. Njabulo S. Ndebele talks about the work of Turkish writer Yashar Kemal on page 24.

A Dirty Story

Illustrated by Mzwakhe

by

Yashar Kemal

The three of them were sitting on the damp earth, their backs against the dung-daubed brush-wall and their knees drawn up to their chests, when another man walked up and crouched beside them.

'Have you heard?' said one of them excitedly. 'Broken-Nose Jabbar's done it again! You know Jabbar, the fellow who brings all those women from the mountain villages and sells them in the plain? Well, this time he's come down with a couple of real beauties. The lads of Misdik have got together and bought one of them on the spot, and now they're having fun and making her dance and all that . . . . It's unbelievable! Where does the fellow find so many women? How does he get them to come with him? He's the devil's own son, he is . . . . '

'Well, that's how he makes a living,' commented one of the men. 'Ever since I can remember, this Jabbar's been peddling women for the villagers of the Chukurova plain. Allah provides for all and sundry . . . . '

'He's still got the other one,' said the newcomer, 'and he's ready to give her away for a hundred liras.'

'Mother, I've seen them! It's the truth, I swear it is. Uncle Osman's wife with . . . .'

'He'll find a customer soon enough,' put in another man whose head was hunched between his shoulders. 'A good woman's worth more than a team of oxen, at least, in the Chukurova plain she is. You can always put her to the plough and, come summer, she'll bind and carry the sheaves, hoe, do anything. What's a hundred liras? Why, a woman brings in that much in one single summer. In the fields, at home, in bed. There's nothing like a woman. What's a hundred liras?'

Just then, Hollow Osman came up mumbling to himself and flopped down beside them without a word of greeting. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a rather shapeless pot-bellied body. His lips drooped foolishly and his eyes had an odd squint-like gaze.

'Hey, Osman,' the man who had been talking addressed him. 'Broken-Nose Jabbar's got a woman for sale again. Only a hundred liras. Tell Mistress Huru to buy her for you and have done with living alone and sleeping in barns like a dog.'

Osman shrugged his shoulders doubtfully.

'Look here, man,' pursued the other, 'this is a chance in a million. What's a hundred liras? You've been slaving for that Huru since you dropped out of your mother's womb and she's never paid you a lira. She owes you this. And anyway she'll get back her money's worth in just one summer. A woman's good for everything, in the house, in the fields, in bed . . . . '

Osman rose abruptly.

'I'll ask the Mistress,' he said. 'How should I know? . . . '

A couple of days later, a short, broad-hipped girl with blue beads strung into her plaited hair was seen at the door of Huru's barn in which Hollow Osman always slept. She was staring out with huge wondering eyes.

A month passed. Two months . . . . And passers-by grew familiar with the sight of the strange wide-eyed girl at the barn door.

One day, a small dark boy with a face the size of a hand was seen pelting through the village. He rushed up to his mother where she sat on the threshold of her hut gossiping with Seedy Doneh.

'Mother,' he screeched, 'I've seen them! It's the truth, I swear it is. Uncle Osman's wife with . . . . May my eyes drop out right here if I'm telling a lie.'

Seedy Doneh turned to him sharply.

'What?' she cried. 'Say it again. What's that about Fadik?'

'She was with the Agha's son. I saw them with my own eyes. He went into the barn with her. They couldn't see me where I was hiding. Then he took off his boots, you know the shiny yellow boots he wears . . . . And then they lay down and . . . . Let my two eyes drop out if . . . . '

'I knew it!' crowed Seedy Doneh. 'I knew it would turn out this way.'

'Hollow Osman never had any manhood in him anyway,' said the child's mother. 'Always under that viper-tongued Huru's petticoats . . . . '

'Didn't I tell you, Ansha, the very first day she came here that this would happen?' said Doneh. 'I said this girl's ready to play around. Pretending she was too bashful to speak to anyone. Ah, still waters run deep . . . . '

She rose quickly and hurried off to spread the news.

'Have you heard? Just as I foretold . . . . Still waters . . . . The Agha's son . . . . Fadik . . . . '

In a trice all the neighbouring women had crowded at Ansha's door, trying to squeeze the last drop of information out of the child.

'Come on, tell us,' urged one of the women for perhaps the hundredth time. 'How did you see them?'

'Let my two eyes drop out right here if I'm lying,' the child repeated again and again with unabated excitement. 'The Agha's son came in, and then they lay down, both of them, and did things . . . . I was watching through a chink in the wall. Uncle Osman's wife, you know, was crying. I can't do it, she was saying, and she was sobbing away all the time. Then the Agha's son pulled off those shiny yellow boots of his . . . . Then I ran right here to tell Mother.'

The news spread through the village like wildfire. People could talk about nothing else. Seedy Doneh, for one, seemed to have made it her job to leave no man or woman uninformed. As she scoured the village for new listeners, she chanced upon Osman himself.

'Haven't you heard what's come upon you?' she said, drawing him aside behind the wall of a hut. 'You're disgraced, you jackass. The Agha's son has got his fingers up your wife's skirt. Try and clear your good name now if you can!'

Osman did not seem to understand.

'I don't know . . . ' he murmured, shrugging his shoulders. 'I'll have to ask the Mistress. What would the Agha's son want with my wife?'

Doneh was incensed.

'What would he want with her, blockhead?' she screamed. 'Damn you, your wife's become a whore, that's what! She's turned your home into a brothel. Anyone can come in and have her.' She flounced off still screaming. 'I spit on you! I spit on your manhood . . . . '

Osman was upset.

'What are you shouting for, woman?' he called after her. 'People will think something's wrong. I have to ask the Mistress. She knows everything. How should I know?'

'Look here,' said Huru, 'you mustn't believe those lying bitches. You've got a good wife.'

He started walking home, his long arms dangling at his sides as though they had been hitched to his shoulders as an afterthought, his fingers sticking out wide apart as was his habit. This time he was waylaid by their next-door neighbour, Zeynep, who planted herself before him and tackled him at the top of her voice.

'Ah Osman! You'd be better off dead! Why don't you go and bury yourself? The whole village knows about it. Your wife . . . . The Agha's son . . . . Ah Osman, how could you have brought such a woman into your home? Where's your honour now? Disgraced . . . . Ah Osman!

He stared at her in bewilderment.

'How should I know?' he stammered, his huge hands opening out like pitchforks. 'The Mistress knows all about such things. I'll go and ask her.'

Zeynep turned her back on him in exasperation, her large skirt ballooning about her legs.

'Go bury yourself, Osman! I hope I see you dead after this.'

A group of children were playing tipcat near by. Suddenly one of them broke into a chant.

'Go bury yourself, Osman . . . . See you dead, Osman . . . . '

The other children joined in mechanically without interrupting their game.

Osman stared at them and turned away.

'How should I know?' he muttered. 'I must go to the Mistress.'

He found Huru sitting at her spinning-wheel. Fadik was there too, squatting near the hearth and listlessly chewing mastic-gum.

'Mistress,' said Osman, 'have you heard what Seedy Doneh's saying? She's saying I'm disgraced . . . . '

Huru stepped on the pedal forcefully and brought the wheel to a stop.

'What's that?' she said. 'What about Seedy Doneh?'

'I don't know . . . . She said Fadik . . . . '

'Look here,' said Huru, 'you mustn't believe those lying bitches. You've got a good wife. Where would you find such a woman?'

'I don't know. Go bury yourself, they said. The children too . . . . '

'Shut up,' cried Huru, annoyed. 'People always gossip about a beautiful woman. They go looking for the mote in their neighbour's eye without seeing the beam in their own. They'd better hold their peace because I've got a tongue in my head too . . . . '

Osman smiled with relief.

'How could I know?' he said.

Down in the villages of the Chukurova plain, a sure sign of oncoming spring is when the women are seen with their heads on one another's lap, picking the lice out of one another's hair. So it was, on one of the first warm days of the year. A balmy sun shone caressingly down on the fields and village, and not a leaf stirred. A group of women were sitting before their huts on the dusty ground, busy with the lice and wagging their tongues for all they were worth. An acrid odour of sweat hung about the group. Seedy Doneh was rummaging in the hair of a large woman who was stretched full length on the ground. She decided that she had been silent long enough.

'No,' she declared suddenly, 'it's not as you say, sister! He didn't force her or any such thing. She simply fell for him the minute she saw those shiny yellow boots. If you're going to believe Huru! . . . She's got to deny it, of course.'

'That Huru was born with a silver spoon in her mouth,' said white-haired, toothless old Zala, wiping her blood-stained fingers on her ragged skirt. 'Hollow Osman's been slaving for her like twenty men ever since she took him in, a kid the size of your hand! And all for a mere pittance of food. And now there's the woman too. Tell me, what's there left for Huru to do?'

'Ah,' sighed another woman, 'fortune has smiled on Huru, she has indeed! She's got two people serving her now.'

'And both for nothing,' old Zala reminded her.

'What it amounts to,' said Seedy Doneh spitefully, 'is that Huru used to have one wife and now she's got two. Osman was always a woman, and as for Fadik she's a real woman. He-he!'

'That she is, a real woman!' the others agreed.

'Huru says the Agha's son took her by force,' pursued Doneh. 'All right, but what about the others? What about those lining up at her door all through the night, eh? She never says no to any one of them, does she? She takes in everyone, young and old.'

'The Lady Bountiful, that's what she is,' said Elif. 'And do you know something? Now that Fadik's here, the young men are leaving Omarja's yellow bitch in peace . . . . '

'They've got somewhere better to go!' cackled the others.

Omarja's dumpy wife jumped up from where she was sitting on the edge of the group.

'Now look here, Elif!' she cried. 'What's all this about our yellow dog? Stop blackening people's characters, will you?'

'Well, it's no lie, is it?' Doneh challenged her. 'When was that bitch ever at your door where she should be all night? No, instead, there she came trotting up a-mornings with a rope dangling from her neck!'

'Don't go slandering our dog,' protested Omarja's wife. 'Why, if

Omarja hears this, he'll kill the poor creature. Upon my word he will!'

'Go on!' said Doneh derisively. 'Don't you come telling me that Omarja doesn't know his yellow bitch is the paramour of all the village youths! What about that time when Stumpy Veli caught some of them down by the river, all taking it in turns over her? Is there anyone in this village who didn't hear of that? It's no use trying to whitewash your bitch to us!'

Suddenly in a burst of fury, he flung himself on the black ox, dug his teeth into its nose and shook it with all his might.

Omarja's wife was alarmed.

'Don't, sister,' she pleaded. 'Omarja'll shoot the dog, that's sure . . . .'

'Well, I'm not to blame for that, sister,' retorted Doneh tartly. 'Anyway, the bitch'll be all right now that Fadik's around. And so will Kurdish Velo's donkey . . . .'

Kurdish Velo's wife began to fidget nervously.

'Not our fault,' she blurted out in her broken Turkish. 'We lock our donkey in, but they come and break the door! Velo furious. Velo say people round here savage. He say, with an animal deadly sin! He say he kill someone. Then he complain to the Headman. Velo going sell this donkey.'

'You know what I think?' interposed Seedy Doneh. 'They're going to make it hot for her in this village. Yes, they'll do what they did to Esheh.'

'Poor Esheh,' sighed old Zala. 'What a woman she was before her man got thrown into prison! She would never have come to that, but she had no one to protect her. May they rot in hell, those that forced her into it! But she is dead and gone, poor thing.'

'Eh!' said Doneh. 'How could she be otherwise after the youths of five villages had done with her?' She straightened up. 'Look here, sister,' she said to the woman whose head was on her lap, 'I couldn't get through your lice in days! They say the Government's invented some medicine for lice which they call Dee-Dee. Ah, if only we had a spoonful of that . . . . Do you know, women, that Huru keeps watch over Fadik at night? She tells the youths when to come in and then drives them out with a stick. Ha-ha, and she wants us to believe in Fadik's virtue . . . . '

'That's because it suits her. Where will she find people who'll work for nothing like those two?'

'Well, the lads are well provided for this year,' snickered Doneh. 'Who knows but that Huru may hop in and help Fadik out!'

Just then, Huru loomed up from behind a hut. She was a large woman with a sharp chin and a wrinkled face. Her greying hair was always carefully dyed with henna.

'Whores!' she shouted at the top of her voice, as she bore down upon them with arms akimbo. 'City trollops! You get hold of a poor fellow's wife and let your tongues go wagging away. Tell me, are you any better than she? What do you want of this harmless mountain girl?' She pounced on Doneh who cringed back. 'As for you, you filthy shitty-assed bitch, you'll shut your mouth or I'll start telling the truth about you and that husband of yours who pretends he's a man. You know me, don't you?'

Doneh blenched.

'Me, sister?' she stammered. 'Me? I never . . . . Other people's good name . . . .'

The women were dispersing hastily. Only Kurdish Velo's wife, unaware of what was going on, continued picking lice out of her companion's hair.

'Velo says in our country women like this burnt alive. He says there no virtue in this Chukurova. No honour . . . . '

The eastern sky had only just begun to pale as, with a great hullabaloo and calls and cries, the women and children drove the cattle out to pasture. Before their houses, red-aproned matrons were busy at the churns beating yoghurt. The damp air smelled of spring.

Osman had long ago yoked the oxen and was waiting at Huru's door.

She appeared in the doorway.

'Osman, my lion,' she said, 'you're not to come back until you've ploughed through the whole field. The girl Aysheh will look after your food and get you some bedding. Mind you do the sowing properly, my child. Husneh's hard pressed this year. And there's your wife to feed too now . . . . '

Husneh was Huru's only child, whom in a moment of aberration she had given in marriage to Ali Efendi, a low-salaried tax-collector. All the product of her land, everything Huru had, was for this daughter.

Osman did not move or say a word. He stood there in the half light, a large black shadow near the yoked oxen whose tails were flapping their legs in slow rhythm.

Huru stepped up to him.

'What's the matter with you, Osman, my child,' she said anxiously. 'Is anything wrong?'

'Mistress,' whispered Osman, 'it's what Seedy Doneh's saying. And Zeynep too . . . . That my house . . . . I don't know . . . . '

Huru flared up.

'Shut up, you spineless dolt,' she cried. 'Don't you come babbling to me about the filthy inventions of those city trollops. I paid that broken-nosed thief a hundred good banknotes for the girl, didn't I? Did I ask you for as much as a lira? You listen to me. You can find fault with pure gold, but not with Fadik. Don't let me hear such nonsense from you again!'

Osman hesitated.

'I don't know . . . ' he murmured, as he turned at last and drove the oxen off before him.

It was mid-morning. A bright sun glowed over the sparkling fields.

Osman was struggling with the lean, emaciated oxen, which after ploughing through only one acre had stretched themselves on the ground and simply refused to budge. Flushed and breathless, he let himself drop on to a mound and took his head in his hands. After a while, he rose and tried pulling the animals up by the tail.

'Accursed beasts,' he muttered. 'The Mistress says Husneh's in need this year. Get up this minute, accursed beasts!'

He pushed and heaved, but to no avail. Suddenly in a burst of fury, he flung himself on the black ox, dug his teeth into its nose and shook it with all his might. Then he straightened up and looked about him sheepishly.

'If anyone saw me . . . . ' He swore as he spat out blood. 'What can I do? Husneh's in need and there's Fadik to feed too. And now these heathen beasts . . . I don't know.'

It was in this state of perplexity that Stumpy Veli found him when he strolled over from a neighbouring field.

'So the team's collapsed, eh?' he commented. 'Well, it was to be expected. Look at how their ribs are sticking out. You won't be able to get anything out of them.'

'I don't know,' muttered Osman faintly. 'Husneh's in a bad way and I got married . . . . '

'And a fine mess that's landed you in,' burst out Veli angrily. 'You'd have been better off dead!'

'I don't know,' said Osman. 'The Mistress paid a hundred lira for her . . . . '

Stumpy Veli took hold of his arm

and made him sit down.

'Look, Osman,' he said, 'the villagers told me to talk to you. They say you're giving the village a bad name. Ever since the Agha's son took up with your wife, all the other youths have followed suit and your house is just like a brothel now. The villagers say you've got to repudiate her. If you don't they'll drive you both out. The honour of the whole village is at stake, and you know honour doesn't grow on trees . . . .'

Osman, his head hanging down, was as still as a statue. A stray ant had caught his eye.

What's this ant doing around here at this time of the day, he wondered to himself. Where can its nest be?

Veli nudged him sharply.

'Damn you, man!' he cried. 'Think what'll happen if the police get wind of this. She hasn't got any papers. Why, if the gendarmes once lay their hands on her, you know how it'll be. They'll play around with her for months, poor creature.'

'But you're a great big Agha's son! Why do you want to drive her away? What harm has she done you? You're a great big . . . .'

Osman started as though an electric current had been sent through his large frame.

'I haven't got any papers either,' he whispered.

Veli drew nearer. Their shoulders touched. Osman's were trembling fitfully.

'Papers are the business of the Government,' Veli said. 'You and me, we can't understand such things. If we did, then what would we need a Government for? Now, listen to me. If the gendarmes get hold of her, we'll be the laughing-stock of villages for miles around. We'll never be able to hold up our heads again in the Chukurova. You mustn't trifle with the honour of the whole village. Get rid of her before she drags you into more trouble.'

'But where will I be without her?' protested Osman. 'I'll die, that's all. Who'll do my washing? Who'll cook bulgur pilaff for me? I'll starve to death if I have to eat gruel again every day. I just can't do without her.'

'The villagers will buy you another woman,' said Veli. 'We'll collect the money among us. A better woman, an honourable one, and beautiful too . . . . I'll go up into the mountain villages and pick one for you myself. Just you pack this one off quickly . . . .'

'I don't know,' said Osman. 'It's the Mistress knows about these things.'

Veli was exasperated.

'Damn the Mistress!' he shouted. 'It's up to you, you idiot!'

Then he softened. He tried persuasion again. He talked and talked. He talked himself hoarse, but Osman sat there immovable as a rock, his mouth clamped tight. Finally Veli spat in his face and stalked off.

It was well on in the afternoon when it occurred to Osman to unyoke the team. He had not stirred since Veli's departure. As for the oxen, they had just lain there placidly chewing the cud. He managed to get them to their feet and let them wander about the field, while he walked back to the village. He made straight for the Agha's house and waited in the yard, not speaking to anyone, until he saw the Agha's son riding in, the bridle of his horse lathered with sweat.

The Agha's son was taken aback. He dismounted quickly, but Osman waylaid him.

'Listen,' he pleaded, 'you're the son of our all-powerful Agha. What do you want with my wife?'

The Agha's son became the colour of his famous boots. He hastily pulled a five-lira note out of his pocket and thrust it into Osman's hand.

'Take this,' he mumbled and hurried away.

'But you're a great big Agha's son!' cried Osman after him. 'Why do you want to drive her away? What harm has she done you? You're a great big . . . .'

He was crushed. He stumbled away towards Huru's house, the five-lira note still in his hand.

At the sight of Osman, Huru blew her top.

'What are you doing here, you feeble-minded ass?' she shouted. 'Didn't I tell you not to come back until you'd finished all the ploughing? Do you want to ruin me, you idiot?'

'Wait, Mistress,' stammered Osman. 'Listen . . . .'

'Listen, he says! Damn the fool!'

'Mistress,' he pleaded, 'let me explain . . . .'

Huru glared at him.

'Mistress, you haven't heard. You don't know what the villagers are going to do to me. They're going to throw me out of this village. Stumpy Veli said so. He said the police . . . . He said papers . . . . We haven't got any papers. Fadik hasn't and I haven't either. He said the gendarmes would carry Fadik away and do things to her. He said I must repudiate her because my house is a brothel. That's what he said. I said the Mistress knows these things . . . . She paid the hundred liras . . . .'

Huru was dancing with fury. She rushed out into the village square and began howling at the top of her voice.

'Bastards! So she's a thorn in your flesh, this poor fellow's wife! If you want to drive whores out of this village why don't you start with your own wives and daughters? You'd better look for whores in your own homes, pimps that you are, all of you! And tell your sons to leave poor folks' women alone . . . .'

Then she turned to Osman and gave him a push.

'Off you go! To the fields! No one's going to do anything to your wife. Not while I'm alive.'

The villagers had gathered in the square and had heard Huru out in profound silence. As soon as she was gone, though, they started muttering among themselves.

'Who does that bitch think she is, abusing the whole village like that? . . .'

The Agha, Wolf Mahmut, had heard her too.

'You just wait, Huru,' he said grinding his teeth. 'If you think you're going to get away with this . . . .'

The night was dark, a thick damp darkness that seemed to cling to the face and hands. Huru had been waiting for some time now, concealed in the blackest shadow of the barn, when suddenly she perceived a stirring in the darkness, and a voice was calling softly at the door.

'Fadik! Open up, girl. It's me . . . .'

The door creaked open and a shadow glided in. An uncontrollable trembling seized Huru. She gripped her stick and flung herself on the door. It was unbolted and went crashing back against the wall. As she stood there trying to pierce the darkness, a few vague figures hustled by and made their escape. Taken by surprise, she hurled out a vitriolic oath and started groping about until she discovered Fadik crouching in a corner. She seized her by the hair and began to beat her with the stick.

'Bitch!' she hissed. 'To think I was standing up for you . . . .'

Fadik did not utter a sound as the blows rained down on her. At last Huru, exhausted, let go of her.

'Get up,' she ordered, 'and light some kindling.'

Fadik raked out the dying embers and with much puffing and blowing managed to light a stick of torchwood. A pale honeyed light fell dimly over the stacked hay. There was an old pallet in one corner and a few kitchen utensils,

but nothing else to show that the place was lived in.

Huru took Fadik's hand and looked at her sternly.

'Didn't you promise me, girl, that you'd never do it again?'

Fadik's head hung low.

'Do you know, you bitch,' continued Huru, 'what the villagers are going to do? They're going to kick you out of the village. Do you hear me?'

'They'd made her dance naked for them . . . . They'd done all sorts of things to her. Yes, they as good as killed her.'

Fadik stirred a little. 'Mistress, I swear I didn't go after them! They just came in spite of everything.'

'Listen to me, girl,' said Huru. 'Do you know what happened to Esheh? That's what you'll come to if you're not careful. They're like ravening wolves these men. If you fall into their clutches, they'll tear you to shreds. To shreds, I tell you!'

'But Mistress, I swear I never did anything to — '

'You must bolt your door because they'll be after you whether you do anything or not, and their pimps of fathers will put the blame on me. It's my hundred liras they can't swallow. They're dying to see it go to pot . . . . Just like Esheh you'll be. They had no one in the world, she and her man, and when Ali was thrown into jail she was left all alone. He'd lifted a sheep from the Agha's flock and bought clothes and shoes for their son. A lovely child he was, three years old . . . . Ali doted on him. But there he was in jail, and that yellow-booted good-for-nothing was soon after Esheh like the plague. She kept him at arm's length for as long as she could, poor Esheh, but he got what he wanted in the end. Then he turned her over to those ravening wolves . . . . They dragged her about from village to village, from mountain to mountain. Twenty, thirty good-for-nothings . . . . Her child was left among strangers, the little boy she had loved so. He died . . . . Those who saw her said she was like a consumptive, thin and grey, but still they wouldn't let her go, those scoundrels. Then one day the village dogs came in all smeared with blood, and an eagle was circling over the plain. So the men went to look, and they found Esheh, her body half devoured by the dogs . . . . They'd made her dance naked for them . . . . They'd done all sorts of things to her. Yes, they as good as killed her. That's what the police said when they came up from the town. And when Ali heard of it, he died of grief in jail. Yes, my girl, you've got Esheh's fate before you. It isn't my hundred liras that I care for, it's you. As for Osman, I can always find another woman for him. Now I've warned you. Just call me if they come again. Esheh was all alone in the world. You've got me, at least. Do you swear to do as I'm telling you?'

'I swear it, Mistress, said Fadik.

Huru was suddenly very tired.

'Well, I'm going. You'll call me, won't you?'

As soon as she was gone, the youths crept out of the darkness and sneaked into the barn again.

'Hey, Fadik,' they whispered. 'Huru was lying to you, girl. Esheh just killed herself . . . . '

There was a stretch of grass in front of the Agha's house, and on one side of it dung had been heaped to the size of a small hillock. The dung steamed in the early morning sun and not a breath stirred the warm air. A cock climbed to the top of the heap. It scraped the dung, stretched its neck and crowed triumphantly, flapping its wings.

The group of villagers squatting about on the grass silently eyed the angry Agha. Wolf Mahmut was a huge man whose shadow when he was sitting was as large as that of an average man standing up. He was never seen without a frayed checked overcoat, the only one in the village, that he had been wearing for years now.

He was toying irritably with his metal-framed glasses when Stumpy Veli, who had been sent for a while ago, made his appearance. The Agha glared at him.

'Is this the way you get things done, you fraud?' he expostulated. 'So you'd have Hollow Osman eating out of your hand in no time, eh?'

Stumpy Veli seemed to shrink to half his size.

'Agha,' he said, 'I tried everything. I talked and talked. I told him the villagers would drive them both out. I warned him of the gendarmes. All right, he said, I'll send her away. And then he didn't . . . . If you ask me, Huru's at the bottom of it all.'

The others stirred. 'That she is!' they agreed.

Mahmut Agha jumped up. 'I'll get even with her,' he growled.

'That, you will, Agha,' they assented. 'But . . . . '

'We've put up with that old whore long enough,' continued the Agha, sitting down again.

'We'll starve if you don't plough. But he won't listen. He's always after that woman. I've lost my son because of that whore.'

'Yes, Agha,' said Stumpy Veli, 'but, you see, she relies on her son-in-law Ali, the tax-collector. They'd better stop treading on my toes, she said, or I'll have Ali strip this village bare . . . . '

'He can't do anything,' said the Agha. 'I don't owe the Government a bean.'

'But we do, Agha,' interposed one of the men. 'He can come here and take away our blankets and rugs, whatever we have . . . . '

'It's because of Huru that he hasn't fleeced this village up to now,' said another. 'We owe a lot of money, Agha.'

'Well, what are we to do then?' cried Mahmut Agha angrily. 'All our youths have left the plough and the fields and are after the woman night and day like rutting bulls. At this rate, the whole village'll starve this year.'

An old man spoke up in a tremulous voice. 'I'm dead for one,' he wailed. 'That woman's ruined my hearth. High morning it is already. Go to the plough, my son, I beg the boy. We'll starve if you don't plough. But he won't listen. He's always after that woman. I've lost my son because of that whore. I'm too old to plough any more. I'll starve this year. I'll go and throw myself at Huru's feet. There's nothing else to do . . . . '

The Agha rose abruptly. 'That Huru!' He gritted his teeth. 'I'll settle her account.'

He strode away.

The villagers looked up hopefully. 'Mahmut Agha'll settle her account,' they muttered. 'He'll find a way . . . . '

The Agha heard them and swelled with pride. 'Yes, Mahmut Agha'll settle her account,' he repeated grimly to himself.

He stopped before a hut and called out.

'Hatije Woman! Hatije!'

A middle-aged woman rushed out wiping her hands on her apron.

'Mahmut Agha!' she cried. 'Welcome to our home. You never visit us these days.' Then she whirled back. 'Get up, you damned lazybones,' she shouted angrily. 'It's high morning, and look who's here.'

Mahmut Agha followed her inside.

'Look, Agha,' she complained, pointing to her son, 'it's high morning and Halil still abed!'

Startled at the sight of the Agha, Halil sprang up and drew on his black shalvar-trousers shamefacedly, while his mother continued with her lamentations.

'Ah, Mahmut Agha, you don't know what's befallen us! You don't know, may I kiss your feet, my Agha, or you wouldn't have us on your land any longer . . . . Ah, Mahmut Agha! This accursed son of mine . . . . I would have seen him dead and buried, yes, buried in this black earth before . . . . '

'What are you cursing the lad for?' Mahmut Agha interrupted her. 'Wait, just tell me first.'

'Ah, Agha, if you knew! It was full day when he came home this night. And it's the same every night, the same ever since Hollow Osman's woman came to the village. He lies abed all through the livelong day. Who'll do the ploughing, I ask you? We'll starve this year. Ah, Mahmut Agha, do something! Please do something . . . . '

'You go outside a little, will you, Hatije,' said the Agha. Then he turned to Halil, stretching out his long, wrinkled neck which had become as red as a turkey's. 'Listen to me, my boy, this has got to end. You must get this whore out of our village and give her to the youths of another village, any village. She's got to go and you'll do it. It's an order. Do you hear me?'

'Why, Agha!' Halil said ingratiatingly. 'Is that what's worrying you? I'll get hold of her this very night and turn her over to Jelil from Ortakli village. You can count on me.'

The Agha's spirits rose.

'Hatije,' he called out, 'come in here. See how I'm getting you out of this mess? And all the village too . . . . Let that Huru know who she's dealing with in the future. They call me Wolf Mahmut and I know how to put her nose out of joint.'

Long before dawn, piercing shrieks startled the echoes in the village.

'Bastards! Pimps!' Huru was howling. 'You won't get away with this, not on your life you won't. My hundred liras were too much for you to swallow, eh, you fiends? You were jealous of this poor fellow's wife, eh? But you just wait and see, Wolf Mahmut! I'll set the tax-collector after you all in no time. I'll get even with you if I have to spend my last penny! I'll bribe the Mudir, the Kaymakam, all the officials. I'll send telegrams to Ankara, to Ismet Pasha, to the head of the Democrats. I'll have you all dragged into court, rotting away in police-stations. I'll get my own back on you for Fadik's sake.'

She paused to get her breath and was off again even louder than before.

Fadik had disappeared, that was the long and the short of it. Huru soon found out that someone else was missing too, Huseyin's half-witted son, The Tick.

'Impossible,' she said. 'The Tick ravishing women? Not to save his life, he couldn't! This is just another trick of those good-for-nothings . . . . '

'But really, Huru,' the villagers tried to persuade her, 'he was after her all the time. Don't you know he gathered white snails in the hills, threaded them into a necklace and offered it to Fadik, and she hung it up on her wall as a keep-sake? That's the plain truth, Huru.'

'I don't believe it,' Huru said stubbornly. 'I wouldn't even if I saw them together with my own eyes . . . . '

'Look, Osman, I'll get you a new woman even if it costs me a thousand liras.'

The next day it started raining, that sheer, plumbline torrent which sets in over the Chukurova for days. The minute the bad news had reached him, Osman had abandoned his plough and had rushed back to the village. He was standing now motionless at Huru's door, the peak of his cap drooping over his eyes. His wet clothes clung to his flesh, glistening darkly, and his rawhide boots were clogged with mud.

'Come in out of the rain, Osman, do!' Huru kept urging him.

'I can't. I don't know . . . ' was all he could say.

'Now, look here, Osman,' said Huru. 'She's gone, so what? Let them have that bitch. I'll find you a good woman, my Osman. Never mind the money. I'll spend twice as much on a new wife for you. Just you come in out of the rain.'

Osman never moved.

'Listen, Osman. I've sent word to Ali. Come and levy the taxes at once, I said. Have no mercy on these ungrateful wretches. If you don't fleece them to their last rag, I said, you needn't count on me as a mother again. You'll see what I'm going to do to them, my Osman. You just come inside . . . . '

The rain poured down straight and thick as the warp in a loom, and Osman still stood there, his chin resting on his staff, like a thick tree whose branches have been lopped off.

Huru appealed to the neighbours. Two men came and pulled and pushed, but he seemed nailed to the ground. It was well in the afternoon when he stirred and began to pace the village from one end to the other, his head sunk between his shoulders and the rain streaming down his body.

'Poor fellow, he's gone mad,' opined the villagers.

A few strong men finally carried him home. They undressed him and put him to bed.

Huru sat down beside him. 'Look, Osman, I'll get you a new woman even if it costs me a thousand liras. You mustn't distress yourself so. Just for a woman . . . . '

The next morning he was more his normal self, but no amount of reasoning or pleading from Huru could induce him to go back to the field. He left the house and resumed his pacing up and down.

The villagers had really begun to feel sorry for him now.

'Alas, poor Osman!' they murmured as he passed between the huts.

Osman heard them and heaved deep, heart-rending sighs. And still he roamed aimlessly round and round.

Wolf Mahmut should have known better. Why, the whole village saw with half an eye what a rascal Halil was! How could he be trusted to give up a woman once he had got her into his hands? He had indeed got Fadik out of the way, but what he had done was to shut her up in one of the empty sheep-pens in the hills beyond the village, and there he had posted The Tick to guard her.

'Play around with her if you like,' he had told him contemptuously. 'But if you let her give you the slip — ' and he had seized The Tick's wrist and squeezed it until it hurt — 'you're as good as dead.'

Though twenty years old, The Tick was so scraggy and undersized that at first glance people would take him to be only ten. His arms and legs were as thin as matchsticks and he walked side-

ways like a crab. He had always had a way of clinging tenaciously to people or objects he took a fancy to, which even as a child had earned him his nickname. No one had ever called him by his real name and it looked as though his own mother had forgotten it too . . . .

Halil would come every evening bringing food for Fadik and The Tick, and he would leave again just before dawn.

But it was not three days before the village youths found out what was going on. After that there was a long queue every night outside the sheep-pen. They would take it in turns heedless of Fadik's tears and howls, and at day-break, singing and firing their guns as though in a wedding procession, they would make their way back to the village.

They lined up as usual at the entrance to the pen. The first one went in and a nerve-racking scream rose from Fadik.

Night was falling and Fadik began to tremble like a leaf. They would not be long now. They would come again and torture her. She was weak with fear and exhaustion. For the past two days, her gorge had risen at the very sight of food, and she lay there on the dirt floor, hardly able to move, her whole body covered with bruises and wounds.

The Tick was dozing away near the door of the pen.

Fadik tried to plead with him. 'Let me go, brother,' she begged. 'I'll die if I have to bear another night of this.'

The Tick half-opened his eyes. 'I can't,' he replied.

'But if I die, it'll be your fault. Before God it will . . . . Please let me go.'

'Why should it be my fault?' said The Tick. 'I didn't bring you here, did I?'

'They'll never know. You'll say you fell asleep. I'll go off and hide somewhere. I'll go back to my mother . . . . '

'I can't,' said The Tick. 'Halil would kill me if I let you go.'

'But I want to go to my mother,' she cried desperately. 'You must let me go. Please let me go . . . . '

It was dark now and the sound of singing drifted up from the village.

Fadik was seized with a violent fit of trembling. 'They're coming,' she said. 'Let me get away now, brother. Save me! If you save me, I'll be your woman. I'll do anything . . . . '

But The Tick had not been nicknamed for nothing.

'They'd kill me,' he said. 'Why should I die because of you? And Halil's promised to buy me a pair of shoes, too. I'm not going to go without shoes because of you.'

Fadik broke into wild sobbing. There was no hope now.

'Oh, God,' she wept, 'what shall I do now? Oh, Mother, why was I ever born?'

They lined up as usual at the entrance to the pen. The first one went in and a nerve-racking scream rose from Fadik, a scream that would have moved the most hardened of hearts. But the youths were deaf to everything. In they went, one after the other, and soon Fadik's screams died down. Not even a moan came out of her.

There were traces of blood on the ground at the back of the sheep-pen. Halil and the Agha's son had had a fight the night before and the Agha's son had split open Halil's head.

'The woman's mine,' Halil had insisted. 'I've a right to go in first.'

'No, you haven't,' the Agha's son had contended. 'I'm going to be the first.'

The other youths had taken sides and joined the fray which had lasted most of the night, and it was a bedraggled band that wended back to the village that night.

Bowed down with grief, Hatije Woman came weeping to the Muhtar.

'My son is dying,' she cried. 'He's at his last gasp, my poor Halil, and it's the Agha's son who did it, all because of that whore of Huru's. Ah, Muhtar, if my son dies what's to become of me? There he lies struggling for life, the only hope of my hearth. But I won't let the Agha get away with this. I'll go to the Government. An old woman's only prop, I'll say . . . . '

The Muhtar had great difficulty in talking Hatije out of her purpose.

'You go back home, Hatije Woman,' he said when she had calmed down a little, 'and don't worry. I'll deal with this business.'

He summoned the Agha and the elders, and a long discussion ensued. It would not do to hand over the woman to the police-station. These rapacious gendarmes! . . . The honour of the whole village was at stake. And if they passed her on to the youths of another village, Huru was sure to find out and bring her back. She would not rest until she did.

After long deliberation, they came to a decision at last. The woman would be returned to Osman, but on one condition. He would take himself off with her to some distant place and never appear in the village again. They had no doubt that Osman, grateful to have Fadik back to himself, would accept. And that would cook Huru's goose too. She would lose both the woman and Osman. It would teach her to insult a whole village!

A couple of men went to find Osman and brought him back with them to the Muhtar's house.

'Sit down,' they urged him, but he just stood there grasping his staff, staring about him with bloodshot eyes. His clothes hung down torn and crumpled and stained yellow from his lying all wet on the hay. His hair was a tangled, clotted mass and bits of straw clung to the stubble on his chin.

Wolf Mahmut took off his glasses and fidgeted with them.

'Osman, my lad,' he remonstrated, 'what's this state you're in? And all for a woman! Does a man let himself break down like this just for a woman? You'll die if you go on like this . . . . '

'I don't know,' said Osman. 'I'll die . . . . '

'See here, Osman,' said the Agha. 'We're here to help you. We'll get your woman back for you from out of those rascals' hands. Then you'll take her and go. You'll both get away from here, as far as possible. But you're not to tell Huru. She mustn't know where you are.'

'You see, Osman,' said Stumpy Veli, 'how good the Agha's being to you. Your own father wouldn't have done more.'

'But you're not to tell Huru,' the Agha insisted. 'If you do, she'll never let you go away. And then the youths will come and take your woman away from you again. And how will you ever get yourself another woman?'

'And who'll wash your clothes then?' added Stumpy Veli. 'Who'll cook your bulgur pilaff for you? You mustn't breathe a word to Huru. Just take Fadik and go off to the villages around Antep. Once there, you'll be sure to get a job on a farm. You'll be much better off than you ever were with Huru, and you'll have your woman with you too . . . . '

'But how can I do that?' protested Osman. 'The Mistress paid a hundred liras for Fadik.'

'We'll collect that much among us,' the Agha assured him. 'Don't you worry about that. We'll see that Huru gets her money back. You just take the woman and go.'

'I don't know,' said Osman. His eyes

filled with tears and he swallowed. 'The Mistress has always been so good to me . . . . How can I . . . . Just for a woman . . . . '

'If you tell Huru, you're lost,' said the Agha. 'Is Huru the only mistress in the world? Aren't there other villages in this country? Take the woman and go. You'll never find another woman like Fadik. Listen, Veli'll tell you where she is and tomorrow you'll take her and go.'

Osman bowed his head. He thought for a long time. Then he looked up at them.

'I won't tell her,' he said at last. 'Why should I want to stay here? There are other villages . . . . '

Before dawn the next day, he set out for the sheep-pen which Stumpy Veli had indicated.

'I don't know . . . ' he hesitated at the door. 'I don't know . . . . ' Then he called out softly. 'Fadik? Fadik, girl . . . . '

There was no answer. Trembling with hope and fear, he stepped in, then stopped aghast. Fadik was lying there on the dirt floor with only a few tatters left to cover her naked body. Her huge eyes were fixed vacantly on the branches that roofed the pen.

He stood frozen, his eyes filling with tears. Then he bent his large body over her.

'Fadik,' he whispered, 'are you all right?'

'Brother, go to the Mistress and tell her I thank her for all she's done for me, but I have to go. Tell her to forgive me . . . . '

Her answering moan shook him to the core. He slipped off his shirt and helped her into it. Then he noticed The Tick who had shrunk back into a corner, trying to make himself invisible. Osman moved on him threateningly.

'Uncle Osman,' cried The Tick shaking with fear, 'I didn't do it. It was Halil. He said he'd buy me a pair of shoes . . . . And Fadik would have died if I hadn't been here . . . . '

Osman turned away, heaved Fadik on to his back swiftly and threw himself out of the pen.

The mountain peaks were pale and the sun was about to rise. A few white clouds floated in the sky and a cool breeze caressed his face. The earth was wet with dew.'

The Tick was scurrying off towards the village.

'Brother,' Osman called after him, 'go to the Mistress and tell her I thank her for all she's done for me, but I have to go. Tell her to forgive me . . . . '

He set out in the opposite direction with Fadik on his back. He walked without a break until the sun was up the height of two minarets. Then he lowered Fadik to the ground and sat down opposite her. They looked at each other for a long while without speaking.

'Tell me,' said Osman. 'Where shall we go now? I don't know . . . . '

Fadik moaned.

The air smelled of spring and the earth steamed under the sun.

Theresa Queiros **Poetry**

society

i lie naked on my bed
like a baby born from the mother's womb
exposed to the world
crying my face red
hungry to be fed
sleepy to be sleeping

then you taught me to walk to you
when you demanded
you made me eat when i was not hungry
you would stab the dummy into my mouth
to shut me from bubbling
you taught me to say my night prayers
to a man called lord
you made me fear him

and that is how i grew up to dislike you
because you never told me who i was
when i asked
you said i am you
but if i am you
then tell me who am i
you are the walls that protect me
you are the walls that close in on me

i'm old enough now to know what's right and wrong but still,
i go to school to learn to say my yeses and no's still
i go to church every sunday to thank the lord that i am healthy

i lie naked on my bed
like a baby born from the mother's womb
hungry to be fed
sleepy to be sleeping
and, oh, how shamelessly
exposed to your eyes

spade my brain

spade spade my brain
dig out what you seek
discover my weapon
then leave me unarmed
spade spade my body
use me then abuse me
when you are satisfied
leave me with the apple core
spade spade my eyes
cover them with the ground
and ignore my salted tears
then leave me to sandpaper your pettiness

theresa queiros

ACHMAT

A SHORT STORY BY

DANGOR

The Incest of Poverty

The first thing old Piet Kansani noticed about Paulus Samson, the new representative, was the man's cruel and beautiful mouth. His lips were thin, but pursed into a smile of a wanton young woman. A countenance of angelic menace that he carried on his face even on the day they found his body, stiff, and covered with mud.

He arrived in the township on a cold winter's day, when the wind, merciless and dry because of the drought, swept clouds of white dust through the streets.

Piet Kansani, seated outside his house which was opposite the township office, watched Samson unpack his motely luggage from his car and drag it into the office. Rimless spectacles, gleaming in the pale sunlight, hid the glint of steel in his muddy eyes. His curly hair, neatly parted, and then piled to one side in the fashion of colonial artists operated for the Bushman kings, betrayed the trappings Samson had acquired at the ethnic college in the Cape. Turgid black suit, the symbol of our new ascendancy.

In the eyes of old Piet Kansani, staring through the haze of dust and wintry sunlight, Paulus Samson appeared to be a 'bush of burning blackness. *'n Regte hotnotsgod.'*

Later, Piet Kansani repeated this vision to the Investigating Officer from the CID who, in support of his conclusion that Samson had not been murdered by one of the township residents, but by a 'terrorist insurgent', wrote in his report: 'The residents respect authority, and would not easily strike against it. So simple and absolute is their fear of authority that even a man of so simple status as Paulus Samson appeared god-like to them.'

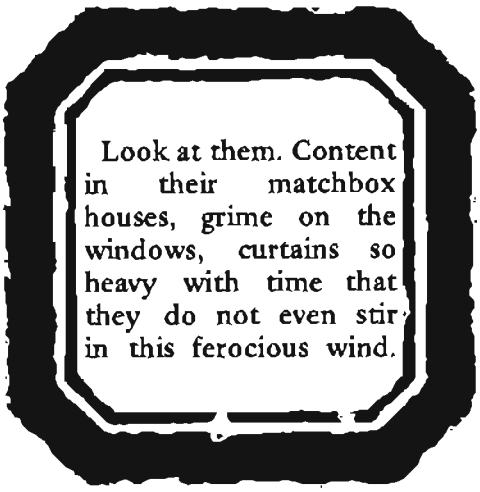
However, on the day of Samson's arrival, old Piet was weighed down by other problems, and could be forgiven for not having noticed the mere mortality of Samson. Worn down heels, and the look of a lonely man, unloved and unloving.

Piet had heard that there was to be a new arrangement for paying out pensions. A New Order had come. Our 'own people' are going to run our affairs, collect the rents and pay the pensions. They were told not to go to the welfare offices in the city any more, but to await the arrival of the Council's new representative.

But Piet, like most of the pensioners in the township, was mistrustful of new arrangements, they had seen so many over the past few years. He had urged his grandson to go to the welfare office as usual. According to his uncomplicated logic, simple-minded bureaucracy was often transformed by the sheer reality of things into simple human kindness. The welfare officer, encountered by the silent hopefulness of the crowd that would inevitably gather, would pay the pensions as usual.

By midday Piet's optimism had turned to fear. His grandson had not returned, and by this time on normal days all the pensions would have been paid out. He saw in his mind's eye the long queues of pensioners and relatives outside the office, wearily observing the glassfronted door, now barred and locked. The cleaner, fastidiously pausing to clean his mop, would be observed making slow, steady progress down the corridor of yellowed walls. Some would watch the sun, glowing darkly on the cleaner's forehead, begin to fade before their eyes.

And so the day would pass, each moment holding no more, and no less promise than the next. At four o'clock the crowd began to disperse and make



their way back to the township. By dusk the cry had swept through the township: No Pensions Were Paid Out Today.

Paulus Samson stood at the window of his office and stared out at the criss-cross of dusty streets. 345 houses split into three sections, the 100's, the 200's

and the 300's. A school, two churches and the municipal offices he now occupied. A small crowd was gathering around the old man who had sat in dusty vigil outside the office all day.

I could hear him thinking, analysing me. Men of dust. Look at them. Content in their matchbox houses, grime on the windows, curtains so heavy with time that they do not even stir in this ferocious wind.

I am here because it is my duty. And my destiny. I too was born and bred in a slum like this. Snot-nosed, with running sores on my skin. And they write about us, romanticise us, the fucking poets.

How we pay homage to our squalor. Samson remembered his own pilgrimage to his birthplace, a slum called Newclare, after an absence of ten years. The welcome glow of candle-light, smell of candle wax and tallow. Warm mouths, tasting of recent carnality, kiss you, sweetly still. The cold, the dirt, the scuttle of rats momentarily forgotten. Then, something makes the stomach turn. Perhaps another wasted walk to a blackened window. They have chained our memories to poverty.

A large crowd had gathered outside, waiting for Samson to address them. But Samson knew that the moment was not yet opportune. He would wait until their agitation subsided into sullen patience, until his moment of emergence from the office would prove welcome relief from the wind and the cold. And until the priest arrived.

Father Patrick Macnally woke with a premonition of sorrow. His head felt heavy and drowsy, the after effects of the drug the doctor had prescribed.

Father Macnally's lonely baritone exhortation to God echoed within the high domed roof of the rectory. Slowly the obscene images faded into the darkness, familiar objects became recognisable and Father Macnally's heaving breast began to subside.

He rose from the bed and drew open the curtains, letting in the late afternoon sun. Gusts of wind against the window, dust upon the window-sill, shadows of the coming night cold upon his face. How dry and desolate everything had become.

It is time, he thought, to go home to green Ireland to die.

Yet, it was almost time for vespers, he must hurry. He washed and dressed himself, knelt and prayed, all with ritualistic certainty.

The doorbell rang. Leave me in peace until the peace of the Lord is upon this house again.

The doorbell rang again, urgently.

Father Macnally yanked open the door. Gusts of bitter wind swept in, bringing a chill into the house of the Lord.

Reginald Baatjies, cap in hand, stood framed in the doorway.

'Yes, Reggie, what is it?' Father Macnally asked with unconcealed irritation.

'Father, no pensions were paid today,' the obsequious voice of Reggie Baatjies replied. Undertaker's agent. Finest coffin, full hearse, a mourning car, funeral director, finest deal in town. No pensions and no down payments on the death policy. Reggie Baatjies would bleed. Father Macnally told Reggie to come in.

'Close the door, no point in freezing as well.'

'There is a new representative, Old Piet saw him move in today,' Reggie continued breathlessly. We need you to speak to him.'

Little men with letters of authority. Representatives of the President in Council, under the new constitution. Good of the Community. Social Reform. Bread in the Home. Jobs in the City. Crime-free Townships. Words that fall from their mouths like stones. And still the wind whips the dust into our faces. Asthmatic wheezes and whooping cough, puerile diseases that afflict even old dogs like myself.

Father Macnally stepped out across the veld, his footsteps raising little plods of dust. Ahead of him rushed Reggie Baatjies, shambling along as painfully

as if an invisible chain secured him to the priest.

Paulus Samson, from his vantage point in the township office, watched the priest, led by a little man who hopped along like a *tokoloshe*, make his way across the veld.

And they are our saviours, foreign priests who teach us the ritual of prayer, how to obtain forgiveness in order to sin again. Our only sin was that we were born black, and not in soft beds and warm houses. Chain of bitter thought, forged and linked through the desolate years. I have seen them flash by in their gleaming cars, painted smiles on their porcelain faces.

Samson opened the door and with measured calm walked across to the crowd just as Father Macnally reached its muttering chaos.

The wind was howling and already the township dogs were slinking through the blue dusk in search of shelter from the coming night.

'Now, little Moses,' the priest muttered 'why don't you raise your hand and cause the wind to lie down?'

They spoke of it as a miracle, called him a sorcerer, a *towenaar*. And regarded him with awe and fear. As Samson reached the crowd, a ripple of muttering erupted, he raised his hand in order to quieten them, and miraculously, the wind and the dust subsided into an inky silence.

'Sowaar! Hy't die fokken wind en stof laat gaan lê!'

Workmen in grey overalls that bore the municipal emblem entered the township early the next morning and began to construct a large notice-board outside the office. The fact that they had to use a ladder in order to affix a sign which read OFFICIAL NOTICES testified to the largeness of the structure.

Residents of the township milled around silently. News of the coming of the new Representatives had spread through the township. The heralder of death. Old Piet Kansani had been there forever, old and gnarled, warming himself in the sun and watching people come and go from the office. Only now he was gone, and a new, strange man had come to stay.

Samson was not seen for a few days, and the door to the office remained shut. But it was evident to the residents that he was extremely busy, for they saw certain prominent residents hurry to his office and stay with him for long periods of time. First there was Muriel Meraai the shebeen owner, fanning herself despite the bitter cold.

'He's an important man,' she whispered in a superior tone when at last she emerged from his office.

Then it was the turn of Reginald Baatjies.

When Reginald emerged, he too seemed inspired with a new urgency. He bustled through the small group of curious onlookers, brushing aside their questions with a peremptory wave of his hand.

And then both of them returned to Samson's office, accompanied by Samuel Cello, painter of signs, unemployed and in need of a drink. Samuel, before he entered Samson's office, already had his hat in his hand.

And so it was that on the fourth

day after his arrival, the thoughts of Paulus Samson first appeared on the OFFICIAL NOTICES board. Big, bright red letters on white cardboard which Samson affixed to the notice board with drawing pins.

SURVIVAL IS A DUTY. This was to become the theme of his administration, and the sign remained on the notice board throughout his stay – until the very end. Below this legend was pinned a thought for the day, which on the first day astounded his uncomprehending constituents: YOU ARE YOUR OWN SALVATION.

While this cryptic thought was being debated (first it had to be read out to the many illiterate) a series of announcements were pinned up, as fast as Samuel could paint them.

APPOINTED ASSISTANTS
MRS MURIEL MERAAI
MR REGINALD BAATJIES.

'What's he saying now?'

'He's the boss, Muriel and Reggie are amper-base.'

PENSIONS
WILL BE PAID OUT HERE.
BIRTHS
WILL BE RECORDED HERE.
DEATHS
CERTIFICATES TO BE ISSUED HERE.

Thomas Peet stroked his belly, the most sensitive part of his body, for it constantly growled with hunger and acidity. His flatulence was legendary and people said that no gathering would last unsullied if Thomas were present. Now in the midst of the sombre crowd reading Mr Samson's far-reaching decrees on their way of life and death, Thomas found himself fighting the emission of an intestinal storm gathering in his bowels. In vain, for even as he fought his way out of the crowd it exploded with the loudness of champagne being uncorked. The stench of his rotten belly scattered the crowd and evoked a cacophony of curses.

'Sies! You filthy dog.'

'Give him a death certificate, Mister, he's so rotten he must be dead!'

Glint of steel in the muddy eye, Samson's scowl, but more so, the murderous beauty of his smile silenced the laughter around him.

Thomas Peet shamefacedly hurried away, the unstoppable backfire of his decayed system receding behind him. He hurried into his house, where he lived with his daughter and a son-in-law whose detestation of Thomas was equal only to his laziness.

Thomas stood in the darkness of the kitchen, breathing heavily.

'What is it, Pa, what is it?' His daughter Jane, asked him.

'He's got his eye on me, I saw it today?'

'Who?'

'The devil.'

'Pa! You've been shitting in the street again!'

Thomas had recovered his breath and was seated by the stove. Through all these fugitive years he never met anyone whose eyes had pierced his hardened disguise.

Dark blaze of anger on a face of African shadows. Symbol of our heritage, beauty of our Xhosa grandfather. Round, plumpish but firm thighs and buttocks, made for the pleasure of African kings we hid in steel trunks under her bed. Keeper of a deadly secret in a land where, by the stamp of a document even mixed breeds become pure mixtures.

If ever it became known that Thomas Peet's father was a Xhosa, a 'Bantu' in official terms, he would be evicted from the township.

Thomas had recovered his breath and was seated by the stove. Through all these fugitive years he never met anyone whose eyes had pierced his hardened disguise. Through the years he had discarded his language, discarded his kin, discarded his passbook, acquired an Identity Card as a coloured.

Metamorphosis from one form of dispossession to another. But at least we could live and work here in the city, not starve in a wasteland where my bastard fairness of skin incurred the derision of other children. What did the high school learning help? To appear slow and backward – another disguise. Anonimity in ignorance. All I have is a decayed stomach, a disability pension that disables. And farts, loud ugly farts that discolour my word. I cannot run away from it.

'Sies, Pa! Get outside until you stop stinking.'

'He's still going to poep himself to death,' said Seth the son-in-law who, emerging from the only bedroom, screwed his face in disgust at the smell.

'But I hear our new representative's going to put a stop to all that. POEPING FORBIDDEN. PENALTY DEATH. Bang! Old kakgat Peet is dead.'

Malicious laughter crackled like the wet twigs in the fire.

Jane continued ironing at the table. Not the rustle of silk as befits her queenly heritage, but coarse cotton lovingly cared for and worn, repeatedly, to a soft and faded smoothness. Poverty grinds its own mills, as exceedingly fine.

'I hear he is going to take all the pension books away.'

'Why?'

'Collect it from the city. One big sum, then pay out the pensions here.'

'So what's wrong with that?'

'Ten rand will be kept for the community fund. Another ten rand for burial. Two rand for administration fees.'

'What the hell is a community fund?'

'To pay the rent for those who are out of work.'

'Hell, we've got to support someone else? He's mad.'

'He's going to do it.'

'How do you know, miss blerry Know-all?'

'Aunt Muriel told me.'

Silence. Crackling of the twigs in the stove. The old man shuffling outside.

'Go and get some coal, and tell the old man to come inside. It's getting cold.'

'Let kakgat stay out there a while longer. Smell of his last poep isn't even gone yet.'

'And the smell of his pension.'

'Jurre, don't start that kak story again, hoor.'

'Listen, 25 rand off his pension and we'll starve. So go and find a job.'

'Just like that. Somme net so. Hey, baas I'm starting work now O.K.? Dom woman, don't you know what a recession is?'

Seth grabbed the bucket, hoping to be outdoors before Jane could give her version of a recession.

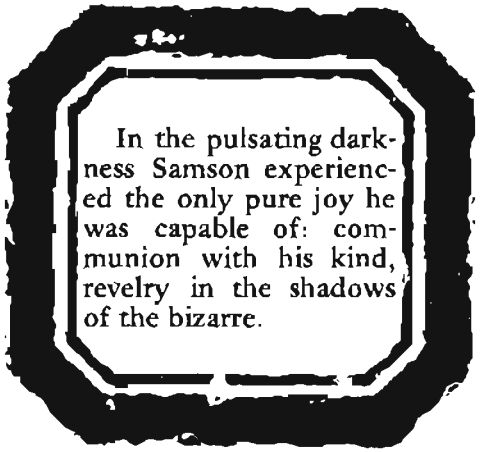
'Excuse for laziness. There was no work many times in our lives, but Pa always went out and found something.'

Knock on the door that echoed with uncharacteristic authority. Reginald Baatjies, his knuckles and his posture hardened by his newly acquired power, stood at the door, a buff envelope in his hand.

'Who is it?' Jane asked.

'The messenger from God himself,' Seth answered, 'God himself wants to see me tomorrow.'

The streets of the township were quiet. Dogs stirred in the shadows and growled as he passed, but his calm, measured footsteps reassured them. This was the quietude Samson enjoyed. Alone in a street of shadows, the bright moonlight bathing the darkened houses in dusty whiteness. They sleep in the confort of their hovels, huddled together like sheep. Warm and smelly refuge, the accidental stroking of a sister's sex. The



incestuous claustrophobia of poverty.

I was once like that. Urchin of the ghettoes. Priestly father looming above, overshadowing the light of the lamp. Wrath of God in his hand, the length of a leather strap that whined as it struck our backs. Believe in the Almighty. Alms for the beggarly poor, we had soup at the soup-kitchens, meals-on-wheels, rotting teeth in the mouth of a smiling nun. We thank you, Lord for what we are about to receive. Face of God iconed upon the wall above my bed, I saw it bleed with tears in the darkness. You are your own salvation.

Samson stopped at the door of Muriel Meraai, smoothed the edges of his moustache before knocking. Silence. Nothing but the sound of the wind and the stirring of dogs.

'Mrs Meraai, Mrs Meraai, it is I, Samson Paulus.' Samson called out softly.

The sound of bare feet making splashing noises on the stone floor. The door opened slowly and Muriel Meraai peered one-eyed out into the darkness.

'Mr Samson! Is something wrong?'

He stood gaping at the black hole where her eye had been earlier in the day.

'Oe jurre!' she gasped in horror, clutching at her empty socket.

Samson stopped her flight. Perfection of our blemishes. His hand gently caressed the empty socket while Muriel looked away with her good eye. Do not look away, there is nothing to be ashamed of. We are all imperfect. Whores of one sort or another.

In the pulsating darkness Samson experienced the only pure joy he was capable of: communion with his kind, revelry in the shadows of the bizarre, loins that reeked of an unspeakable hunger, savage because it had been so prolonged.

But Samson's gentleness surprised Muriel, and she urged him to thrust again and again his thin, wiry body into her. Only the restlessness of children sleeping in the adjoining room, and the smell of soot that began to penetrate his senses, brought them to a gasping, shuddering stillness.

He lay still in the icy darkness, watching Muriel's breath form frozen plumes in the air. He rose on elbows and asked her to light a candle. Phosphorous and the stench of scorching tallow. Horror of my childhood. He took the glass eye from the bedside table and curtly told the perplexed woman to insert it into the socket. The gentleness had evaporated, Samson had once more slid into his shell of brittle hardness.

He dressed without hurry, as if preparing for work and not leaving the bed of a strange woman in the dead of night.

'Tell me, what happened to your eye?'

In the flickering darkness he saw her blush.

'It was self-defence. My husband. He was a drunken brute. He tried to kill me, I managed to wrest the knife from him. Self-defence, the judge said. But it was too late to save my eye.'

He listened to her hoarse voice. Story of my kind. Self-defence, the judge said. Or murder with mitigating circumstances, your blackness mitigates. Who are they to judge us and confer forgiveness? An eye for an eye, and we are doomed to wreak this vengeance upon ourselves. That is the incest of poverty.

P. J. Petersen — Poetry

johnny wasse greek

johnny wasse greek gewies
yt'ie atiene se district six
halloep hy met innocent bankies
wat wit wys en dun soes plankies
while sy piepie voo' oo' ninety
ergerer as'ie skoppelmaai swaai

voor'ie brothel het hy gespiel
albasters geskiet en laat rol
tot onne die djentoes se poephol
wie met kaal gatte saam
onbeskof maak tot diep in'ie aand

'n blaa' val hie' in sy sak
baas in sy cafe international
skiet'ie gel op'ie counter
met'ie riel by o's wat'ie count'ie
djentoes van'ie oepe market
hoo' die baas:
ek thal'ie poliethe
va' thaai goods and go hootnoots

has beens

hel dis funny
die silver oldies
in'ie golden old days
was haaitie taaities
maa' is klaa

hulle was voo'straat
schoolstraat kêkgronne
en esselenpark se high bugs
wat op hulle way baklei
om vi' o's 'n plek to kry
en vi' hulle 'n blerrie naam
dit was'ie ou dae se play

mr. die en mrs. daai
fighters virre open society
het mette variety
strongpoints die gormint geloep
maa' op'ie stoep hulle stoep
van'ie voo'straat schoolstraat en'ie esselenpark
was'ie hawker servant
milky en postman
inne anne way mie gepraat

op'ie stoep
was'ie fight condemn
van'ie brêkspul
ou dae se strongmen

die kaap is cool

disse coolspul
in'ie kaap
ampe' soes agter labarang
wannee' net'ie krummels
in'ie boem lê
en'ie pôdjie sêd lyk
soes kinnes met spielgoet
agter'ie krismis sêd
oor'ie karrendjies watte mee' raas
of'ie groot pop wat'ie mee' skrie:
'fanie en melanie ontdek die piepie'

p.c. proposals 'n sêd biesageit
vi' o's ytgepoep
en dit bly sikke tyd
om mette djis-dja
o's te dummy met'ie old
o story va' colour affairs
onner'ie south african flag

nei die public is cool
en wat ka' o's sê: druk deu'
eid mubarak en
blessings for the struggle
en soe aan
dis al

PHUMAPHI

by Floss Jay

Illustrations by Caroline Cullinan

Phumaphi. Your name. Translated from the Zulu, that means 'where did you come from?'

You were there on the farm, a few years older than me, growing. The paths across the hilltops, the muddy way to the calves' pens, the stepping stones across the stream: both of us held those places with the soles of our feet.

Grass traps across the footpaths often tripped me and sent me sprawling in the summer dust – perhaps you made them. You crouched there on the path, yellow sun beating down on your head and the nape of your neck, while your fingers drew grass from each side of the path and knotted it together. The trap prepared, you left it there, to trip the likes of me. Much as I would gaze about me for evidence of an audience as I rose angrily and dusted myself off, I never saw or heard any.

You were the boy on the wagon that day:

'Let's go down with the wagon!' My sisters, shouting, racing up the lawn towards me from the orchard.

Work over on the top of the hill, the wagon headed for the sheds near my grandmother's house, a half mile or so away.

We ran past the loquat tree to the side gate and clung to it until the tractor drew level with us. As soon as he saw us, the driver stopped.

I would stare angrily at my sisters, neatly seated and impatient to be moving before I reached the wagon. But strong hands helped haul me on. I would accept them, but be too ashamed to acknowledge the help.

The chugging of the Ferguson engine jerked the wagon into motion and I felt the pressure of the separate planks of wood against my buttocks as I bounced up and down.

At first, the men and boys cut their loud conversation and singing because of our presence. Then we would shyly greet each other. The grown men would run their wide gazes over each of us, would speak compliments. 'Thandi,' I would hear, and lower my head to hide my ill-suppressed joy. The name – mine – theirs for me – would roll luxuriously from one pink tongue to the next and I could feel the flash of white teeth as the men smiled.

But this day my name was not all they spoke. My head was slowly arching upwards into the warmth of approval, when one more comment roared through my hearing, orchestrated by the uneven grind of the tractor engine. 'Her breasts are grown to womanhood,' one man said. I felt all eyes resting on my scarcely formed, white-fleshed breasts with their nipples, suddenly so large, so pointed and so pink. I felt them grow as I sat there.

I wore usual child's summer wear: white cotton bloomers. Suddenly I felt naked. With each bump, my new-found breasts bounced. I was trapped in the movement and the shame and confusion but knew that I could not keep my head bent.

No help from sisters who were trailing their hands in the long grass, oblivious to my moment. I had to meet eyes somewhere. I raised my head and met your gaze. You sat at the far end of the wagon. I rested in the brightness of your smile; nestled in the warmth of your acceptance of my uncertainty. My eyes, and then my mouth, began to smile and your gaze supported my pleasure.

The men were watching closely – close as they always were to minute, momentous detail. Then they roared with laughter at the awakening they had caused: roared in celebration. My sisters didn't notice the event. Neither did they see me. But you were there. You saw.

Then boarding school. My feet crammed into black lace-up shoes, my body into layers of clothing: hot black bloomers, square-necked shirts, deathly black tunics. The whole, bound at the waist by a rough, knotted girdle. And pinnies worn over all of these after lessons.

Where were you then? I envied you through those early years of my separation from the soil. You remained attached, rooted. While your knowledge of English increased, my ability to think and laugh and speak in your tongue was slowly dissipated by distance and the city.

The farm became a kind of holiday place: not my home. There were monthly free Sundays there as well as the odd weekend. There was the Sunday I came home, very grand, and fourteen years old. I stood in the kitchen catching the aromas of a roasting dinner, greeting the kitchen maids from a dizzy, adolescent height. Your face was there, outside the open kitchen window.

You were watching me. I blushed, but recovered; managed a smile. I rasied my hand and murmured, *'Sawubona, umfaan'*. Didn't I know your name?

My mother came into the room in search of me. 'That boy's working in the garden now. Fat lot of use he is! Can't follow instructions – not even to cut the hedge. And slow . . . !' And then to you: *'Hamba! Sebenza!* – you know what your work is. And *'mina aithanda wena'* standing round kitchen windows staring in, preventing the girls from getting on with their work.'

You ducked as though a log had been thrown at your head, looked up through half-closed eyes, kept your head down, and slid silently out of sight. The muscles below my ears tensed. My toes gripped the linoleum and a hard knot heavy like a stone, swelled in the lower part of my chest. I was preparing myself to hear the sound of my mother's long hatred of the farm.

'Native boys – honestly. No sense of decency. It's bad enough having girls around one's kitchen and under one's feet all day – but black faces peering in at the window unannounced and for no reason . . . ! I don't feel comfortable having my snooze in the afternoons since he came.'

I wondered what you had needed at the kitchen. A cup of water? Some information from my mother? Were the hedge clippers blunt?

And I wondered what was so secret, so private, in the kitchen. And surely, I thought, Phumaphi would never dare – never bother – to peer at my mother's large form as she slumbered heavily during the hot afternoons. I wondered wildly whether she had taken to naked napping.

Later, I walked down to the wendy-house which had been built to accommodate changing for the family swimming rituals. I put on my floral, stretch fabric costume, lifted a towel from one of the hooks, and headed towards the steps that led down to the pool. You were there. Across from where I stood, on a ladder, clipping the hedge. I saw your feet first.

Naked, as mine were, but yours so very dark on top, and pale below. Thick soles cracked, and the yellow of them spreading a little up the side of the foot. The sole of your foot was the foot's own shoe. And your legs – you had grown immensely tall. One leg, straight and taut, carrying your weight, on a lower rung; the other relaxed, bent at the knee, resting lightly on the ball of the foot, one rung higher.

My eyes passed rapidly up, afraid to dwell too long on you body and determined to reach your face which I may be able to meet with words that would undo my earlier clumsy greeting.

There were no words. I asked instead, foolishly: 'Do you still go to school?'

'No,' you replied. 'I work here, in your father's garden.'

Couldn't I see that? Fool. What an insult. What a swish thing to say to a farm boy.

'I'm going to swim,' I said. A knot blocked my throat as I sank away from my foolish words.

You worked. Moved the ladder along a few feet.

Clack. Fwoosh. Clack. Fwoosh. Clack. Fwoosh – as you clipped and threw down unruly stalks of the hedge.

I spread my bright towel and lay down at the bottom of the steps. I hid my face in my arms and pretended to sleep in the sun. But I watched.

I drank the brown plains, the tautness and perfection of your chest. When you turned your back to me, I could see most of one of your buttocks – the khaki shorts were tattered and you wore no underpants. There you were, dark and still and framed by the sun which hung behind the orchard, burning and bright. I watched intensely, anxious not to lose a moment.

'Boy! *UmFAAN!* GET DOWN from there. *Hamba!* Can't you SEE the *nkosazaan* is swimming now.' (To me:) 'What did I tell you? Hamba! Go and do your hedge-cutting somewhere else.' The words cracked into me from my mother's bedroom door.

'But I came here after he did, Mum,' I said, rousing myself, feeling suddenly naked, missing the point in my retort, for the point didn't bear speaking of.

'That doesn't matter. He should know better. Honestly! They're all the same.'

I couldn't swim after that. The knot in my throat dissolved into the pressure of welling tears. Swimming seemed an indecent activity, and I couldn't see then how the warp had occurred. You left with your ladder and clippers. I wrapped myself in my towel, muttered to my mother that the sun was too hot, and went to my room.

Were you watching from somewhere when we packed up after tea, ready for the car journey back to school? I do know that much as I gazed about me for evidence of you, there was none.

Beach holiday: sand grains between our toes, sand in the secret reaches of our bodies, sand gritty on our scalps, sand trailed into the cottage, sand in a narrow drift down the bath centre, sand under our nails; sometimes, mysteriously, sand between the sheets as we slid in to sleep at night.

Rich and golden.

The trip home, and we carried satisfaction. Cooled by the sea and the breezes, warmed and browned by the sun.

'There's a good chance that boy won't be there when we get back. He's done nothing to prove himself reliable.' My mother.

'Oh, I think he'll be there all right. He hasn't let you down yet.' My father.

'Well, if he is there I'll bet it's for the first time in the three weeks.'

Silence.

'We'll soon see if he's been shirking. Three weeks doing nothing – those boys on the farm have it too easy. I bet he's had a jolly good snoop around the house. God, if he's been in our bedroom I don't know what I'll do . . . .'

Silence again. And then my sisters began to squabble.

What could you do in their bedroom, I wondered, that could so excite and repulse her. I idly imagined what it could be: your black buttocks on the white lavatory seat in her 'en suite' bathroom perhaps? Your great, strong, flat, yellow-soled feet sliding between her sheets? What could it be? Look at your face in her mirror, touch her beads, finger her lipsticks?

I gave up and lolled back on the car seat; gazed sleepily out of the window, until I slept. And I slept until I sensed the familiar bumps beneath the car wheels that meant the turn in our drive.

We stopped.

As I sat up my mother leaned over and hooted, loud and long, her hand so eager and so urgent that she knocked the ignition keys out of my father's hand. She waited only seconds before she glared at my father and said, 'There. What did I say. No sign of him.'

'He could be at the bottom of the orchard. Anywhere.' My father, pacifying her.

She hooted again.

No response.

Again.

And this time, your voice, distant. My father began to get out. We opened the back doors.

'Well, why doesn't he come?'

'You heard him. He's on his way.' My father. Short with her.

She stood up suddenly and walked swiftly down the drive and across the lawn in the direction from which your voice had come. She stopped mid-lawn and stared ahead of her. The tension in her body compelled us to look at her.

Then she wheeled. 'The swine – the bloody little swine – you'll beat him for this – how dare he do this to me – the dirt – of all things! Go: get him.' Her face was cracked with terrible, deep lines, her eyes burning red and wet.

My father said: 'What's happened?'

I thought you must have crapped on the lawn.

Then you walked up to the car from behind the house and stood there, near the boot, ready to help with the suitcases. I turned to you.

Had you heard my mother? You stood so quietly.

'There he is. What are you going to do with him?' She engaged the perturbed eyes of my father.

I looked at you, and I was pleased with the way the sun caught and lighed the drops of cool water on your hair. It had been so hot in the car. I thought I'd like a dip in the pool to cool me as soon as this was over.

'I can't do anything unless I know what the trouble is.'

'He's been in the pool. Swimming. In our pool. It's got ripples in it. He thought we wouldn't see – but I did. My whole holiday is ruined. I knew it would be.' She had lost the fine point around which her delicate sanity revolved.

I looked down at my shaking hands, struggled to breathe. I was crushed and afraid.

I looked up. The drops of cool water still shone in your hair.

I had an impulse to touch your bare brown shoulder as you turned to go, no clue for me on your face. Only silence. I wanted to smooth the glistening water over your curls, and lift the cooled palm of your hand to the heat of my cheek. But I did not.

That day the pool was emptied. The following week it was repainted. We didn't swim at all until the next summer.

You left the farm. Went to the city. I last saw you the time my sister fell from her horse. I scrambled off mine as I saw her begin to fall. I needed help.

You must have returned to the farm to visit your family. You were seventeen, maybe eighteen. There you were, walking along the path. You broke into a run when you saw us. She was unconscious and you lifted her. I helped you, my heart thumping with exertion and anxiety. We worked together, carrying her all the way to the garden gate.

As we laid her carefully on the grass I stumbled and you held on to me until I was steady. I heard your deep voice as I hurried in to fetch my mother: *'Nkosazaan!'* In my panic, I did not turn.

I thought you would be there when I came back. But you were gone.

'Which boy was it that helped you carry her? We should thank him,' my mother said later.

'I think he was a stranger visiting,' I said.

Floss Jay — Poetry

FIRST NIGHT FESTIVAL: GABORONE, BOTSWANA, 1982

Where the shadows do not fall
between reflected throngs
are nests of soft earth
in the night.

The sky
is white
above the tree-high dark,
lifted by sharp still stars
from the sand
which puffs up
at footfall.

I contemplate
an act of love
suspended somewhere quiet
between the closed dark border
of home
and this finegrained moonspattered territory.

I anticipate
warm converse
with the liquids of a strange body.

Old fantasies
– fecund thoughts of liberty –
could root
here
beneath the quiet sky.

Floss Jay

INITIATION

by Ahmed Essop

Illustrated by Mzwakhe

One evening I decided to go to the Planet Cinema. I stepped out of the door of the boarding house onto a paved terrace and then went down the steps to the street. When I reached the last step I saw him. He was sitting on the side of the step beside an ornamental palm growing in a large pot. He seemed about six years old.

'What are you doing here, boy?' I asked, bending over and placing my hand on his head.

'I am waiting for my big brother.'

'Where is he?'

'He went to the shops.'

'When did he go?'

He did not answer.

'Before it got dark?'

'Yes.'

I was puzzled. He had been waiting for nearly two hours. Had the boy's brother fallen into a state of amnesia? Or had he joined some revellers in a backyard and forgotten him? Or had he been arrested on suspicion of theft? Or for not having his pass? For being unemployed? For trespassing?

'Are you hungry?' I asked him.

'Yes.'

'Come.'

Holding his hand I led him up the steps. In the dining-room I looked at him closely. In appearance he was delicate, but well-dressed. He had an intelligent sensitive face, and he was not afraid. He said that his name was David. He sat down at the table while my landlady gave him some food. He ate with relish.

'I will wait outside in case his brother turns up,' I said.

I sat where he had sat, thinking of his courage and musing what I would have done if I had been him. Perhaps cried hysterically, or run through the streets screaming for my brother.

After a while I went back into the house. David had finished eating.

'He knows his house number in Orlando,' my landlady said. She told me the number and I wrote it down on a piece of paper.

The next thing to do was to take him home. But I had no car and even if I had one I would not have found my way in the lampless streets of Orlando.

'Perhaps he is lost,' my landlady suggested, 'and his brother may have informed the police.'

'Of course, I should take him to the police station,' I said. 'They will take him home.'

I took David's hand and we left the house. We went through several streets and after crossing a busy street intersection of noisy cars and gay people in evening wear on their way to the cinemas, we reached a quiet street flanked by trees. Soon we reached the police station and entered the charge office.

It was a large room. There were five policemen who seemed to be involved in enacting a scene of ritual violence. One of them was holding a gun in his left hand and a hippo hide whip in his right hand. He was half crouching and trying to flick the whip at another policeman who was being protected by the others who stood before him. They were all grinning and laughing in a gurgling sort of way. They took no notice of us.

After a while I began to feel a sense of unreality taking hold of me. Did they not see me (if not David whose head just reached the counter)? Their indifference to my presence began to take on a sinister quality: their continued self-contained involvement in their play threatened to annihilate my existential being. I had to do something to assert my reality.

I opened the counter flap and entered. I went towards the policeman holding the gun and whip and touched him on his shoulder.

'There is a boy here,' I said. 'He needs help.'

'Yes,' he said, placing his gun in the holster and coming with me outside the counter to look at David. The other policemen came to the counter and with folded arms looked at us. I told David's story and asked: 'Has anyone come looking for him here?'

'No.'

'This is his address,' I said, giving him the paper on which I had written it.

'Good,' he said. 'But there is no one going to Orlando now. I will send him tomorrow morning.

'His brother . . . ? His parents . . . ?'

'I will lock him up tonight and send him tomorrow. Come.'

'No . . . ' I protested.

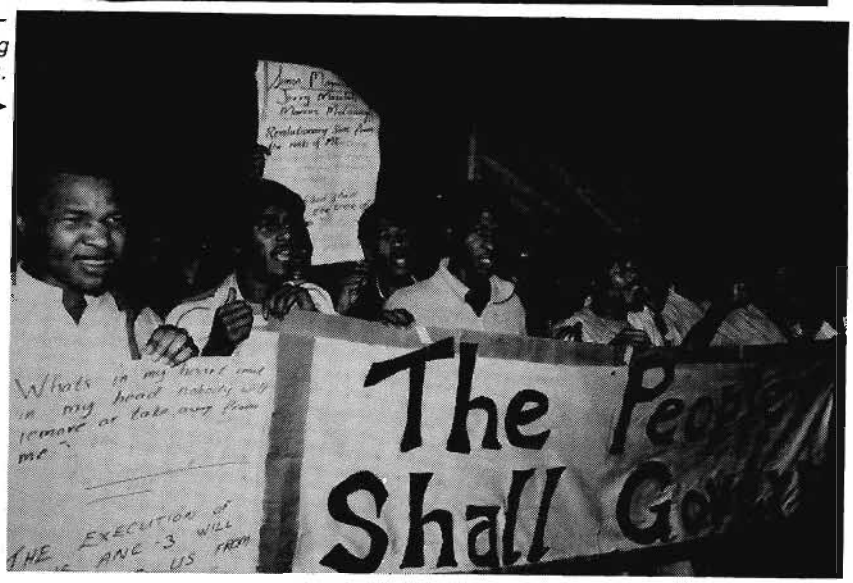
He gave David a push on his back and walked ahead of him towards a corridor. David followed hurriedly as though drawn by a leash.

He did not turn to look at me.

Photo Diary

Omar Badsha

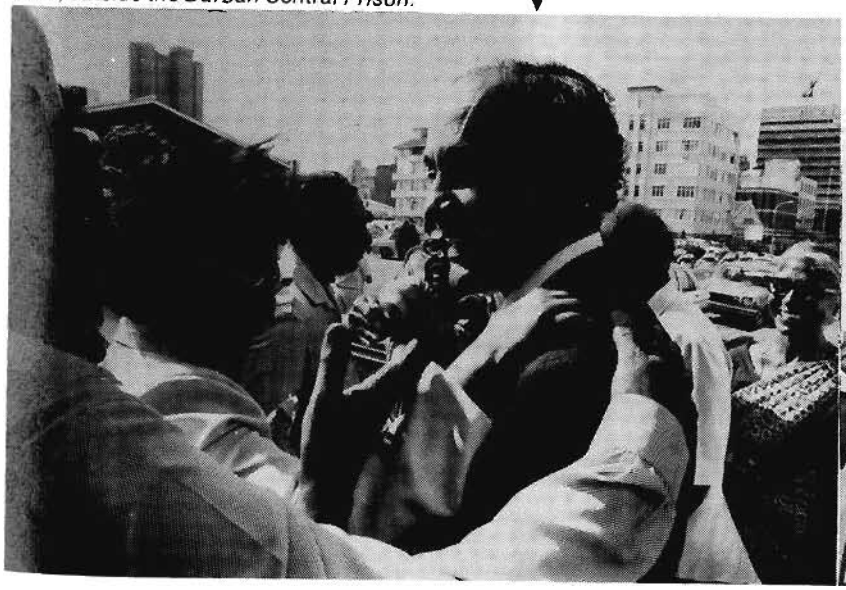
A march through the city centre — after an all-night vigil of the hanging of three ANC members — 1983.



A commemoration meeting at Merebank Township for Krish Rabilal, a member of the ANC killed in the Maputo raid

AT the funeral of Msizi Dube — a community leader assassinated in Lamontville — 1983.

THE release of Billy Nair after 20 years of imprisonment on Robben Island — February 27, 1984, outside the Durban Central Prison.



UDF Rally in Pietermaritzburg — 1983

Review

In an essay specially written for this issue of *Staffrider* Njabulo S Ndebele, author of *Fools and Other Stories*, Ravan Press, R6.95, reviews the work of Yashar Kemal, the Turkish storyteller.

Turkish Tales, and Some Thoughts on S.A. Fiction

Review by Njabulo S Ndebele

Yashar Kemal, *Anatolian Tales*, (London: Writers and Readers, 1983)

As I was preparing this review of Yashar Kemal's *Anatolian Tales*, I realised that I was going to have to go beyond the conventional review. The subject matter of Kemal's stories and the forcefulness of his storytelling, left me thinking long and hard about his art. It dawned on me that I had before me, a collection of compelling artistic statements which, at the same time, presented themselves, with an intriguing sense of inevitability, as fruitful occasions for a serious examination of key social issues affecting some rural and semi-rural communities in one 'Third World' country, Turkey. There seemed to be something disturbingly familiar about these stories; something the echoes of which edged the focus of my mind towards the South African literary situation, where it seemed there was something missing. Was there, in contemporary South African fiction, a tradition of such compelling an imaginative recreation of rural life as in Kemal's stories? I could not come up with ready examples. On the other hand, instead of showing any serious interest in rural life, our writers seemed decidedly preoccupied with urban culture. Granted that such preoccupation may be justified and valid, what, nevertheless, was the state of the resulting urban fiction itself as art? Before I address myself to the questions posed, let me describe what triggered them off in the first place.

I

Kemal's *Anatolian Tales* is a collection of stories in which we are treated to a detailed, imaginative recreation of rural life in the Anatolian plains of Turkey. It consists of four fairly long, and three very short, stories. I will summarise the long stories first.

'A Dirty Story', which opens the collection, is the story of Hollow Osman, a somewhat mentally retarded peasant who has been living with and working for Huru, a woman who has brought him up since he was a child. Osman's friends succeed in convincing him to persuade Huru to buy him a wife. After all, hasn't Osman been 'slaving' for Huru all these years, and 'living alone and sleeping in barns like a dog?' But it is not long after Osman has had a wife purchased for him that a rich landowner's son seduces her. Soon, the young men of the village are 'lining up at her door all through the night'. Osman is powerless to deal with the humiliation. Things come to a head when even vital economic activity, such as ploughing, stops, threatening the village with virtual starvation. The young men return from Osman's house in the morning to sleep, too tired to do any work. The village faces a crisis. In a plot involving the Agha (landlord) and some other people, Osman's wife is driven out of the village. But the young men pursue her to her place of refuge, where they continue to ravish her mercilessly. In the end, Osman picks her up, all but lifeless , and runs away with her.

'Drumming Out' is about Fikret Irmakli Bey, a young man recently graduated from the university, and whose first appointment is as District Commissioner in Anatolia. Learning of his appointment, all the rich farmers of the district prepare to give the new Commissioner a glorious welcome, and they provide him with the best accommodation available. The aim is to lull the young, inexperienced Commissioner into a stupor of comfort and complacency, so that he could easily issue permits for rice planting against the Rice Commission's regulations which are meant to protect public health. Bey falls into the trap, and planting permits are issued liberally. Matters come to a head when powerless villagers are flooded out of their houses. As a result, a conscience stricken deputy Commissioner, who has been working in the district for a long time, brings the attention of the new Commissioner to the regulations. The Commissioner, to his horror, realises too late that he has been fooled. From that moment, he begins his fight against the Aghas, and goes out of his way to protect and defend the interests of the peasants. The rest of the story is about the determined efforts of the Aghas to get rid of the Commissioner, who is no longer their 'friend'. They succeed. The final ejection ceremony is the 'drumming-out' by an 'army of small boys, each one holding a tin can and drumming on it with all his might'. 'It's a send off,' it is explained to the departing Commissioner. 'The Aghas always do that for Government officials forced to go like you . . . . ' Thus, the Commissioner

leaves, but he has won the gratitude of the peasants.

In 'The Baby', Kemal tells the story of Ismail, whose wife has just died, leaving her husband with a newly born baby. Ismail's problem is how to bring the child up in so desolate a place as his village. He also has to deal with unfounded recriminations that he contributed directly to the death of his wife. Ismail goes around trying to get the help of breast-feeding women. But only one person is willing to help: a blind woman who 'sees' more clearly than others. But her help is of no avail. There is no relief from hunger and suffering. The rest of the story is a piling up of details of Ismail's suffering.

In 'The Shopkeeper', the last of the long stories, Mehmet is a village storekeeper whose store is also some kind of village social centre. Men gather there for a chat. But always there with them is Queer Sully, a boy who always sits, absolutely silent, a few paces away from the men. Part of Mehmet's business is to obtain grain clandestinely from village women who, without the knowledge of their husbands, want to buy a few luxury items from the store. This way, Mehmet accumulates a lot of grain which will seemingly bring in a lot of money when household stocks run out. An unscrupulous businessman, Mehmet deals under-handedly with his competitors. He also arranges abductions of village girls for men in the cities. But Mehmet has to reckon with Queer Sully who has a quiet disdain for injustice. He has a history of dealing firmly with local wrong-doers; such as setting their fields on fire. Mehmet tries to ward off possible retribution by attempting to bribe Queer Sully with the bounty of the store. At the end of the story, Sully almost clears the store of goods, and then spits at Mehmet in the face, for Mehmet had just arranged for the beating up of a competitor.

Kemal . . . emerges as a writer who is rooted firmly in the timeless tradition of storytelling.

The next three stories are the short ones. 'White Trousers' is the story of a young apprentice who dreams of owning a pair of white trousers. He lives with his widowed mother and already shoulders the heavy responsiblity of helping her in the hard task of surviving. The boy's resolve to prove himself as a worthy and deserving worker is severely tested when he is hired out to work continuously for three days at a kiln. He barely passes the test, and a fine relationship develops between him and his employer. In the manner of a rites of passage story, the boy is well on the way to being an economic asset to himself and his mother.

'On the Road' is the story of a man who returns home from the market where he has just sold six sacks of farm produce. He is riding home on his donkey cart, and is counting his money, when he comes across a woman walking alone in the scorching sun, along the empty country road. He offers her a ride. It turns out that she is returning home after a divorce. Two lonely people meet on a lonely road. Fate brings them together for a lifelong companionship.

In 'Green Onions', Mahmud is returning home to his village after being away to make money in the cities for five years, so that he could set himself up in livestock farming. His return home by train is also his second train ride. In the compartment, he finds a young man with a sleeping, sickly woman resting her head on the young man's shoulder. She has a 'wasting disease which, according to one doctor, can be cured by the breathing of fresh air full of the smell of pine trees'. The smell of fresh onions in the compartment so reminds Mahmud of his own village that he buys fresh green onions at the next station. The green onions become a symbol of all that is wonderful in the world. Once he learns of the young woman's problem, Mahmud wants to share with the engaged couple the healing powers of the pines of his village, and its health-giving springs. There, they will find life, and the girl will be cured, and they will be married. Mahmud invites the couple to come and live with him, and will take care of them with the money he has just made, and shower them with the hospitality of his village. As the story ends, Mahmud, the train moving, and the couple having got off at their village station, is yelling at them from the window of the moving train, the name of his village for in his excitement, he had forgotten to give it to them.

II

A remarkable feature of Kemal as a writer in this collection, something I found refreshing, is that he emerges as a writer who is rooted firmly in the timeless tradition of storytelling. A chief characteristic of this tradition is that a story is allowed to unfold by itself with a minimum of authorial intervention through which a storyteller might directly suggest how readers or listeners should understand his story. Two key effects result from the lack of such intervention. Firstly, the entertainment value of the story is enhanced, and the emotional involvement of the reader is thus assured. Secondly, such involvement does not necessarily lead to a lulling of the reader's critical consciousness, as Brecht, the German poet and dramatist, would assert. On the contrary, the reader's emotional involvement in a well told story triggers off an imaginative participation in which the reader recreates the story in his own mind, and is thus led to draw conclusions about the meaning of the story from the engaging logic of events as they are *acted out* in the story.

Also, there is an impersonal ring to Kemal's stories, one which approximates the impersonal, communal quality of a traditional tale of unknown origins passed from mouth to mouth.[1] This quality in Kemal's stories surely blends well with the Anatolian setting in which the oral tradition must still be alive. In both 'A Dirty Story' and 'The Shopkeeper', people often come together to exchange stories, even if some of the stories are gossip. For Kemal then, an observation by Walter Benjamin is most appropriate. Benjamin comments that 'experience which is passed from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. And among those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers.'[2] Kemal, of course, does not appear, in these stories, to have written down known tales in the same way as A C Jordan did in his *Tales From Southern Africa*. But there is some evidence that Kemal is writing within a popular tradition he is doubtlessly conscious of. Andrew Mango observes that:

> Turkish 'socialist realist' theatrical writing of today, with its stock types of wicked landowners, down-trodden peasants and progressive intellectuals, derives . . . from a local tradition of popular pantomimes (called tulûat theatre) . . . . Turkey's most successful novel of recent years, Yashar Kemal's *Ince Mehmet* (translated as *Mehmet, My Hawk)* is, for all its progressive message, a *destan*, a tale of stirring deeds by a local hero *as told by generations of bazaar story-tellers*. [My emphasis].[3]

Kemal's art then, is rooted in the history of storytelling in Anatolia. Perhaps his remarkable achievement can, to a very large extent, be attributed to this fact. I would now like to highlight some features of Kemal's art in *Anatolian Tales*.

A distinctive feature of Kemal's art is the apparent ease with which he opens his stories. The opening to 'A Dirty Story' for example, is instructive in this regard:

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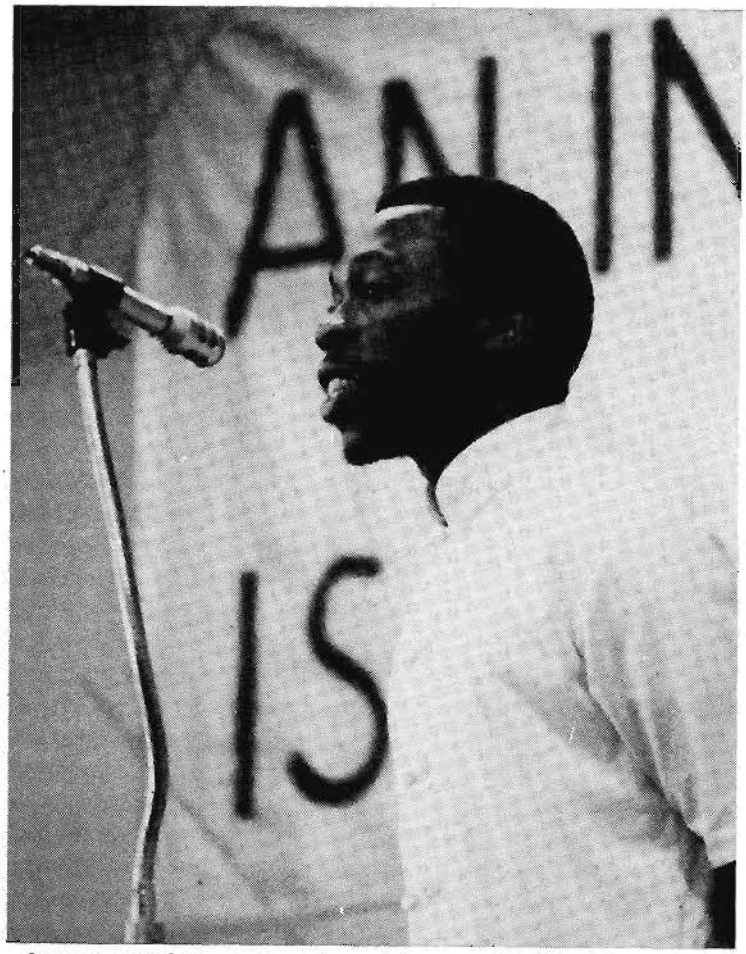
Forward with the Workers' Struggle

by Lawrence Mshengu

Photo, by Cedric Nunn



Lawrence Mshengu addressing workers at a CCAWUSA meeting.

Lawrence Mshengu is a shop-steward at an OK Bazaars store. He was elected to the Branch Executive Committee of CCAWUSA Natal in 1983.

translated from the Zulu by Nyana Molete.

In 1977 I was employed by OK Bazaars. From the beginning I had many hardships. The hardships I had were not because I could not do my work but because of the way we were treated by employers, indunas and impimpis.

Indunas are workers but they do not go along with the workers' struggle. They are individualists who tend to side very much with the employers. Their friendship with employers results in the oppression of workers. There is no induna that refuses to take instructions from the bosses. They do not oppose orders given by the bosses that are meant to oppress workers. Therefore they cannot help in solving some of the workers' problems. Some of these problems are:

(i) The time to start work is fixed but the bosses choose to make the knocking off time flexible.
(ii) Bosses don't care whether a worker has eaten or not.
(iii) Shouting at workers in front of customers,
(iv) Dismissal of workers
(v) Low wages.
(vi) Bosses divide workers so workers do not trust one another.
(vii) They like employing new staff all the time in order to create hostility among workers.

Liaison Committees fail

The employers worked hard at establishing committees which would handle our problems. These committees though, did not help us at all. The hardships we had remained the same.

Visitor from a union

During about mid 1978, a trade union organiser visited us. He told us all about this workers' movement. We told him about all the hardships we were facing at work. Twenty three workers joined. These were all the workers at our branch. After joining we realised that although we had done ourselves a lot of good, we did not have enough knowledge about the workers' struggle. What kept us ignorant about the workers' struggle was that we did not attend meetings, especially meetings called seminars. In these meetings workers share ideas and advise one another as to how to solve problems. We were aware that there was a union office where our problems could be solved.

One of our fellow workers was a lot of help to us. He was the only one who started attending meetings. He would report back to us after these meetings. This man was a great friend of mine. He did not get tired of explaining to me how important it was for us to attend meetings.

Workers at meetings

I missed four meetings but did attend the fifth one. This is how it happened: I attended the meeting in order to please my friend who kept on encouraging me to come to meetings. I agreed to go to the meeting and that was when I realised how little I knew. I observed that workers came from many different companies. I noticed that workers formed unity everywhere.

The workers in this meeting were not satisfied. Their main theme was 'workers unite'. I cannot write down all the things they wanted to improve. But I will note a few:

a) Low wages.
b) Bad treatment of workers.
c) Unfair dismissals.
d) The fact that starting time was fixed but that knock-off time was left to the decision of the bosses.
e) Maternity leave – women were not given time off when they had to go and have babies.
f) Workers were not compensated when injured at work.
g) Workers' grievances were not attended to properly.
h) Working overtime without compensation. This is how this overtime system works: When you start work at 8.00 am and knock off at 5.00 pm that is seen as normal time. But when you begin work at 8.00 am and knock off at 7.00 pm you are compensated by getting time off. You stay home for the time equivalent to the extra time you worked, whereas you should get time off equal to one and a third times the overtime which you worked. I feel very bad that I cannot relate everything that took place at that meeting. At the end of the meeting I committed myself to being one of those who will push forward the workers' struggle.

Back at work

I met other workers at the shop who asked me what I learned at the meeting. I told them I did not know where to start and where to finish. I spent three days thinking about how to tell them about the meeting. My intention was to motivate them, to tell them about their rights which they did not know of, rights which I too was ignorant of before I attended the meeting.

We workers did not receive a proper education. This is why we have problems with everything we want to do. But unity is the only weapon we can use to win our struggle. I also had a big problem when writing this article about workers. I had to find a friend who would write it for me as I dictated.

We arrange a meeting

Two of us resolved to arrange a meeting of workers at our shop. We wanted to have the meeting after work away from work. We thought of making a plan to encourage workers to attend the meeting. We did not come up with a good plan so we decided to encourage those who were nearest to us so they could encourage others.

Not many workers pitched up at this meeting. But we formed a core group which consisted of very keen workers. Just over three months, OK-Montclair workers were slowly becoming interested in the workers' struggle. We must not forget that at that stage there were no agreements reached between the company and the union. I will explain later what I mean about agreements.

Other difficulties

My friend and I were eager to secure workers' rights. By this time my manager started showing great hostility towards us. He threatened to transfer me back to Pietermaritzburg where I had worked before I was transferred to Durban.

What gave us courage was that other workers showed solidarity with us. They said that if we got fired they would leave with us. The workers could see that what we were telling them was the truth and that the manager was behaving the way he was because he was trying to stop us from opening the workers' eyes.

One day a fellow worker Zanele Zondo, was fired. Zanele was working at the tills. The person in charge in that department said Zanele's work did not satisfy her. That day we downed tools. When we asked what was dissatisfying about Zenele's work we could not milk a satisfactory answer out of the bosses. We resolved that we would not go back to work. At the beginning the employer threatened us by telling us that if we did not go back to work within ten minutes he would take further steps. The workers responded by singing a workers' song:

Hlanganani Basebenzi, Hlanganani Basebenzi
Sithi Ikhona Lenhlangano Ya Basebenzi!
Ikhona Lenhlangano Ka Ccawusa!

They sang beautifully in low voices, and there was order. After ten minutes the boss came back and asked if we still refused to go back. No-one answered him, instead people continued singing workers' songs. This time the boss said he would give us only five minutes to go back to work. After five minutes he came back and threatened to call the police.

We argued and asked him why he wanted to call the cops when all we wanted was satisfactory answers. We also asked why he did not have time to discuss with us. After a while the district manager arrived. Three CCAWUSA officials also arrived at the shop. The manager refused the officials permission to see the workers on their own. The officials

met with the district manager and finally agreed that Zanele would be reinstated but transferred to another branch of the company. These agreements were all made without our consent or consultation.

That strike helped a lot because afterwards workers showed a lot of enthusiasm in pushing forward the workers' struggle. We have since then been through a lot of battles and won most of them easily.

Another one of these battles occurred when a certain department manager searched one of the workers in a humiliating way. We spoke to the district manager about this. He assured us that such a thing would not happen again and the department manager was warned never to repeat this action. Soon we became known and gained a lot of respect. Impimpis lost their importance because of the anger of the workers.

One day the boss called a general meeting. At this meeting he spoke with his spirit low. He was showing signs of defeat. He pleaded with impimpis not to give him reports anymore because they told him things but wanted to be anonymous. He sternly warned them not to continue telling him things. As he spoke one worker kept shouting *'Amandla, Awethu!'*

Unity is very important, hence our slogan: UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL. Workers are a very important force in our society but many workers do not know this.

Generally people think that bosses are above us and more important than us. I would like workers to know that we and bosses are equal – bosses would not be bosses if there was no us. They would not have the money they have if there were no workers. We think that they are above us because they deny us our rights. The workers' struggle is about all these things – *Phambili nomzabalazo wabasebenzi.*

The need for shop-stewards

All the battles I write about happened when we had no shop-stewards. We had meetings during lunch time, discussing the election of shop-stewards. A weekend was set aside for electing shop-stewards. Two of us were chosen to be shop-stewards. The election of shop-stewards was a result of the fact that workers were becoming conscious of their rights. They soon realised that shop-stewards were the backbone of the union. We became more and more aware of our rights and we demanded them as they were.

In 1980 we formed our own football club. We invited other branches of the company to play us. After matches we spoke to these other workers about the workers' struggle. We achieved a lot by doing so because now we know who the leaders from those other branches are. Slowly but surely we are all becoming better and better organised.

A message for fellow-workers

I wrote this story so that those who read it may gain from it, so that you too will have the courage to know about your rights. So that you know that you will not get your rights unless you struggle hard for them. This story is about you and your life and about the future of your children.

Amandla Awethu!
Sonqoba Simunye!
United we stand, divided we fall!
Phambili Nomzabalazo Wabasebenzi!
Phansi Izimpimpi Zabaqhashi
An injury to one is an injury to all

Use these slogans, they are workers' slogans that will give you strength and courage to press forward with the workers' struggle.

Robert Berold **Poetry**

Theresa Queiros

recipes

switch off the radio
blow the t.v. into flames
burn the newspaper with the matchstick
then sit down and watch and listen to the
footsteps of marching feet coming towards your door
and through your telescope watch the moving pictures
bring children's hearts beating against the walls
and thousands of hands reaching out towards a vacuum
black children with stomachs puffed out
mothers dry and empty breasted who are unable
to feed them
when good is tortured by the bad
young people who drug their life out of their bodies
brothers, sons and fathers who die to save a nation
who leave their families to die without dignity
blood that runs thicker than water

Theresa Queiros

THERE IS A RIVER IN ME

There is a mouth opened in me, a river
it flows down from my throat to the ground
through streams more liquid than water.

As I walk past the people passing in the rain,
this river, which is not mine,
flows into theirs.

It travels to some through the waves of air,
to some through the painful way they walk,
to some through the long bible of their thinking,

even the man who swings onto the bus
as it moves away. The township hisses,
it's a ribbon of smoke now.

There's a river in me, and it's not mine,
it was taught to me by a teacher of rivers,
and it flows and flows with its kirlian fire

then it falls and joins with others in their stream.
Oh I'm disappointed in people, but I love them more
and my hand is open at the place of the rivermouth.

Robert Berold

STAN by Carol Mathiane

Illustrated by
Percy Sedumedi

Stan parked the huge company truck in the firm's yard, collected his pouch which had the day's takings, and walked towards the administration block.

'Sorry, bra Stan,' called one of his truck assistants, 'there is someone in your car.'

'Thanks, ntwana!' And he immediately turned to walk towards his Valiant that was parked along with many other cars belonging to his colleagues.

Who could it be, he wondered. On reaching the car, he smiled and blew a wolf-whistle 'Oh-la-la, look who's here!' He got into the car and kissed the woman who had been waiting for him for some time.

She smiled and after the customary 'where-have-you-been-hiding-yourself-all-these-months', Stan excused himself, promising to be back shortly.

He went back to the office, submitted the cash, sorted the following day's orders, said goodnight to everybody who was still there and left the office. He strode back to the car, got in, adjusted his Ayres cap and drove off.

'So, tell me, what puts you here, mmh?' with one hand stroking the woman's right thigh while the other hand manoeuvred the steering wheel.

'What do you mean what puts me here?' asked the woman. 'Have I perhaps committed a crime by coming to see you?' she asked. 'Maybe you want to drop me at the next bus stop so I can catch a bus home,' she said.

'Come come. You know how happy I am to see you. What I meant to ask was is there any serious business that has brought you here? Then your visit is a great joy,' and he continued stroking her thigh.

'Hey, wena, leave me alone. What will people think of us!' she chuckled.

'Ahh! Nobody sees anything from here. Say, where are you working now?'

'Lost my job last Friday. I am looking for one. Do you think your wife can hire me to wash her baby's nappies?' She laughed, sticking her tongue out at him.

'How did you know about Nana?' asked Stan without concealing his astonishment.

'I move around and I pick up stories. Is that supposed to be a secret?'

'No, not at all, but — I don't move around in the same circles as you. That's why I'm rather surprised.'

They headed for the M1 North, both silent. In fact, the mentioning of the baby reminded Stan of his earlier resolution not to arrive home after nightfall.

For some days now he had been getting home very late, unintentionally. The first night had been when he had a puncture but did not have a jack. That had meant waiting for one of his work mates who had finished checking in his cash to lend him his jack. He knew he dared not tell his wife he had a puncture for fear of being told 'I've heard that one before.' After changing the wheel, he had driven to a shebeen to while away the time. He got home very late. On arrival he pretended to be drunk. Nana did not say anything that night, or the following morning.

The next evening was spoilt by the sudden recall of a Pirates Football Club Fan meeting. They did not have a telephone. He got home towards midnight. The following day was Friday which meant, like most majitas, he had to end the week well by downing a bottle or two with the guys at the joint.

All the way they did not say much until they got to the Baragwanath Hospital intersection.

'Turn right, I want a drink,' said the woman.

Oh my God, said Stan to himself, that's all I need tonight. He indicated his intention to go right and was soon speeding off towards Orlando.

He had not been honest when he had said he was delighted to see her. He had had an affair with this woman — Lebogang — some two years ago when life between himself and his wife Nana was real bad. But when Nana fell pregnant with their fifth child, something had happened to him. He had changed.

He had not wanted another child, but somehow, when she told him she had missed her period, he had wondered how an intelligent woman like his wife, who kept nagging about the miserable life she was leading, could allow herself to fall pregnant again. Maybe it is an attempt to win back my affection. In that case, he wanted to make it up to her. Also he had not wanted to divorce her. She was the one who would raise the question of divorce each time they had a quarrel. He could never visualise life without his children. And he had told her that should they part, he would fight heaven and earth to gain the custody of the children. Then she became pregnant. To Stan it meant he had to be very kind, considerate and loving for the nine-month period. And, he had continued to be so even after the birth of their son.

He reached Diepkloof and soon located Pall Mall, the joint where most of his friends drank. It was called Pall Mall because the owner was so impressed by the cigarette advertisement that he knew it word for word.

He was cheerfully greeted as usual. He ordered two beers and a nip of brandy. There was the usual township gossip, teasing and arguing about football.

'I tell you, bra Stan, this Saturday, your boys won't know what happened to them. Mine are in good form this week,' promised a Chiefs supporter.

'Look, I wouldn't waste my breath talking about Kaizer Chiefs,' answered Stan, 'as our offspring, you have a long way to go before you can even think of yourselves as a club,' and he lifted his glass to drink.

'Tell me,' asked the Chiefs fan in mock innocence, 'is it true that last week's meeting at Donaldson was about a new Inyanga that you people want to get?'

> 'Look, I don't want to get into trouble with your husband. I am taking you home from here.'

'Shut up,' said a man who had been sitting at the far end of the room sipping his beer. He had a mean scar on his right cheek and a squint. The man who had been harrassing Stan with questions realised he had over-stayed his welcome finished his beer and left. A jazz record was put on the hi-fi set and the conversation went from music to the newly introduced general sales tax.

'Aren't you getting late, Lebo? We better hit the road,' said Stan looking at his watch which registered ten-thirty.

She looked at him with her large black eyes, smiled and said, 'Don't worry, the night is still young. I'll have another drink,' and she moved closer to him and planted a kiss on his cheek.

'Careful, you are getting drunk. What will your husband say when you get home in this state?'

'Am I going home? Surely, Stan, it's been such a long time.'

'Look, I don't want to get into trouble with your husband. I am taking you home from here.'

'You don't have to worry about him, I'll handle him. In fact, he is easier to handle in the morning than if I were to go home now. I could end up with a black eye.'

The lady was not going home. That much was clear to Stan. He felt very angry with himself but continued to drink the rest of his brandy in silence. For months he had successfully buried his past — nights of sleeping out and drinking sprees. He wanted to devote the hours when he was not at work to his family. Now this. In the meantime, Lebo was thoroughly enjoying herself and kept stroking the palm of his hand, kissing him on the neck and cheek.

Having finished their drinks they drove off. Stan drove straight to the Diepkloof Hotel where he booked a double room. After paying, he linked her right arm into his left. Turning to him she asked, 'How about a night-cap?' Stan gave her a cold stare and walked up the stairs leading to their room, leaving behind a rowdy crowd from the smoke-filled bar that made the entire building look like a huge shebeen.

Neither felt like having a bath. Lebo sat on the huge bed and started undressing. Stan stared out the window at nothing in particular. He thought of his wife and children sleeping all by themselves. He resisted the urge to go away from the woman who was by now tossing and turning waiting for him to join her.

He started undressing, made a neat bundle of his clothing and joined Lebo between the sheets.

Stan woke up with a start from a nightmare. Next to him lay Lebo sprawled like a baby after a day of intense enjoyment of all sorts of games. She was snoring slightly. Stan moved an inch and waited to see Lebo's reaction, but she continued to snore. He half sat up and looked at her as she rolled over towards the wall.

Making as little movement as possible but working very fast, Stan got his clothes on, took his car keys from the table, and placed the hotel slip and a five rand note on the table. He tip-toed out of the room. He felt a strong urge to run to his car and drive off but dared not do so lest he be hurled in on suspicion of stealing.

He walked past the nightwatchman, greeted the man matter of factly, 'Yebo, baba,' and hurried to his car.

He arrived home, parked his car and stealthily let himself into the house. It was long past 2 am. He first went into the childrens' bedroom as was his custom, lit a match and admired their innocent faces. Walking as lightly as he possibly could, he went into his bedroom. He suspected that his wife might still be awake. Nevertheless he glided to the wardrobe and got his blankets and a pair of pyjamas out. He went back to the lounge where he usually slept, and made his bed on the couch.

He undressed and got into bed. He could not sleep. He stared at the ceiling and watched the sleepy flies around the electric globe. He longed to talk to Nana about what had happened to him. He lay thinking of how easy it had been for him to get into trouble. He wanted to talk to Nana and tell her of how Lebo had imposed herself on him. He craved to take her in his arms and tell her how much he loved her. But would she believe him? Women were strange creatures. She would rather sneer at him or tell him to get lost.

He longed for the days when they were young and in love. The Orlando High School days when he would wait for her each morning at New Canada Station from the train coming from Naledi, and they would both rush to the next platform to catch the one going to Kliptown Station. For three years they rushed from station to station, sports field to sports field and cafe to cafe until that fateful day of the Students' Christian Movement picnic, when they decided to take their love one step further. Two months later, Nana was no longer a girl. They had to leave school. She was to be a mother and he a father.

Gwar-a-ka-tla! 'What's that? rain or something?' wondered Stan. Once more Gwara-ka-tla! It wasn't rain but stones hitting the roof of his house. He stopped breathing and listened. Indeed someone was throwing stones on his roof. He opened the curtains slightly and peeped outside. There was a car parked with its lights facing his house. On seeing the curtains opened the driver hooted.

He got out of bed, unlocked the door and went out. He took three steps towards the car when a woman's voice screamed, 'It's him!'

'Open the gates,' said the driver of the car.

'Ja,' said the woman, 'you think I am a ticky-line. You leave me sleeping at the hotel and you rush to your high society wife. Open the gate, I want to show you who I am.'

He almost had a heart attack, for there was Lebo in the car screaming her head off. One by one, the neighbours' lights went on. For some time he thought he was in a dream, but it was real. 'What is this woman doing to me?' Soon Nana would want to find out what was going on outside. He could not afford that to happen. He had to pull himself together and think of something to do, and fast.

'Look, man, if you don't want anything to happen to you and your car, you had better take this bitch back where you took it from.' He went back into the house and came out seconds later wielding an axe. The driver sensed trouble and started his car, vanishing into the night.

Exasperated, he went back to his bed, shaking with rage. He cursed himself for not hacking the car and breaking each and every bone of Lebo and the man. Although he was not a violent man, he hated being threatened. He made a vow to kill Lebo the next time he set eyes on her. At that time, he did not care if Nana had overheard the nasty conversation or not. All he wanted was to throttle Lebo.

He blew the candle out and was just about to fall asleep when another stone hit the roof. This was followed by the sound of a motorcar hooter. He jumped up and opened the door, axe in hand.

A policeman in uniform emerged saying, '*Hee monna, bula* gate' (open the gate, man). He put the axe away and opened the gate to let four people into his lounge. They were introduced as Lebo's husband, his neighbour, the policeman and last but not least, Lebo.

'I came from work and found my wife missing,' began Lebo's husband. 'At first I didn't make much of it until after ten when I notified my neighbour here of Lebo's absence since I was getting worried.' The neighbour nodded.

'Then, about an hour ago, in walked Lebo in tears. She told me you forcibly took her to the Diepkloof Hotel, raped her and left her there. Here is the receipt in your name as proof of your evil deed.'

> 'Stop it, woman, if you don't want to get into trouble. *Ke motho oa molao nna.*'

Stan was speechless. He looked at the policeman, then at Lebo who was sobbing next to her husband.

'You realise that you have put my house and the name of my father into disgrace. My wife has suffered shame and for that I de . . . .'

Just then the door of their bedroom opened. Nana was standing at the door leading to the lounge holding on to her rather bulging hips. 'What's going on here?' she asked. 'What right have you got to come and talk nonsense in my house?'

'I am the husband of this woman who . . . .'

I don't care who you are. I say get out, the whole lot of you. This is not a bloody Bantu Affairs Commissioners' Office where shit like this gets discussed Out or else . . . .' She adjusted the towel she had wrapped around her waist and went to the kitchen. She returned wielding an axe.

'I shall not hesitate to hack you with this,' and she went towards Lebo whose eyes seemed about to fall our of her sockets. The policeman jumped to his feet in a bid to stop her.

'Stop it, woman, if you don't want to get into trouble. *Ke motho oa molao nna.*'

'*Molao se* shit,' said Nana. 'You think this is a charge office. You come dragging each other here over this slut, get out or else,' and she flung the axe at Lebo who, by the grace of god, ducked in the nick of time, the axe went crashing on her glass display cabinet, bringing down an avalanche of glass splinters. One by one they dashed for the door, into the car and out of sight.

As the noise from the glasses subsided, Nana seemed to come back to her senses. She looked at the mess on the floor and went cold. She thought of what would have happened had the axe landed on the woman's head. Her whole body started shaking. Stan realised his wife was in a state of shock. Measuring his steps carefully, he walked over to her, picked her up like a small baby and put her on the sofa. He went to the kitchen where he prepared glucose, and made her sip it spoon by spoon until the cup was empty. He pulled the blanket over her and was on his way to sleep on the floor when she said: 'Stan, please come and sleep with me.'

He joined her but was not sure of what to do. She moved closer to him and held him tightly and whispered, 'to think I was beginning to think things were getting better between us.' She let go of him and started crying. Tears ran down her cheeks. She could not control the mucus flowing from her nose.

Using his pyjama top, he wiped the tears and mucus from her while muttering 'I am sorry, baby, truly, I am.' He kissed her on the mouth and on her forehead and continued to whisper 'I am sorry, Nana, please believe me.' She stopped crying and responded to his kisses. Just then, the alarm clock went off. Stan had to start washing and get to work. Nana had to prepare the baby's first feed. But they were locked in embrace.

For some time nothing mattered as they breathed into each other's mouths. It was after a long pause that Stan said, 'You will never understand what I've been through. She looked at him, smiled and nodded. And from the bedroom, the baby went 'nga-a-a-a.' They both started. A new day had begun.

The first story in the *Staffrider Popular History* series is based on an interview with Mrs S. by Mmantho Nkotsoe for the Oral History Project, funded by the HSRC and directed by the African Studies Institute, Wits University, to whom we wish to express our thanks. Quotation of Modikwe Dikobe is from unpublished notes made by him on various topics at various times.

The Widow of Phokeng

This is the story of an old 'Mayibuye' woman, a fighting woman who was in the Anti-Pass campaign and in the bus and potato boycotts; who marched on Pretoria's Union Buildings singing 'Nkosi Sikelele' and 'Verwoerd, bula teronko'; who attended early-morning strike meetings in Alexandra's 'Number Three Square' and got to know the inside of 'Number Four' (Johannesburg Fort Prison). Her three decades in Alexandra (1930-1962) were the years that saw the emergence of mass-based urban political movements, and the lawyer who defended her in court at the time of the anti-pass campaign was none other than the young Nelson Mandela.

These, however, were not the only events in the life of Mrs S, the widow of Phokeng. There were also times when she was unable to link arms with other militants and continued the fight on the battleground of her own life. It is possible that what she learned there will be as useful to others as what she learned in the arena of 'The Struggle'. When she was setting down the thoughts on which this story is based she said, 'I was very unfortunate to be born into a family where there were no grandparents who could sit down with me and tell me about their ancestors.' What can we say to her if not, 'Grandmother, sit down and tell'?

Life in Phokeng

She will tell us, for instance, why as a young woman 'not yet twenty' she left the village of her birth, Phokeng.

'Girls of my age were working in Jo'burg. I couldn't just till the land, unmarried as I was. There was nothing I could do with the bags of mabele I could get from the fields, since I had no children. I looked down on the idea of going to the fields, young as I was.'

The village of Phokeng is the heartland of the Tswana-speaking Bafokeng people. It lies a few kilometres north-west of Rustenburg, and just to the east of the Magaliesberg. The mountains bend northward at Olifantshoek to form one end of the bow which the whole range resembles. It is as if the people behind the Magaliesberg were sheltered to some degree by this bulwark of sandstone and quartz that lies between them and the Rand. The process of rural disintegration so familiar in the rest of the countryside advanced more slowly here. Although her father had died young, the mother of the widow of Phokeng had fields at Kanana which the children helped her to till. During the season of cultivation they would go and live in small, rudimentary huts 'until the hoeing was over.' Since other people came to Kanana to cultivate the fields adjacent to theirs, they did not lack company.

The Phokeng mine began to cast a shadow over these fields. Dumps encroached on what had been agricultural land, and Mrs S speaks of 'the mineworkers' with some hostility. 'They kill people out in the fields.' In her story we do not see their faces or learn anything about the circumstances of their lives. They are groups of men moving through fields of mielies and mabela, reaping where they did not sow, a constant source of danger to the women working in the fields.

The mine belongs to the Bafokeng people. Mrs S, however, does not feel she has a share in it. She resents the seemingly high-handed way in which the chief disposes of the revenue from the mine. She is prepared to believe that the money is being spent on laudable projects like schools, but it is a sore point that 'we do not have direct control over the money.' Nor, one imagines, over who gets to work in the mine, or over wages and conditions of work. A source of wealth to the people, the mine squats over their lives. The men who help to make that wealth terrorise the 'owners' in their fields. This Phokeng mine is one of the few assets of 'independent' Bophuthatswana . . . .

Golden City Sisters

She left Phokeng at the end of the Twenties, travelling the first stage of her journey by ox-wagon to Rustenburg: 'We used to ask a lift from people on ox-wagons going to the mill in town.' From Rustenburg she took a train to Pretoria, and another train from there to the Golden City's Park Station. 'There were no taxis. Blacks did not have cars, train was the only means of transport.' Arriving at Park Station she set out to find the brother who was her key to the door of Egoli. He was working at Stanley's Dairy in the white suburb of Parkview, still semi-rural then. She asked her way there and found it easily enough. The brother took her to a woman relative who was already employed as a domestic worker. Her relative 'kept her ear to the ground' and gave directions which enabled her to penetrate what seemed a maze of streets, hunting a job.

In the end the network of kinswomen and friends found her the opening that confirmed her presence among them as an independent person. She went to one of the lonely rooms that linked into the chain, winding through the suburban maze, of sisters in similar rooms. 'The housemaids protest they cannot be expected to run the risk of sleeping alone,' writes Modikwe Dikobe of a situation like hers. If she was 'without a man companion, a master did or could demand sexual intercourse.' The widow of Phokeng presents a different perspective of what could still be the same back-yard.

'We used to enjoy working as domestic servants because we paid each other visits. We had boyfriends but we didn't want them to sleep in our rooms. Whenever one of us knew that her boyfriend would be likely to pay her a visit, she would organize her friends to come and spend the evening with her so that the boyfriend would be inconvenienced.'
What was the idea behind all that?
'It was to make it impossible for the boyfriend to sleep with his girlfriend and to prevent pregnancy in a way. One would sometimes find ten people sleeping in one room.'

Marriage

There was a boyfriend. Maybe she ran out of visitors to ask around when he came. Or — to judge from what she tells us of the life with him that followed — maybe she knew that he was the one who counted. When pressed to explain why she left the world of the 'live-in' domestic servant she tells us first that 'I was married already and I had to have children,' then that 'I left the suburbs when I had fallen pregnant. My fiancée then looked for a room to rent in Alexandra.'

Dikobe's testimony:

Marriages in town were very rare.
In Doornfontein there were few who had married in any form.
It was 'vat en sit'.
The couple were living a common-law life. Their affair began in the backyard of the woman's employer while she was living as a domestic servant. She fell pregnant and left for home. From there she wrote unreplied letters. Returned to find her man little concerned. She persuaded him to hire a room.
The couple could not raise enough money for bogadi. Cattle had decreased and the man's parents were too poor to meet the required number of cattle. A native commissioner's certificate did not qualify them. According to custom they were unmarried.
A home was made of a father, mother and a child. Other children, if there were any, were with the grandparents at their mother's home.
The children belong to the woman's family.
A genuine family unit was broken down by labour recruitment. Women found marriage very scarce.

The married life of Mrs S seems to have been like this in some ways, and different in others.
Did you celebrate your wedding here in Phokeng?
'No, in Johannesburg.'

'We used to pay £1 a month for a two-roomed house. Alexandra was a very good place for poor people. We used to love it for that.'

'Yes, it was scandalous among Tswanas to listen to people saying: "I have seen so-and-so's mother selling fruits or vegetables in the street." When I started selling in town, I had to sit down and think before I could venture into that business.'

We are not told whether this couple raised enough for bogadi, only that they were poor. We know that amicable relations were maintained with both his and her families (widowed mothers in both cases) and that all the children (there were six from eight pregnancies, but one died in childhood, leaving five of whom three are still alive) lived with the parents in Alexandra.

'We used to pay £1 a month for a two-roomed house. Alexandra was a very good place for poor people. We used to love it for that.'

From time to time she would send her mother-in-law £5. This old lady, who survived the widow's own mother, lived not far from Phokeng, at Dinokana. Dikobe tells us that most marriages at this time were between couples who hailed from the same area. 'Marriage between Zulu and Tswana was abhorred. Even between Tswanas of different areas.'

Alexandra Days

The first plots were sold to Africans in Alexandra in 1912. The widow of Phokeng and the township were thus of an age. In the Thirties, Forties and Fifties things happened which were decisive for the identities of both the place and the woman. From the late Thirties through to the early Fifties a flood-tide of black South Africans was sweeping from the land into the cities – particularly the manufacturing centres. The society, the economy, and politics were being transformed. Alexandra was one of the stomachs in which the lives of people like Mrs S and her husband were digested. As well as people from all parts of the countryside there were those who came on to Alex after the slumyard clearances, or in order to escape regulations in the townships under municipal control. Like Alex, Sophiatown and Western Native Township were bulging at the seams.

'Almost all youngsters who went to Sophiatown on their arrival from the villages would finally get a "pass" in Alexandra. It was very simple to get a pass. All we had to do was to go with the boy to the Health Committee officer. Then we had to introduce him to the Committee which gave him a "pass" without any fuss. It was very easy. The only document I had to take along to the office was the receipt I was issued with when paying rent.'

In the days when Doornfontein was being cleared a 'Marabi' piano-player named Ernest Mochumi had to turn to the trumpet for a living. But his music lived on in exile, in Alex. Mr Masonte's bicycle shop moved out there, and so did Moloto the herbalist. Mrs S didn't go to Marabi parties, didn't join a dance club, and rather regrets that she didn't queue for 'bioscope' with her sister, who would go to the cinema whenever she came on a visit from Phokeng, and return 'with stories about thieves shooting one another.' You didn't need to go to the movies to see that. The Americans and the Spoilers regularly came over from Sophiatown 'to wake up Alexandra gangsters'. Their big cars pitched and rolled in the potholed streets, an armada parading with provocative slowness, every window rolled down and bristling with guns.

Apple Sellers

She hadn't entirely left white suburbia, going across to Dunkeld to do washing though she wasn't registered to work. At home she was making clothes at weekends. On Friday or Saturday night she'd do the cutting. Early next morning she'd sit down at her sewing machine and spend that day finishing the dresses, bonnets and aprons that she made. Then she broke into apple-selling. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were her laundry days, so this new sideline occupied Thursday and Friday, sometimes Saturday. It meant journeying into the centre of Johannesburg, and widening her horizons in other ways. Just as the sisters in Parkview had helped her to begin as a domestic worker, so another group of women brought her into apple-selling.

'I used to go sell apples with a group of women from Bethanie – a village near Brits. They are the ones who introduced me into that business of selling apples, mangoes and other fruits. Do you know where Market and Commissioner Streets are? We used to sit down on the pavement with big bales of fruit beside us.'

It is possible that these women had broken a long-standing taboo on street-selling among Tswana people.

'Yes, it was scandalous among Tswanas to listen to people saying: "I have seen so-and-so's mother selling fruits or vegetables in the street." When I started selling in town, I had to sit down and think before I could venture into that business.'

Stokvel

As well as her contacts with domestic workers, the Bethanie apple-sellers and the dressmaking clientele, Mrs S participated over the years in many 'stokvel' groups. There were usually between eight and ten members, each paying a weekly contribution of about R5. The benefit rotated, and every member could look forward to a windfall about six times a year. The stokvel was also an emergency fund that members could turn to in times of need.

'I always look at my grandchildren with sympathy because I know that it is not possible to give them good food we used to eat when we were still young . . . .'

Msomi Nights

No event in her life illustrates the storytelling skill of the widow of Phokeng better than the time her house was raided by Alexandra's dreaded Msomi gang. Like all good storytellers she is able to identify the single incident on which the whole story turns. As is often the case, that incident contains an element of surprise, while the reader (or listener) is left to provide his or her own explanation of the turn the story has taken.

'I think it was in 1939 if I am not mistaken. It happened while we were sleeping. I said to my husband: "I hear some voices outside". He dismissed the topic and said that there was no-one outside, I was just imagining. The next thing, we heard a very loud knock at the door. I knew immediately that it was that gang. They had come to kill us. We woke up and tried to hold the door very firm. We did not have expensive furniture because the idea of building a house here in Phokeng had always been in our minds. I therefore thought that they would kill us because we had no furniture to give them and save our lives with. The house was also too small, we didn't have enough space for our furniture. We held the door very firmly, my husband and I, but the people outside were very powerful, they were pushing it from outside. I tried to scream for help but people were alseep already. No-one came to our rescue. Then they broke the window, the wooden window frame was also broken into pieces, leaving behind a very big opening. I looked at the window for anyone who could force his way through it. My attention was drawn to that window. We heard one of them saying: "Get in through that window." When he landed inside, he found me ready for him. I pushed him around, trying to burn his hand on the hot stove. He jumped, but my nails still held at his throat. I did not know how strong I was until that night. During the struggle I prayed to God that He should accept our souls because it was clear that they were going to overpower us eventually. I gathered strength and told myself that I had to open the door, no matter what happened. I left that man on the floor, pushed my husband away from the door and swung it open. I said: 'People, why do you want to kill us?' One of them said to the others, "Let's go". They left us without any problem. Just those words, 'What do you want?' made them change their minds. It saved my life.

Now after that Msomi gang affair, we decided not to report the case. I was not hurt during the struggle; my husband's finger got hurt in the struggle but it was not serious. One night I had a dream and in that dream, someone advised me to go and report the case to the police but I didn't do that. I had no time to go there. Now one of those guys came to our house one day. Before that boy could enter into the house I had a vision in which that boy appeared to be one of those people who broke into our house. That boy stood at the door, he was hesitant about entering into the house. He couldn't even look at me. I then asked: "What do you want here, can I help you?" He said that he was looking for a man by the name of Moatshe. I looked at him very closely and saw that he was wearing the same clothes he had on during that terrible night. My neighbour knew the boy and she told me that he was not living far from our place.'

Was he a local person?

'Yes, he was. I did go to his place but I could not find him. They told me that he was a robber and went out at night in most cases. I left a message that he should pay for my broken window but he never turned up to pay for it.'

Bread of Life

Listen carefully to what the widow of Phokeng says on the subject of food and you seem to hear, in a few sentences, the story of her life. From her childhood comes the story of the making of 'matebelekwane', a home-made bread. Mabele meal was ground with warm water, to which a pinch of salt was added, then a small quantity of bread flour. This bread flour was made from 'diara', the leavings of the reaping machine in the wheat fields of Brits. Her mother would travel there with a party of people from Phokeng to glean the harvest. They threshed the wheat in Brits, bringing home full bags. Ground in the local mill, the bread flour would be stored in the house, ready to be used whenever matabele-kwane was made.

'I always look at my grandchildren with sympathy because I know that it is not possible to give them good food we used to eat when we were still young . . . .'

In Alexandra, too, her family ate well. She laughs as she tells us that

'I used to like well-prepared food. Even on Saturdays I would go personally to the butchery to look for tasty meat. Under normal circumstances I would buy short-rib. I never made a mistake of leaving out potatoes and rice. I would fry cabbage

mixed with potatoes and put in marrow-bones to make it tastier.'

Here is an old lady whose appetite is still good, who still enjoys eating. She has lived through rising prices and a decline in the quality of cooking.

'Food was not expensive, my child, we could buy a bag of maizemeal at about 25c, a bag which I think was about 25kg in weight. Meat was also cheap, at one shilling one could fill up a saucepan. Things have gone expensive nowadays. Whenever I visit Johannesburg I make sure that I go there having enough money. I am used to sending children to buy me things like onions, tomatoes and meat in order to have something to eat during the day.

It is only now that I tolerate badly prepared food. (Laughter) Nowadays I eat everything that you children cook. My children are fond of complaining about the food that my grandchildren cook. Just cook whichever way, as long as what you have cooked is edible.'

Potatoes

In the Alexandra days she was very fond of potatoes. She would buy five shillings worth at a time from the women selling at the bus terminus, who were in turn buying from the Italians. But there came a time, in 1959, when she and many others (including some whites, she heard) stopped eating potatoes. Listening to her tell this story we cannot doubt that in South Africa we are living through an epic of resistance. Survival and sacrifice — the two great themes of this epic — became so fused in the popular imagination that it seemed as if eating potatoes would be an act of cannibalism. Men were dying on those potato farms!

'Rumour had it that the Boer who farmed with potatoes had the habit of knocking down his "lazy" labourers with his tractor. He did not bury them, instead he used them as compost in his potato farm. We were convinced that what we heard was true because even the potatoes themselves were shaped like human beings. In every township, potatoes were boycotted. We argued that eating potatoes was the same as eating human flesh.'

Passes

Now Granny, were you still at Alexandra during the pass campaign?

Yes.

What happened?

Women refused to apply for passes because they argued that they too would have to be registered when employed somewhere. Were they telling lies?

No, they were not.

That's right. We tried to avoid some of those problems that you people are faced with when looking for a job. But it worked out to be a futile attempt. Some of us were imprisoned. Were those women who staged a protest against passes crazy?

Women only?

Men also were in the struggle but women were in large numbers as compared to men. My child, we really protested against passes and ended up at No. 4.

Did you reach No. 4 also?

Jesus! I did. We resolved that we were not going to apply for passes. Then we started singing:

Hei, Verwoerd, hei bula teronko
Hei, thina si zo ngena zimankosikaze
MaZulu, MaXhosa, Sotho, Shangana!

(Hey! Verwoerd, hey! Open up the prison cells. Hey! we are women, we are going to enter therein. We are Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Shangaan!)

I started to realise that women are militant sometimes. Pedi, Shangaan, Xhosa, we got into police vans, all of us. We started singing our 'Verwoerd' song even behind bars. Whites lost hope of ever being able to control us. We marched to the Union Building. Our leaders had black dresses trimmed with yellow and blue. We sang many songs while waiting for Verwoerd.

Koloi ena, e ya nyanyatha
Koloi ena e ya nyanyatha
Fa a sa sute ya go thula
(This car is moving very fast. If you don't move out of the way, it will knock you down.)

Did he live long thereafter? He didn't. We waited for him outside but he never turned up. We received a message which said we should go home, Verwoerd would hold a meeting with us in a few days. All that they were telling us was lies. Immediately after all these strikes, most of us were forced to move from Alexandra and Sophiatown to Meadowlands, Orlando, Diepkloof and other townships. I think the aim of the government was to make us less militant.

Man Called Fish

Granny, who used to go around organising meetings in Alexandra?

Fish was the man who was very active. I think his name should have been written down in the books because he was very popular. We used to assemble at No. 3 Square very early in the morning in response to a whistle. As early as 5 o'clock one would see men distributing pamphlets warning people not to go to work the following day because the strike would begin on that day. Men were getting paid £3 per week and they had to pay rent out of that. We therefore insisted on 'a pound a day' so that they could earn at least £5 per week. It became a well organised strike. No-one dared to go to work while other people were on strike. We were one thing.

Buses

Did you boycott buses also?

Yes, it happened that bus fares got increased from 4d to 5d if one wanted to go to town. Then we went on strike. We didn't even feel the distance from home to work in going on foot. The boycott lasted for six months. It went on like that until the fare got reduced to 4d, the original one.

Soft-spoken Man

The husband of the widow of Phokeng is a shadowy figure in her story. We do not hear of the part he played in the boycotts, strikes and campaigns that were so much a part of her life. Was he a political coward? When she is wrestling with the Msomi gangster, her husband plays the minor role. Was he a physical coward, too? Whenever she chooses to give us a glimpse of him, we see enough to know that it could not have been as simple as this. Whatever he did, or did not do, she continued to respect him.

'There was something I could not cook very well, thick porridge. What I would do was to boil water in the saucepan and wait for my husband to come home and ask him to mix it for me.'

From the beginning she accepted that 'I was married to a peace-loving man. My husband was soft-spoken.' He was soft-spoken about his achievements, too. Before they were married, he didn't tell her that he was attending night-school. He learnt to read and write English. Later, he was able to help the children to read and to do their arithmetic.

'My husband was a religious man. Every day when supper was over, he would gather the family to the table, read the Scripture and explain to the children.'

His religion did not make him intolerant. She seems to have appreciated the latitude he left her to lead her own life. His easy-going temperament meant that their house was free of tension and bickering.

'My husband was very good. He used not to complain about small issues. I was even strict as compared to him.'

She recalls an incident early on in her fruit-selling days which showed her how conservative and hidebound many of the men from their region still were.

'One day when I was busy selling, one man I was acquainted with shouted at me and said, "Mma-Josefa, why do you stand there selling apples in the street when on the other hand Joseph is busy working to support you and the children?" I felt so humiliated that I could not even answer to that.'

The attitude of her husband was very different:

'He only asked whether I would cope up with all the work. He thought it would be strenuous for me to go around selling. I convinced him that I was accompanied by a group of women who were also selling fruit. He didn't make a fuss of it.'

His Choice

Only one difference of opinion stood between them all their lives. They were agreed that money would be set aside and saved to build or purchase the house in which they would live when they were old. What they disagreed about was where the house should be.

'If only he could have agreed with me when I asked to buy a plot in Alexandra, he could have died rich. He argued that we could not buy a plot in Alexandra since our place of birth was Phokeng.'

This disagreement is not as clear-cut as it seems. Choosing Phokeng, her husband's reasons are traditional, conservative. Yet we have seen that he adapted well to city life. What he learned he passed on to his children. He supported his wife's experiments in getting by. Choosing Alexandra, she seems to have turned her back on country-based values; getting rich is important. Yet she says: 'My child, whites have taken our culture from us.' In the popular struggles of her Alexandra days she stands with the rank-and-file. Would things have been different if she had had her way, and invested in property?

(At the time of the squatter movements in Alexandra in the forties, when the Bantu Tenants Association was started by Marks Rammitloa and Schreiner Baduza, there were property owners who locked their taps and charged for water. Rents were forced up. Thirty tenants had to share a single toilet.)

Through the years her husband worked for a shop-owner in Rosebank. By 1962 they were being threatened with removal to Meadowlands. Sufficient money had been saved for the house in Phokeng, so they decided to build it and move there.

'We had to move into this house during that year, but he was unfortunate to move in here dead.'

The husband died: it was the wife who lived out the future the husband had prepared; the future she had tried to oppose.

Tale of Two Sons

She is back in Phokeng, twenty years a widow now, when she tells this story. Of the five children she raised, three survive. Her eldest son was killed by thugs in Diepkloof. When he was a boy, and she and her husband were both working, he would buy the food and prepare it. When he was a man, he sent her money regularly. She still grieves for him. The manner of his death fills her with bitterness against the Golden City.

The son who survives is her youngest. His name is 'Lucky'. He lives in Soweto.

'My child, a black man is being used by whites. We are a source of income to them. Nowadays they have introduced a TV to us. I once visited my son in Johannesburg and I was amazed when I found out that every night his friends come from all angles to watch television. I had to join them and while I was watching TV, I started thinking about how cunning whites can be. They started off with a "wireless" and it earned them a lot of money, "kwadi" (an organ) was the next to follow, now it is this thing, TV set. Nowadays there is nothing constructive that we think of except going to so-and-so to watch television. My grandchildren from Soweto once visited me here in Phokeng. They would go watch television every afternoon and not bother themselves about helping with domestic work at home. I had to reprimand them but it was of no use since their father stood on their side. If I were a man, I wouldn't be worrying myself about buying a TV set. Nowadays we don't plough any longer, we have to spend on buying things at the shop. We don't work anymore but we have to depend on the shop.'

Retreat Song

Back in Phokeng this woman who had refused all her life to carry a pass finally took one out.

'One of the clerks at the magistrate's offices said to me: "Granny, are you applying for the first time? People here have long been applying for passes, where have you been?" Then I said to him: "Mayibuye Africa! I also took part in that struggle so that you could work as a clerk in the office like this one. I was not satisfied to see Boers only in the offices." '

Whenever she pays the 50c bus fare to Rustenberg she remembers the Alexandra bus boycotts.

'People say nothing about it. If it were during those years we would be boycotting them.'

She is back where she started. She fought and she was defeated. Yet as she looks at her life it seems to her that coming back to Phokeng may have been the best thing she

could do. She has protected her independence. The house she lived in in Alexandra was pulled down to make way for the women's hostel. Her brother's daughter stays there, and while visiting her she saw something that made a deep impression on her.

'I saw a very old woman walking past with a stick in her hand. I recognised her immediately and began to ask: "Is that woman so-and-so from Bethanie? She looks much older than I expected. Where does she stay? Why does she walk towards the hostel's entrance? One woman then told me that the old woman was staying in that very hostel. Her children got married and left her. She sold all her belongings except her clothes and blankets which she brought along to the hostel. I looked at her with a broken heart and thanked myself for having gone to Phokeng to stay there while I was still having some means to build a house. I looked at her for a long time with sympathy. I felt a pain raging in my heart as though I had lost one of my children. I realised that she had no hope in life. She was a deserted woman.'

The widow of Phokeng has some fields at Bala, next to Chaneng village near Phokeng. There is a mine there, too, but the fields are at some distance from it. When the drought breaks, and school children can be found to assist, and a bargain can be struck with a man they know who has a tractor, she and another old woman plan to plough these fields and plant mabele.

Ken Barris — Poetry

DISSOLUTIONS

Today I read entrails: the morning is terse and full
as a surgeon's hands on a bloodstained smock.

Outside, a pigeon's tedious chuckle
falls into colons,
into the acrid smell of ink.

'A message from time
in an elephant skull:
it mutters about Africa
where the wind chips at
its vitreous china.'

My animal spirits, too,
are garrulous,
they speak out of turn.
Winged fragments of bread and wine
blur past my window.

'They had much to do with the hippos,
the kudu, the lion, the quaint yellow men.'

*

'The growth began slowly – a vegetable patch –
a fort, hovels and farms, Company offices.

Lichening well beyond their basin,
the buildings began to gel
like the shell of a hermit
crab or a mussel,
a muscular resistance to the surf of time.'

Yet the rooted brain is benign;
it sees no harm. It insists,
there must be truth in pain
and health in this sagacious meat.
Yet I am vicious with time
and so wait on salvation,
saying I am bread and wine,
though converted by my own mass.

'Emerged from the past,
they accepted deposits
of brick, stone, mortar.'

In my mind there is only slow eruption:
lymph and oil, water, corruption.
Bursting like this against the skin,
I feel new knowledge crawling in
like poplars hissing drily
in a black wind.

*

Straddling my garden wall,
this morning glory is all that violence desires:
quivering green, and veins,
and strangling faces.

'Cancerous city! stretched
upon a mountain's paws, houses grinning like a cadaver's teeth!
'I hear their slow grinding down,
the thud and tumble
of their accretion into monumental stone.

'As we drive to work,
this poison mist
gives us empty vision of the East:
cornblue
ochre
and a sulphur sun
that the black trees break.'

Ken Barris

Interview

Reproduced from the April 1983 issue of *Okella*, a journal of the Creative Writers' Workshop, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

Mbulelo Mzamane

Okella interviews Dr Mbulelo Mzamane, a South African writer and critic. He is presently a Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Ahmadu Bello University, Samaru, Zaria. The interview was conducted by David Handan and Samuel A.A. Myesgin on 17 January 1983.

OKELLA: Can you tell us your brief life history?

MZAMANE: I am of South African origin; born 35 years ago and brought up in that troubled area of South Africa known today as Soweto. I started schooling there, and in the 1960s my parents decided to send me away to the neighbouring state of Swaziland. They did that largely because of their disapproval of the educational system in South Africa, that is Bantu education, which had been introduced when I started school around 1953/54. My parents were education conscious people and did not want their children to go through this inferior system of education. Hence I received my high school education in Swaziland. This school was at that time also attended by the children of most politically conscious South Africans. For instance, the children of Nelson Mandela and a great many others whose parents were in the vanguard of our liberation struggle schooled there, largely because such parents could afford the financial burden. I tended to gravitate away from South Africa as a result of procuring my education outside South Africa. In 1967 I went to the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (U.B.L.S.), which was a rather small but international community admitting students from as far as Kenya, Nigeria, and southern Africa in general. I got married in Lesotho, on the main campus of the U.B.L.S. My wife, Nthoana, a Lesotho national, was my fellow student. After our graduate and post-graduate studies, we started teaching at the University. My wife also worked as an agricultural researcher (she still is but is presently employed by the National Animal Production Research Institute of the A.B.U. in this country). I started my profession as a lecturer in 1971 at the Botswana campus of the University; then I taught for a while in Lesotho. The University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland then split as a result of Lesotho's withdrawal. We left Lesotho late in 1975 and continued to teach at the University of Botswana and Swaziland (U.B.S.) till 1979. I taught African Literature mainly and was also the Dean of Student Affairs at the University College of Botswana. I then went on an indefinite study leave to the United Kingdom, to the University of Sheffield, where I completed my Ph.D. and was responsible, with Christopher Heywood, for the M.A. course in Modern African Literature as well as helping with the teaching for the third year B.A. Honours course in African Literature.

OKELLA: You mentioned that you developed an interest in literature basically while learning at the U.B.L.S. Did you publish any books of relevance to African Literature?

MZAMANE: Yes, as a South African student but educated outside South Africa, I had access to materials by my own people, which students within South Africa itself were being deprived of. Even as a high school student, I was a very literary conscious person. This was largely because I had the fortune of coming into contact with some of the giants of the short story in South Africa, such as the late Can Themba (author of *The Will to Die*, published posthumously in the African Writers Series), who was once described as the greatest non-writing writer in Africa. I had, therefore, this of, you might say, unbroken contact with my people's literary tradition – just literary. So that when I started writing, without consciously thinking about it, I started writing short stories, first in our high school magazine, then in the University magazines and subsequently in various other magazines, periodicals, and anthologies. Some of these stories, but by no means all of them, appeared in my first collection of short stories entitled *Mzala*, and reissued abroad as *My Cousin Comes to Jo'burg*. They are stories some of which go back more than ten years, prior to their publication. Apart from that I've done several other things in the sphere of creative writing. I have recently finished a trilogy entitled *The Children of Soweto*, largely concentrating on what I perceive as the next important landmark, after 1960, in the unfolding history of my people's inexorable march towards freedom. However, I do not consider myself seriously as a writer; I see myself more seriously as a teacher and maybe a literary critic.

OKELLA: What are your views on the works you have so far published?

MZAMANE: Ah, I don't take any views on my own work, even under the most extreme provocation. My view is that my own views are as irrelevant as they are immaterial. Naturally, as the creator of my work it is difficult to take any but a highly personal part, at best it is highly subjective objectivity. It is left to the reader or the literary critic to adopt positions towards my work.

OKELLA: But you can tell us, at least, something about your work. Here I mean, what are you trying to get across to your readers?

MZAMANE: Ah . . . , the culture of my people! My people's culture can be described basically as a culture of resistance. In recent years we have tended to look at this aspect in a very narrow sense, consequently, we talk of things like protest in literature, which has become and is almost synonymous with Black South African literature. In other words, we talk as if every time a black South African writer picks up a pen, he is protesting. Moreover, if you are protesting, you protest against, maybe, the power structure. In other words we are saying that when a black South African picks up a pen to write, he is writing for a white man. You

Mbulelo Mzamane

see, they are the power structure where I come from. This is, in fact, the type of stereotyping into which I have actually seen some of my compatriots attempting to fit. It's too small a jacket. I believe that my resistance entails a much wider aspect than political protest. I think, actually, if you wanted to describe my people's politics at this stage or era more accurately, you'd have to talk more about the politics of challenge rather than of protest. Therefore, I attempt to reflect this spirit in my own writing, that is, I attempt not to present my people as in any sense self-pitying, as though they were lachrymose all the time – mournful and so on. You may be surprised at how much zest for life black South Africans have: We laugh; we sing (perhaps you have heard of Miriam Makeba) – there is a great deal to celebrate amongst my people. It is this positive side of my people which I think is eternal and testifies to their indomitable spirit. This is what I attempt to capture particularly in my short stories. In other words, just the mere zest for life, the mere statement of saying 'I am' is testimony of a vital, vibrant humanity, of the everlasting in man. For I believe that no matter what people can take from you, they cannot take away from you your spirit; they can take away a whole lot of things from you, but they cannot take away your soul, your desires and aspirations, your being, that is your eternal side. These are some of the things I try to recapture. So I try to show my people as people who make love, as people who enjoy food, who enjoy a good laugh etc. However, people have tended to see me as a writer who is not very serious. I don't quite agree. I think we can't always be serious, we've got to sit back at times and laugh! Dickens says as much in *Hard Times;* Hardy says the same thing all the time; your own Soyinka would have nothing to disagree with in what I'm saying. Yet no one in their right senses could accuse these writers of trivialising life, of escapism, of marginalising anything. That is why I admire Soyinka; he can provoke laughter at will, whether in a serious piece of work such as *The Road* or in his lighter satiric plays such as the Jero plays and *The Lion and the Jewel.* These plays are our classics; they have something for everybody. I'm no Soyinka, but my contact with such people and their work has been a tremendous inspiration to me.

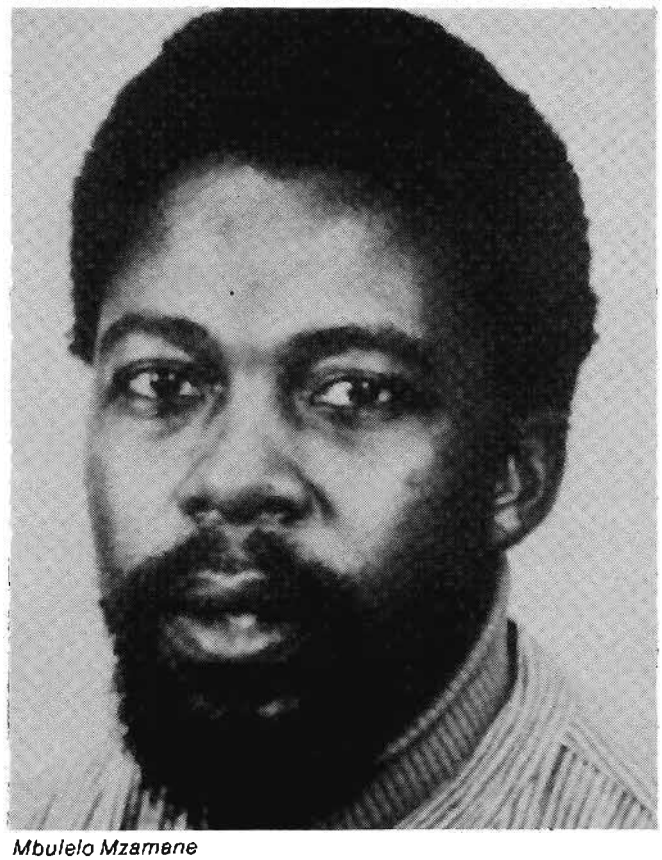
> If you read Peter Abrahams properly, you'll hear the voice of a prophet; he foresaw a great many of the problems that later plagued Africa ●

OKELLA: So, is it appropriate to say that this culture of your people, that is, their zest for life, and your contact with many literary figures and intellectuals have been the motivating factors behind your writing?

MZAMANE: Yeah, but I think the real spring of my work is the working class, not the intellectuals among whom I spend most of my time but the 'proletarians'. You pick up any of my works and you'll find that my heroes spring from the soil. However, I agree that the intellectual energy and the stimulus derives from the class I associate with in my work situation and so on. But my central heroes are the people's heroes; they are sprung from the people.

OKELLA: As an African writer, what are your own views of African literature in general?

MZAMANE: African literature strikes me as the last authentic, sincere, almost uncontaminated voice we still have as Africans. If you look at our institutions such as the political institutions, economic institutions etc., most of them have been afflicted in one way or another by colonialism and neo-colonialism. In the midst of all this alienation from our true selves, in the light of the rape of the continent, I find the loudest authentic voice in African literature. Politicians can prostitute themselves; but a writer who is worthy of his vocation can only declaim from the heart, can only speak with the voice of his conscience. In this sense, the writer can put himself in a position where he serves no master but humanity, so he can be both authentic and prophetic. He can take a whole lot of views vis-a-vis his society. Were African politicians able to sit back and listen to the voice of the writer, which is the voice of our consciences, Africa would be less in a mess. Here is one little example: In 1956 a fellow compatriot, Peter Abrahams published a novel entitled *A Wreath for Udomo.* This was, I think, the first political novel in modern African literature of English expression which developed in the post-independence era; modern and political in the sense that it dealt with the political problems of a nascent nation just newly emerged from the womb of colonialism; also it was published at a time when we were experimenting with legislative councils, legislative assemblies etc. If you read Peter Abrahams properly, you'll hear the voice of a prophet; he foresaw a great many of the problems that later plagued Africa, like the problem of corrupt leaders, of opportunists etc. Though his analysis has not always been accurate – for instance, he saw the worst problem besetting Africa as tribalism, whatever that means, whereas there are other graver problems, like class exploitation, economic problems and so on. However, his prophecy lies in his understanding of the dynamics of African society, of societies in transition generally, of how, if we get treacherous, opportunistic leaders like his central character,



Mbulelo Mzamane

There has been this controversy over the appropriate medium or language that should be adopted by the African writer to communicate with his African audience.

Udumo, we cannot help but have a spate of woes. Way back in 1956, before the attainment of independence by many African states, if some leaders had read this work and had taken it as being more than just fiction, and hence taken it seriously, a lot of the damage that later afflicted us could have been avoided. I have been told — I don't know with what accuracy — that Achebe's *A Man of the People*, was written before the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war. So, you see, if the politicians, so to speak, had taken it more seriously, the civil war likewise might have been avoided.

OKELLA: There has been this controversy over the appropriate medium or language that should be adopted by the African writer to communicate with his African audience. This controversy dates as far back as the Sixties, when people like Obi Wali contended that African literature should be written in African languages while, on the other hand, people like Professor Chinua Achebe contended that the African writer can use the foreign languages (like English, French, Portuguese, etc.) just as well to express his own peculiar emotions effectively, though not as the native speaker. Which of these two views do you hold?

MZAMANE: The matter has been debated so exhaustively by writers, academics, critics, and even politicians that I am sure I can add nothing new. So the best way to answer your question is for me to speak less as a contributor to the debate and more as a commentator. I think there is merit on both sides. There are certain things we cannot run away from, one of which is the fact that language is culture specific and, therefore, the use of language entails communication of the culture that goes with it. For instance, if you use Yoruba, there are certain inherent things to the Yoruba culture which are being communicated. An equivalent in English will not completely capture what you mean to authentically convey something indigenously Yoruba or indigenously Hausa or indigenously Zulu. Fagunwa, who writes in Yoruba and employs the same traditional material as Tutuola, who writes in 'English', communicates more of the Yoruba culture than Tutuola can ever hope to do. From this perspective, it seems not only a crime but an act of lunacy as well to ignore writing in and to abandon our indigenous languages wholesale for then we're abandoning the whole culture that is embodied in the language. I think there is validity in the act of retrieving and preserving our traditional heritage, I mean those aspects of it that are progressive, and there are many. I worry, for instance, over the fact that in South Africa creative writing in the indigenous languages is not getting the impetus it should be receiving, because it continues to be mixed up with Bantu education and Bantustan politics. So that one day we'll wake up to find that, to use a cliché, we've thrown out the baby with the dirty bath water. That's what's happening in South Africa and we're all part of the problem. Let us look at the other side of the coin. These same 'Africanists' and cultural purists, it seems to me, contradict themselves, because if we're really expressing African culture undiluted, we'll not be writing altogether, since writing is foreign to us; thus, we will be talking only of oral tradition. It is in that spirit that I see positive things in people who write in English. I've been convinced since coming to Nigeria that English is no longer the language of the British, when I listen to some Nigerians speak English but can't understand what they are saying because they are talking in Nigerian English. For instance, both John Haynes, who is an Englishman, and I, though we couldn't always understand what was being said, enjoyed the adaptation of Mongo Beti's *Perpetua* [a play put on by the A.B.U. Drama Workshop], which was done in pidgin English. It's written in English, in the same way as you can write a play in American English or use Cockney as spoken in the East End of London — remember George Bernard Shaw's Cockney characters in *Pygmalion?* Some of the best characters he ever created — but actually it sounds authentically Nigerian. A remarkable exercise in syncretism, in merging cultures, obliterating cultural boundaries, for the original novel is not only set outside Nigeria but written in French. I know of people like Mazisi Kunene of South Africa whose poetry was written in Zulu and translated into English because, as of now, not many of his readers can read Zulu. The same is true of the late Okot p'Bitek of Uganda (another poet), who tried to bridge the two cultures: he wrote in his native language, Acholi, and then translated his poetry into English, so that today *Song of Lawino* can be enjoyed by millions of readers outside his own language group. In my own case as a creative writer, I try to bridge these two cultures I've inherited by transliterating from some of the indigenous African languages spoken in South Africa into English (this is often done with words I can't translate). There are things a writer can do, in English or French, to capture the current state of his culture in his work, which is a conglomeration of Africa and the West.

OKELLA: Thank you.

> The three of them were sitting on the damp earth, their backs against the dung-daubed brush-wall and their knees drawn up to their chests, when another man walked up and crouched beside them.
>
> 'Have you heard?' said one of them excitedly. 'Broken-Nose Jabbar's done it again! You know Jabbar, the fellow who brings all those women from the mountain villages and sells them in the plain? Well, this time he's come down with a couple of real beauties. The lads of Misdik have got together and bought one of them on the spot, and now they're having fun and making her dance and all that . . . . It's unbelievable! Where does the fellow find so many women? How does he get them to come with him? He's the devil's own son, he is . . . . '
>
> 'Well, that's how he makes a living,' commented one of the men. 'Ever since I can remember, this Jabbar's been peddling women for the villages of the Chukurova plain. Allah provides for all and sundry . . . .'

The ease of exposition coincides with the ironic ease with which a dehumanising abnormality, the turning of women into mere objects of commerce, has become normal. This creates an ambiguity within the reader, the kind of tense ambiguity which makes for reading enjoyment, in which the narrative style appears to validate an objective social condition which, at the same time, begs to be condemned. Kemal, therefore, dooms us to 'enjoy' injustice as we condemn it. This is a critical tension that stays with us throughout the story. In other words, we accept, as readers, the human validity of the situation before us while asking, at the same time, what terrible social conditions can produce such human beings. The irresistible sense of story, together with the detailed social realism, immediately engage us on two levels: that of imaginative involvement and enjoyment on the one hand, and critical evaluation on the other.

One more passage from 'A Dirty Story' will help us understand other aspects of Kemal's narrative style: how he develops setting, character, dialogue, and suggestive symbols for narrative effects:

> Down in the villages of the Chukurova plain a sure sign of oncoming spring is when the women are seen with their heads on one another's lap, picking the lice out of one another's hair. So it was, on one of the first warm days of the year. A balmy sun shone carelessly down on the fields and women were sittting before their huts on the dusty ground, busy with the lice and wagging their tongues for all they were worth. An acrid odour of sweat hung about the group. Seedy Doneh was rummaging in the hair of a large woman who was stretched full length on the ground. She decided that she had been silent long enough.
>
> 'No,' she declared, 'it's not as you say, sister! He didn't force her or anything. She simply saw those shiny yellow boots. If you're going to believe Huru! . . . She's got to deny it, of course . . . . '

The women are gossiping about the Agha's seduction of Hollow Osman's wife. Their dialogue complements their action: the gossip is as pleasurable as the 'picking of lice out of one another's hair'. In this way, the sense of community among the women is sealed, for better or for worse. This sisterhood breaks up sometimes, as when they fail to realise that the practice of wife buying undermines their own dignity. What is normal to the men, as we have seen, is normal to the women too. For example, the women's inability to sympathise with Osman's wife during her terrible ordeal makes them cruel witnesses. The sisterhood breaks up again when in 'The Baby' the women fail to come to the aid of one of them who dies in childbirth, leaving the baby in the care of a helpless man who wanders all over the desolate plains in search of someone kind enough to breast-feed his child. But sometimes, as in 'Drumming-Out', the sisterhood can rise to heroic proportions in the fight against the injustice threatening their very lives.

Another feature of the above quote is how it depicts the human tendency to adjust social habits according to changing seasons. Indeed, in all of Kemal's stories we are made conscious of seasons, particularly summer. The hot sun becomes the summer's predominant image. So are the hot dry land and the dust. These conditions are an everpresent background to the people's consciousness. Nevertheless, they go about their business, and, as everywhere, are attempting to bring some semblance of meaning into their lives.

There is also the omnipresent wealth and power of the landowners, the Aghas, whose corruption is probably the most predominant political-economic concern in the plains of Anatolia. In a society that hovers precariously between feudal and capitalistic social formations, the owner of land, that ultimate source of the means of survival, wields almost unlimited power. He can ruin land for profit ('Drumming-Out'); he can kill off competition ('Drumming-Out' and 'The Shopkeeper'); he can bribe government either with money or with high sounding patriotic phrases, and he can seduce women with impunity. Kemal, almost unobtrusively, dots here and there the symbols of the Aghas' wealth: shiny yellow boots, white trousers, and brand new cars. It is germane to point out that a lesser writer would probably have been tempted, in order to 'strike a blow' for justice, to dwell overly on these symbols, thus getting out of us more indignation, and less understanding. Kemal is more interested in the actual social processes of injustice than in finished products. He dramatises these processes with much skill, allowing the nefarious activities of the Aghas to *condemn themselves* through their *dramatised* effects.

It seemed to me that there existed a disturbing silence in South African literature as far as peasants, as subjects of artistic attention, were concerned.

Overall, *Anatolian Tales* is an unsentimental yet sympathetic portrayal of peasant life with all its jealousies, vindictiveness, cruelty, powerlessness in the face of the wealthy, and in the ease with which peasant solidarity can break up under stress. But all those foibles are brought out under the control of the writer's deep creative understanding of his subjects. The peasants are never seen as debased human ghosts inviting only condescending sympathy or pity. They are disturbingly too human for that. The realistic setting, moreover, enables us to understand that the peasant condition is not attributable to some mysterious forces of the 'human condition'. They are what they are largely as a result of a particular kind of life in a given set of physical conditions. Some triumph against these conditions; others are destroyed by them. The result of all this, for the reader, is a kind of understanding that is much deeper than any direct 'message' of 'instruction'. Deeper, because the stories are an occasion not for easy messages, but for asking further questions.

The endings of all Kemal's stories in this collection, leave us thinking. In the lengthy stories, the ending comes with defeat, and we leave the stories with an uncomfortable feeling of gloom. But this gloom is always accompanied by a kind of quiet, contemplative indignation. There is no resignation, only a quiet determination to find answers. The shorter stories on the other hand, share a rare kind of lyrical triumph. But the lyricism is never allowed to become

sentimental. It is always grounded in the actual needs of survival; the cart and the reeds in 'On the Road'; the onion, pine trees and springs in 'Green Onions'; the kiln in 'White Trousers', and just retribution in 'The Shopkeeper'. In these stories, the peasants achieve some victory. But this is no false heroism, for Kemal seems to be aware that to imbue his peasants with undeserved heroism is to condescend towards them, to despise them, to reduce their humanity in an effort that would turn them into mere items in a moral or political debate. Kemal strenuously avoids the kind of heroism that scores points without being, at the same time, a celebration of *achieved* triumph. In the shorter stories, therefore, we are left with a hope that makes us contemplate the validity and worthiness of those moments in life that are joyful: that affirm it.

> Only the whites have some access to the best educational facilities. This means that any research of radical interest which, by definition, has to emanate from, and its evaluation be situated in, the very current of the African struggle as it evolves, has no organic relationship with that struggle.

III

I became aware, after I had read Kemal's stories, that I did not remember ever coming across as compelling a body of fiction about peasant life in South Africa. It then seemed to me that there existed a disturbing silence in South African literature as far as peasants, as subjects of artistic attention, were concerned. There have, of course, been stories here and there. A lot of fiction in the African languages, Zulu or Sesotho, for example, is set in the rural areas. But, almost invariably, the setting soon shifts to the towns; or, if not, the writers, armed with Christian zealousness, are merely concerned with eradicating 'superstition'. Seldom do we see peasants, *in their own right*, struggling to survive against the harsh conditions of nature or man-made injustice. What seems to be lacking then is an attempt at a sincere imaginative perception that sees South African peasant life as having a certain human validity, albeit a problematic one.

I became aware also, that much exciting and revealing research has been, and continues to be carried out on South African peasants by a recent crop of radical historians. Much of their work has been published by Ravan Press. But, with few exceptions, their research, and the discussions of it, appear to have been confined to the white liberal universities. Nevertheless, there has been no corresponding surge of interest in peasant subjects in our writers and artists: at least none that I am aware of. I cannot exactly make up my mind about the reasons for both the silence and for the lack of interest in response to the scholarly efforts; but I will tentatively suggest a few.

Firstly, as far as the possible response to scholarly research is concerned, we have here yet another glaring tragedy of South African life. For historical reasons, only the whites have some access to the best educational facilities. This means that any research of radical interest which, by definition, has to emanate from, and its evaluation be situated in, the very current of the African struggle as it evolves, has no organic relationship with that struggle. So it cannot enrich the struggle in the *immediate* instance. This is so from the perspective of information giving as well as the assimilation of that information. Michael Vaughan, in a recent issue of *English in Africa*, makes the following observation which is most pertinent to what I'm saying here:

> As one white academic critic, I have certainly felt myself drawn more and more to the position that the most socially significant developments in literature in South Africa are taking place in black township literature. To engage with this developing literature in a social-critical spirit has come to represent an absolute critical priority. At the same time, this engagement raises the question of critical 'address'. Black township literature is written by and for the inhabitants of black townships: its concepts, and the criticism and self-criticism that sustain and correct it are derived largely from the ideological and political milieu of the township – a milieu I do not share, except in the form of certain texts, which, furthermore, come to me divorced from their normative contextual associations.[4]

He then states, in what could easily apply to historical research, that 'academic criticism of contemporary black literature must be extremely circumscribed in its practice so long as it is deprived of contact with the writers and public of this literature'.[5] It would seem to follow then, that African fiction in South Africa would stand to benefit qualitatively if and when a radical intellectual tradition was to be effectively placed in and developed from the ranks of the mass struggle. There, the writers will also be found.

Secondly, the city appears to have held tyrannical hold on the imagination of the average African writer. The situation, no doubt, has historical roots. The South African industrial revolution occasioned a massive flow of labour from the rural areas into the towns and cities of the country. Once there, those Africans who managed to acquire an education did not have any material or compelling ideological incentives to return to their peasant origins, neither physically nor imaginatively. We are talking here not of individuals here and there who return, but of socially significant movements. So, peasant consciousness never seriously benefited from the now relatively sophisticated intellectual perspectives of its own original sons and daughters. The 'Jim comes to Jo'burg' theme was the only viable compromise. In time, Jim sank his roots firmly in Jo'burg and encouraged a tendency which validated only the city experience as worthy of artistic attention. The setting had to be Johannesburg, then Cape Town, then Durban, then . . . in descending order of importance. In effect, life outside of the major urban centres was all but obliterated. Only the miners would oftentimes be an irritating reminder, as Nat Nakasa observed.[6]

Thirdly, the perception appears to have consolidated within the ranks of the struggle that the decisive element in determining the course of the coming South African future, is the workers in the cities. That might be so, and is theoretically understandable. But what of the millions of Africans in the rural areas who, at that very decisive moment, might decide the fate of the hinterland? What of the deliberate peasantisation of urban Africans by the government through the Bantustans? The peasant position within the economic and political structures that govern the organic relationship between the urban and rural social formations might be theoretically understandable. But the peasant's *actual* aspirations, it seems, are a matter that ought not to be taken for granted.

Whatever the reasons, it does look as if, both from the political and the cultural perspectives, an important dimension has been left out of the total South African experience as that experience attempts to be conscious of

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itself and to define itself. However, one can predict the coming, in the not too distant future, of an era of urban obsession with rural areas as genuine sources of an array of cultural symbols by which to define a future cultural dispensation in South Africa. In a sense, that era has already begun. When it is running full steam ahead, that era will come with declarations asserting the need for an awareness of tradition that goes back into a peasant past. The era will doubtlessly idealise that past, thus defeating its own intentions. Perhaps the time is now in which to make a calm and objective reassessment.

One thing is clear, though. We are in the cities, anyhow, so what is the state of writing there?

In general, writers in the cities seem to be clear about one thing: that their writings should show of themselves and their writers, a commitment to political engagement. According to this view, a poem or a work of fiction should most decidedly be written and be read as offering necessary political insights. It should 'strike a blow for freedom'. Now, while most writers can agree on this aim, they may not necessarily have the same thing in mind about what implications this agreement has for the actual relationship between art and society; or, more specifically, between art and politics. The central problem here appears to lie in the often confusing paradox that art is an autonomous entity which, at the same time, derives its objective validity from and within society. This latter condition would then, by definition, appear to deny artistic autonomy. Something there is, therefore, in art that determines its autonomy; and something there is that appears necessarily to undercut that autonomy. Writers might therefore fall into two camps: according to whether they emphasise what makes for artistic autonomy, on the one hand; or, on the other hand, according to whether they emphasise the undercutting elements. It is the latter camp that is often easily defined as 'managed' or 'committed' or 'relevant'.

What so readily seems to undercut the autonomy of art is its subject matter: the specificity of setting, the familiarity of character, recognisable events in either recent or distant history, and other similar factors that ground a work firmly in the time and space. In societies such as South Africa, where social, economic, and political oppression is most stark, such conditions tend to enforce, almost with the power of natural law, overt tendentiousness in the artist's choice of subject matter, and in the handling of that subject matter. It is such tendentiousness which, because it can most easily be interpreted as 'taking a position', earns a work of art displaying it, the title of 'commitment' or 'engagement'. Clearly then, according to this attitude, artistic merit or relevance, is determined less by a work's internal coherence (a decisive principle for autonomy), than by the work's displaying a high level of explicit political preoccupation which may not necessarily be too critical of the demands of the artistic medium chosen.

If the average South African writer has chosen this kind of preoccupation, what effect has it had on his writing? One major effect is that the writing's probing into the South African experience has been largely superficial. This superficiality comes from the tendency to produce fiction that is built around the interaction of surface symbols of the South African reality. These symbols can easily be characterised as ones of either good or evil, or, even more accurately, symbols of evil on the one hand, and symbols of the victims of evil on the other hand. Thus, as far as the former kind of symbols are concerned, we will find an array of 'sell-outs,' 'baases', 'madams', policemen, cruel farmers and their overseers, bantustans, farm labour, township superintendents and their subordinate functionaries. On the other hand, the victims will be tsotsis, convicts, beggars, washerwomen, road-gang diggers, nightwatchmen, priests, shebeen kings and queens, and various kinds of 'law-abiding' citizens. All these symbols appear in most of our writings as finished products, often without a personal history. As such they appear as mere ideas to be marshalled this way or that in a moral debate. Their *human* anonymity becomes the dialectical equivalent of the anonymity to which the oppressive system consigns millions of oppressed Africans. Thus, instead of clarifying the tragic human experience of oppression, such fiction becomes grounded in the very negation it seeks to transcend.

The problem is that this kind of fiction is almost certainly the product of an ideology whose analysis of society is based on moral premises. In this view, the problems of South Africa are premised on the moral evil of apartheid. The major commitment of such a moral ideology is the *exposure* of the existence of social evil with the aim of pricking the human conscience of those responsible for that evil. The result is not knowledge but indictment; and indictment, because it assumes an accusatory stance, evokes a defensive attitude which might compel the evil-doers not to re-evaluate their position, but to push their evil producing programme fast in order that their 'utopian' aims might be realised sooner, thus proving the indictment against them false. All this is because moral ideology tends to ossify complex social problems into symbols which are perceived as finished forms of good or evil, instead of leading us towards important and necessary insights into social *processes* leading to those finished forms. Thus, showing no more than surfaces, writings influenced by such an ideology tend to *inform* without involving readers in a truly transforming experience.

Indeed, the problem of *information* in a modern capitalist society appears to be at the root of the matter. (It is not too long ago that South Africa had what was called the 'Information Scandal'.) The issue is that indictment, by its very nature, requires *information* in order to be validated. And the more dramatic the information, and the more strikingly perfect it is in its finished form as a symbol of the devastating effects of *apartheid*, then the more desirable it is as a weapon of moral war. Thus, the writer of indictment soon gives himself up to dealing with the oppressive negation on its own terms. And these terms, at their starkest, are numbing sensationalism and its consequent smothering of creative thinking. What we have is a conflict between the aim of storytelling and that of imparting social information. It is at this point that a competition between creative writing and journalism ensues. Lewis Nkosi's criticism of this 'competition' is well known.[7] In fact, it is not accurate to describe this relationship as a competitive one. Rather, what we have is creative writing's almost obsessive emulation of journalism. But Lewis Nkosi did not go far enough in his analysis of the problem.

The phenomenon of information in a capitalist society hinges on such issues as who produces the information, who interprets it, and who disseminates it. Now, to the average African writer in South Africa, naturally placed in opposition to the government by virtue of race, colour, economic, and political status, the production, interpretation, and dissemination of information by the South African government and its agencies renders such information suspect. On the other hand, information produced, interpreted and disseminated by a variety of liberal institutions is more

readily accepted because such institutions are perceived to be morally in opposition to established Government policy on matters of race relations. Such acceptance, in the evolution of African political resistance, has over the years, almost become dependence. This dependence was almost unavoidable. The liberal institutions of higher learning, liberal research agencies, and the liberal press have, by pouring out masses of information as examples of the iniquities of *apartheid*, dominated the information giving activity for the general opposition.

Furthermore, the liberal institutions' essentially anthropological interest in African society gradually consolidated a picture of African society under South African oppression as a debased society. Studies and press reports on tsotsi violence, shebeens, convicts, sexual promiscuity, faction fighting, mine compound life, 'witchdoctors', 'strange' African customs and other instances of pathetic suffering have determined the public's (both black and white) perceptions of African suffering under *apartheid*. On the other hand, African medical doctors, teachers, township musicians, lawyers and others have been condescendingly promoted as symbols of African progress. But such promotional activity produced its opposite effect; the reinforcement of the image of debasement, because what was finally seen were caricatures of sophisticated white men. Needless to say, all these images were highly marketable ones, and the press did its duty consolidating stereotypes and prejudices. In African newspapers advertising promoted, corresponding commodities of debasement: liquor, skin lightening creams, high-tar tobacco on the one hand, and correspondence schools, etc on the other hand, playing on eager hopes.

Those who have not domesticated the information gathering process at the institutional level are doomed to receive information, even about themselves, second-hand.

One can probably assert with some confidence then, that the average literate African's perception and conceptualisation of the African predicament in South Africa has been fashioned by a broad spectrum of the white liberal establishment. For example, the popularity of the *Daily Mail* and its influence in the townships over the years should always be understood within the context of the newspaper's link with Anglo-American, which in turn has more than casual links with such institutions of higher learning as the University of the Witwatersrand, and such liberal research agencies as the Institute of Race Relations, all of which belong to a specific ideological climate.

It can be surmised then, that in general the African resistance movement has not been in control of the information gathering, interpretation, and dissemination process. Under such conditions it is easy for sloganeering, defined as superficial thinking, to develop. The psychology of the slogan in these circumstances is the psychology of intellectual powerlessness. For example, the constant reference to the terrible South African Establishment as fascist, racist, imperialist, satanic, etc, while true, becomes mere verbal evocation acting as a facade for what might appear to be an empty and desperate intellectual centre lacking in firmly established traditions of intellectual rigour. The slogan is the substitution of the gut response for clarity of analysis based on systematically acquired information. Those who have not domesticated the information gathering process at the institutional level are doomed to receive information, even about themselves, second-hand. It will be argued, of course, that Africans *do* have information about themselves as the actual sufferers. That is so. But such information has only biological validity. Only institutionalised information is subject to ideological scrutiny. Unfortunately there has not been, among Africans, a consistently original intellectual and analytical base from which to domesticate information and turn it into a truly transforming tool of liberation.

...the average African writer, working under an information ethos which for him has not habituated a tradition of rigorous analysis and interpretation, produces an art of anticipated surfaces rather than one of processes . . .

Now, it is at the level of slogans that the resistance movement has traditionally turned away from the liberal establishment, in order to marshal the second-hand information against Afrikaner political power. The resulting conflict has a dimension to it that can most clearly be seen as a clash of slogans. It might be wondered why the Afrikaner resorts to slogans when he has his own information gathering, interpretation, and dissemination agencies. One possible answer is that the intellectual tradition of the Afrikaner must, with few exceptions, surely be based on one of the most profound traditions of rationalisations ever conceived, for surely they must see the evil of their own creation. It is at the point of this recognition that their own slogans begin. The purpose of Rhoodie's Information agency was precisely to market oppression through attractive packages of slogans. In this situation, it is easy to see how the marketing of oppression through the various state agencies produces its dialectical opposite: the 'marketing' of resistance. In this conflict, the slogan of oppression qualitatively equals the slogan of resistance. Both are verbal claims making little attempt to genuinely involve the 'consumers' as equals in the quest for truth.

What implications has all this had for creative writing? It should be clear. I once met a writer who gleefully told me how honoured he felt that his book of poetry had been banned by the South African censors. What I found disturbing was the ease with which the writer ascribed some kind of heroism to himself, almost glorying in a negation. It did not occur to him, of course, that the censors may have banned his work precisely because they may have seen in it their own 'games', their own tactics, their own quality of propaganda, their own vindictiveness, their own debasement. The writer may have concentrated on those aspects of social reality and the methods of treating that reality which interest the censors to the extent that the ceonsors cannot think beyond them. The censor may have seen not experience, but social information that simply conflicted with his own. The whole problem, of course, might be more complex than that. I was merely trying to challenge what seems to be a dangerously complacent attitude.

The point of the matter is that the average African writer, working under an information ethos which for him has not habituated a tradition of rigorous analysis and interpretation, produces an art of anticipated surfaces rather than one of processes: processes in character development or in social evolution, for example. He produces an art that is grounded in the negation of social debasement, where scenes of social violence and a host of examples of general social oppression become ends in themselves. As a result very little transformation in reader consciousness is to be expected since the only reader faculty engaged is the faculty of recognition. Recognition does not necessarily lead to transformation: it simply confirms. Beyond that confirmation, it may even reinforce the frustration produced by the reader's now further consolidated perception of an overwhelmingly negative social reality.

For example, it will be recalled that it was the aesthetics

of recognition that was the basis of dissatisfaction with the early poetry of Oswald Mtshali. I have also found Mtutuzeli Matshoba's depiction of social reality in his stories simply too overwhelming. His basic technique has been to accumulate fact after fact of oppression and suffering, so that we are in the end almost totally grounded in this reality without being offered, at the same time, an opportunity for aesthetic and critical estrangement. Recently, Mbulelo Mzamane has produced a novel, *The Children of Soweto,* grounded almost entirely in the events of June 16, 1976. I found no independent narrative line that permits any reader involvement beyond the act of recognition. On the contrary Sipho Sepamla's *A Ride on the Whirlwind* has an independent plot line. An African guerilla fighter has sneaked back into South Africa on a mission to kill. His arrival coincides with the events of June 16, 1976. It is this existence of a plot line that makes Sepamla's novel more narratively engaging than Mzamane's. Sepamla constantly struggles to subject the objective events to the demands of his art. He does not entirely succeed, but he is moving in the right direction.

Where lies the possible remedy then?

Basically, the demands of the craft of fiction are that a writer has to have a more than casual view of the relationship between fiction and society, or between artistic information and social information. The world of fiction demands that the writer grapples with some of the following problems which are basic to his art: setting, conflict, credible characterisation, consistent narrative point of view, the complexities of fictional language and time. Beyond these essential technical issues, a serious writer must address himself to the ideological nature of fiction, since the handling of social information, whether within the narrative, or within ordinary discourse, is always ideologically determined. The moralistic ideology of liberalism for example, has forced our literature into a tradition of almost mechanistic surface representation. On the other hand, an ideological stance which stresses, as a condition for meaningful knowledge acquisition, social or historical process will more easily dispose writers towards a more explanatory approach to fiction. To work from the perspective of process is to attempt to situate individual events within an explainable totality of social meaning.

The example of character development may serve to shed some light on what I am trying to say. In a critical appreciation of Mtutuzeli Matshoba's stories (*Staffrider*, Vol. 4, No. 3), Michael Vaughan observes that in Matshoba's work 'the whole liberal preoccupation with the individual interiority, and hence with subtle and elaborate characterisation is dispensed with. Characterisation establishes individual specificity and separateness, a function which is not relevant to Matshoba's project.' It seems clear that Vaughan's position with regard to liberal philosophy is critical. On this basis, although he does not say so explicitly, Vaughan implies that a writer's concern with subjectivity in character development may amount to a bourgeois or liberal escapism into an ethos of individualism. But is that necessarily so?

The point is not to avoid interiority, but to render it *as concretely as possible* within the unfolding logic of narrative.

Herbert Marcuse's views on the question of subjectivity in bourgeois culture are too persuasive to be easily dispensed with. He notes that:

> even in bourgeois society, insistence on the truth and right of inwardness is not really a bourgeois value. With the affirmation of the inwardness of subjectivity, the individual steps out of the network of exchange relationships and exchange values, withdraws from the reality of bourgeois society, and enters another dimension of existence. Indeed, this escape from reality led to an experience which could (and did) become a powerful force in invalidating the actually prevailing bourgeois values, namely by shifting the locus of the individual's realisation from the domain of the performance principle and the profit motive to that of the inner resources of the human being: passion, imagination, conscience. Moreover, withdrawal and retreat were not the last position. Subjectivity strove to break out of its inwardness into the material and intellectual culture. And today, in the totalitarian period, it has become a political value as a counterforce against aggressive and exploitative socialization.[8]

The point, therefore, is not to avoid interiority, but to render it *as concretely as possible* within the unfolding logic of narrative.

As I am writing this essay, I happen to be reading Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, and I have only just finished a chapter which begins in the following manner:

> The mule suddenly sat down under the priest. It was not an unnatural thing to do, for they had been travelling through the forest for nearly twelve hours. They had been going west, but news of soldiers met them there and they had turned east; the Red Shirts were active in that direction, so they had tacked north, wading through swamps, diving into the mahogany darkness. Now they were both tired out and the mule simply sat down. The priest scrambled off and began to laugh. He was feeling happy. It is one of the strange discoveries a man can make that life, however you lead it, contains moments of exhilaration; there are always comparisons which can be made with worse times: even in danger and misery the pendulum swings.[9]

Here is a man during a moment of insightful intimacy with himself; a moment of transcendence. Most wonderful in this little piece of narrative is how it makes subtle shifts in narrative point of view: how it is now outside and objective ('the mule suddenly sat down under the priest'), and now it is inside and subjective ('it was not an unnatural thing to do'). The latter is an evaluative statement that can only spring from inner reflection. In a subtle manner, we are let into the subjective life of the priest through a deceptively objective narrative stance. The picture suggested of the priest is that of a sympathetic man, grateful that his mule has, apparently, led him out of danger. The priest is deeply relieved that his keen sense of self-preservation has led him to safety. Seen in this perspective, the laughter of the priest is far from irrational. It represents a triumphant moment of inner realisation, triggered off by the sense of the priest's having momentarily overcome objective danger and finding himself in a moment of deserved celebration. Such moments are not an escape into bourgeois phantasy. On the contrary, they are moments of universal experience, and because we recognise them as such whenever we see them, we are, in this case, led into a sympathetic pact with the priest. Here is what I mean by interiority concretely rendered.

It seems clear therefore, that it is humanly unrealistic to show a revolutionary hero, for example, who has no inner doubts. All great revolutionaries from Lenin, through Nkrumah, to Che Guevara, among others, have had to grapple with inner fears, anxieties, and doubts. In appreciating this fact, one gains an insight into the human reality of their heroism. A reader, confronted with such heroism, experiences himself as potentially capable of it too, only if he could learn to find a method of dealing with his fears.

I have listened to countless storytellers on the buses and trains in South Africa. The majority of them have woven masterpieces of entertainment and instruction. Others were so popular that commuters made sure they did not miss the storytellers' trains●

'The need for radical change,' asserts Marcuse, 'must be rooted in the subjectivity of individuals themselves, in their intelligence and their passions, their drives and their goals.'[10] The specific subjectivity of character is universalised through the reader's recognition of familiar emotion generated in a given event. Thus, a reader, confronted with a *dramatisation of process* in character development, grows with the story.

Perhaps more light can be thrown on this issue if one considers the problem of the villain in a story. This is particularly pertinent to the problem of portraying functionaries of the oppressive system in South Africa: the 'mayors', 'presidents' of 'independent states', policemen, informers, etc. Is it useful, in the quest for a transforming social understanding, for a writer to always portray such characters as finished products: unaccountably vicious, cruel, malicious, fawning and greedy? Obviously not. And here, the maturity of the writer is called for, since he is called upon to be narratively fair minded even to those he socially abhors. The point is that attempting to understand the villain in all his complexity does not necessarily imply a political acceptance of him. On the contrary, it intensifies political opposition even more. Artistic compassion only situates the villain within the domain of tragic acceptance, which, in practice, translates itself into moral or political rejection. We cannot wish away evil; but genuine art makes us understand it. Only then can we purposefully deal with it.

Returning to Vaughan's discussion of Matshoba's characterisation, one would note that where the demand for a surface art emanates from within the radical intellectual movement, it becomes the dialectical opposite of the demonstrative liberal approach already seen above. It represents no qualitative improvement. On the contrary, it manages to become a liberalisation of the practice of radical dialectical thinking by appearing to give political morality an all too ready precedence over inclusive and liberating understanding.

Finally, I want to make reference to a very interesting interview of Miriam Tlali, Sipho Sepamla, and Mothobi Mutloatse, by Jaki Seroke (*Staffrider*, Vol. 4, No. 3), in which at least two issues of interest to me are raised. Firstly, Mothobi Mutloatse criticises the press for being 'so sweeping in its criticism of the new wave of black writing. They say it is too obviously political; it cannot offer anything else. We see the new writing as part of what is happening. It is a type of writing that is *perfectly suited to the times*. We need a writing that *records exactly* the situation we live in, and any writing which *ignores the urgency of political events* will be *irrelevant*.' [emphasis mine]. One might ask: in what way is writing 'perfectly suited to the times'? In what way does writing 'record exactly the situation we live in'? What kind of writing, emerging at the same time as the writing that fulfils Mutloatse's conditions, is deemed to ignore 'the urgency of political events', thus rendering itself 'irrelevant', even possibly, irrespective of the seriousness of its intention? These questions raise serious critical questions the answers to which ought not to be self-complacently taken for granted. And in addressing those questions, we may need to make a distinction between the *journalistic*, informational ambience on the one hand, and the *storytelling*, narrative ambience on the other.

For example, Miriam Tlali complains that she has been accused of speaking 'about the matters just as they are instead of building them into the emotions of the reader. As if it's just reporting.' But why is the parting scene at the end of Tlali's novel, *Amandla*, so effective? It's because the hero and his girl *are in love*. Any situation that forces lovers apart will invite our condemnation. Now, the vast majority of people, I think, enjoy reading about lovers. Almost all of us are, or were, or will be lovers. Thus, we can feel with Tlali's lovers, we can identify with their problem. What Tlali has done is build into her characters 'the emotions of the reader': the very thing which Tlali, in this interview, appears not to want her work to be associated with. Clearly, the artist in her, repudiates the critic in her. In any case, *Amandla* is, in my opinion, the best of the novels written on the events of June 16, 1976. It surpasses, in the quality of its art, Sepamla's *A Ride on the Whirlwind*, and Mzamane's *Children of Soweto*. Tlali was not 'just reporting', she was telling a story.

When Sipho Sepamla in the interview agrees with Miriam Tlali that 'we have to go to the people', for 'it is the man in the street that I feel we must listen to', he is probably establishing the premise on which is based one fundamental assumption shared by all three writers: that the 'political' writers are writing what the African masses really want. Is that assumption a valid one? When Sepamla listens to 'the man in the street' what does he hear? I have listened to countless storytellers on the buses and trains carrying people to and from work in South Africa. The majority of them have woven masterpieces of entertainment and instruction. Others were so popular that commuters made sure they did not miss the storytellers' trains. The vast majority of the stories were either tragedies or comedies about lovers, township jealousies, the worries of widows; about consulting medicine men for luck at horse racing, or luck for getting a job or for winning a football match; about fantastic ghost stories (let's remember here Bheki Maseko's *'Mamlambo'*, *Staffrider*, Vol. 5 No. 1; here is a writer who has listened to the man in the street, and heard); they have woven satires about the assassination of Verwoerd by Tsafendas (even the art of stabbing in the townships became, 'I will tsafenda you'); they have woven stories about helicopter weddings, about African soldiers seeing ships, the sea and Europe for the first time in World War II. And we have to face the truth here: there were proportionally fewer overtly political stories. When they talked politics, they talked politics; when they told stories, they told stories. If any political content crept into the stories, it was domesticated by a fundamental interest in the evocation of the general quality of African life in the township. Where is the concept of 'relevance' here?

When we turn to the lyrics of the vast majority of popular songs in 'soul' and mbaqanga music, we find a similar situation: lyrics about infidelity, about the relationships between women and their in-laws, about going to work early in the morning, about weddings, about the joys of music. As I am writing, a new hit is ringing in my mind. The lyrics tell school children to heed the school bell summoning them to go and learn how to read, write, count, and sing. Then I am reminded of Thamsanqa's story 'Have You Seen Sticks?' (*Staffrider*, Vol. 4, No. 3), and then the entire African experience of going to school in South Africa is laid bare before me, accompanied by an exhilaration emerging from my having been given the opportunity to recall, to reflect and to evaluate a communal experience in all the townships of South Africa; indeed, the world over.

'All the writer needs to understand is that he can only be genuinely committed to politics through a commitment to the demands of his art.'

In all these stories and songs, I am made conscious of Africans in South Africa as makers of culture in their own right. I am made conscious of them as philosophers, asking ultimate questions about life, moral values, and social being. And I am forced to conclude that if the conscious political will does not embrace this totality, it is bound to come out with a skewed vision of the future. I am aware too, that we *do* have novels which address themselves to this totality: Dikobe's *Marabi Dance*; Nyembezi's *Inkisela Yase Mgungundlovu*; Mofolo's *Chaka*; Jordan's *Ingqambo Yeminyanya*; Boetie's *Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost*; Mphahlele's *In Corner B*, and more recently, the stories of Matlou and Bheki Maseko in *Staffrider*. What is common to these writers is that they are storytellers, not just case makers. They give African readers the opportunity to experience themselves as makers of culture. They make it possible for people to realise that in the making of culture, even those elements of life that are seen not to be *explicitly* resistance oriented, are valid. Indeed, the latter may upon reflection (crucial to the undercutting of the ethos of the market place) be found to represent a much wider, and richer, because more inclusive, context of resistance. The matter is simple: there is a difference between art that 'sells' ideas to the people, and that whose ideas are *embraced* by the people, because they have been made to understand them through the evocation of lived experience in all its complexities. In the former case, the readers are anonymous buyers; in the latter, they are equals in the quest for truth. All the writer needs to understand is that he can only be genuinely committed to politics through a commitment to the demands of his art.

There is one other thing that emerges from the *Staffrider* interview. There appears to be a rather disturbing anti-intellectual attitude in Sepamla and Tlali with regard to the practice of literary criticism. We have just seen above how Tlali's artistic practice contradicts her own critical assertions. She continues later: 'Writing is an art like all the other art forms and it should not be pipelined or squeezed in a watertight channel.' Isn't this what the critics are in fact saying? They wouldn't agree more, for they perceive the literary situation to the narrow-minded and 'pipelined or squeezed' in its artistic orientation. It seems to me that Miriam Tlali may not have fully and carefully thought out the implications of her own artistic practice, and all too readily dismisses the critic who, if he is serious and genuine, might *legitimately* raise issues that may clarify her own position.

About readers and critics, Miriam Tlali declares: 'It is the reader who must judge, not these masters of literature.' One might ask: are critics not readers too? Of course, what she means is that she prefers the judgement of the enthusiastically uncritical average reader (she is after all one up on them – she spent much thought in composing her novels), to the judgement of one who may painstakingly have spent much thought in trying *to understand* her work. I do not believe that is what she really desires, for she goes on to say: 'it is quite a task to write. In the first place you have to be fortunate enough to have an education which can enable you to express yourself.' Although Tlali accepts the importance of education, she does not go far enough. One result of education is heightened, critical awareness which will not shy away from applying that awareness to literature. Surely this is what she wants!

...Since the world and the people on it are the writer's business, he has to constantly enlarge his intellectual horizons regarding his key focus. There seems no escape from this necessity.

Furthermore, Tlali is surely correct in complaining that 'so-called critics labour under a misconception in that they say that in order to write you have to be a literary scholar'. A writer does not have to be a literary scholar in the academic sense. But then, it is useful to note what Henry James, the United States writer, has to say on the issue. 'There is,' he says, 'one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together, that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that intelligence is fine will the novel, the picture, the statue partake of the substance of beauty and truth.'[11] At the root of this sentiment is the requirement that since the world and the people on it are the writer's business, he has to constantly enlarge his intellectual horizons regarding his key focus. There seems no escape from this necessity.

Sepamla echoes Tlali on the question of critics: 'Instead of encouraging a person who is making an attempt we try to destroy this person. What we hope to gain mystifies me. There is nothing that a so-called critic will gain by destroying this book. Instead he will prevent the black people from making progress.' Sepamla goes on to lament the fact that 'some of these critics are Black Consciousness adherents'. Firstly, there is a danger here that critics might be accused of being unpatriotic simply because we do not agree with what they say. Secondly, does it mean that 'Black Consciousness adherents' must uncritically rave enthusiastically about anything written? Nothing could be more dangerous to the struggle than the suppression of criticism. The two attitudes above are not only anti-intellectual, they are also essentially undemocratic. If we want to struggle towards a genuinely democratic future, then we must be prepared to subject *everything* to rigorous intellectual scrutiny followed by open and fearless discussion. Writers and critics can make their contribution too. The future is too demanding on us for us to feel sorry for ourselves.

We have come a long way from Turkish tales. The thoughts they have triggered no doubt need further discussion. I could not at this stage go beyond a preliminary identification and statement of key problems. The Turkish tales, I believe, contain the essence of what is universal in the art of narrative. My attention was then necessarily turned home, where I believe we should produce works that will not only inspire us through the enchanting powers of art, but will also be embraced well beyond our borders as a joyful lesson too.

NOTES

1. See Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations* Harry Zohn (trans), (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970).
2. Walter Benjamin, p 84.
3. Andrew Mango; *Turkey*, (London, Thames & Hudson, 1983), pp 122-3.
4. Michael Vaughan, 'Ideological Directions in the Study of Southern African Literature,' *English in Africa*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1982, p 62.
5. Michael Vaughan, p 63.
6. Nat Nakasa, 'Johannesburg Johannesburg', *The Classic*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1966, p 19.
7. Lewis Nkosi, 'Fiction by Black South Africans', in *Introduction to African Literature*, ed. Ulli Beier (London: Longmans, 1967), p 222.
8. Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetic*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), pp 4-5.
9. Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (UK: Penguin Books, 1962), p 59.
10. Herbert Marcuse, p 3.
11. Henry James, *The House of Fiction*, ed. L Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957), p 44.

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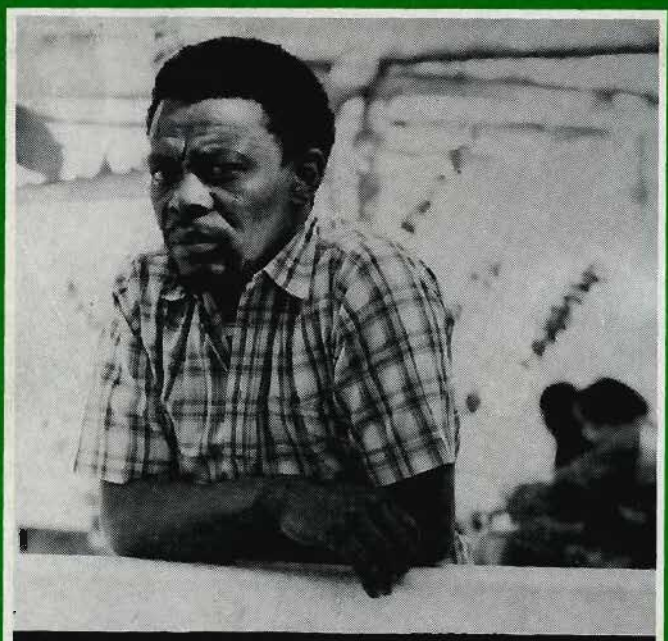
Photo Diary

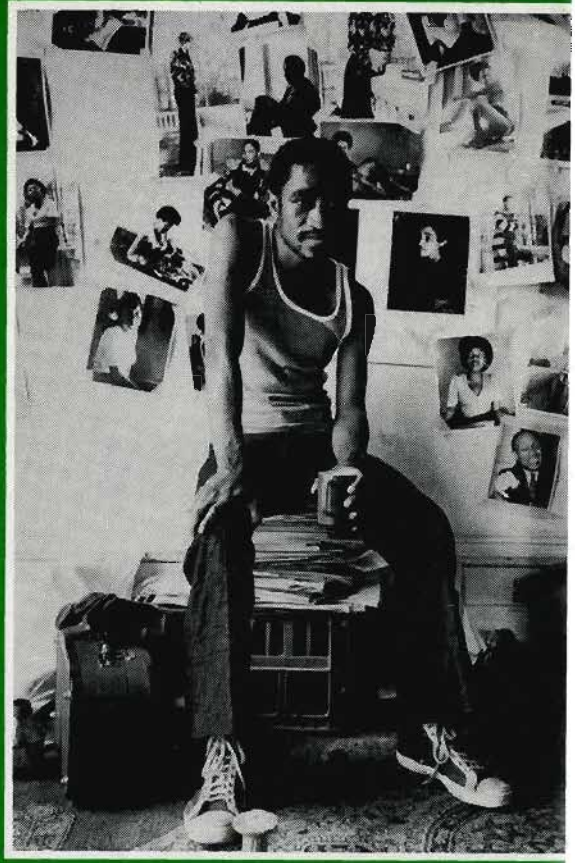
George Hallett



Mongane Serote, author in exile, Botswana 1982.

Eugene Skeef, musician, actor and artist in exile in London

Bessie Head, author in exile, Botswana 1982



Mongezi Feza, trumpet player who died in exile in London