

Staffrider

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ESIQITHINI

MY BLOOD by Walt OyiSipho ka Mtetwa

The LiteMaster Story



NEW BOOKS FROM RAVAN



FATHER COME HOME

Es'kia Mphahlele



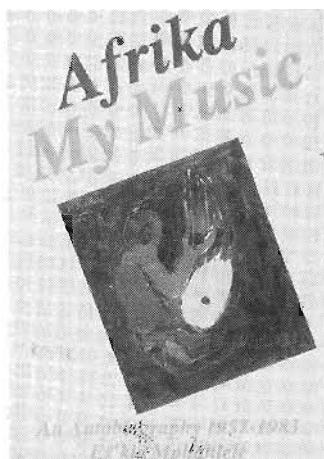
FATHER COME HOME
by Es'kia Mphahlele

It is 1913, the year of the Natives' land Act. Thousands of black South Africans are driven off the land. The 'Native Reserves' where they are now supposed to live are mainly arid, infertile, and overpopulated. Men flock in their thousands to the mines and the cities in search of work, leaving their wives and children at home.

Fourteen year old Maredi Tlulano from the village of Sedibeng faces life without his father, who has left home, as part of the pain and trauma of growing up. Restless and on the threshold of manhood he sets out on a quest for the missing man. Alone and inexperienced, he is going down a dangerous road . . .

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by Es'kia Mphahlele

Es'kia Mphahlele's first work of autobiography, *Down Second Avenue*, is one of the classics of African literature. After that seedtime came the years of exile during which — he was a 'listed' person — none of his works could be read in South Africa.

His second autobiography, *Afrika My Music*, is set amidst the tumultuous years of his return to South Africa after 1976. 'Bantu Education' — the system which had forced him out of teaching and into exile when it was introduced in the Fifties — had triggered the Soweto Revolt barely a month before he returned to his native land after twenty years in Europe, Africa and the United States.

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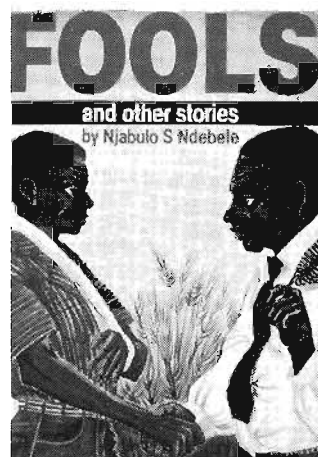
edited by Essop Patel



THE WORLD OF CAN THEMBA
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Can Themba's understanding of the black townships of Johannesburg was 'intuitive, complete and magical' in the words of the publisher of *Drum*, the magazine in which much of his work appeared. As the presiding spirit in 'The House of Truth', as his Sophiatown matchbox was known, he was unquestionably one of the most important South African writers of the Fifties. The publication in one volume of a wider selection of his work than has previously been available — poems, reportage, brief biographies and extended anecdotes as well as the incomparable stories — is an important literary milestone.

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FOOLS AND OTHER STORIES
Staffrider Series No 19
by Njabulo S Ndebele

'Fools', the title story in this collection, is a tale of generations in the struggle against oppression. Zamani is a middle-aged teacher who was once respected by the community as a leader or the future. Then he disgraced himself, and now he's haunted by the impotence of this present life. A chance meeting brings him up against Zani, a young student activist whose attempts to kindle the flames of resistance in Charterston Location are ludicrously impractical. Both affection and hostility bind Zamani and Zani together in an intense and unpredictable relationship. Finding each other means finding the common ground of their struggle. It also means re-examining their lives — and, notably, their relationships with women.

R6.95

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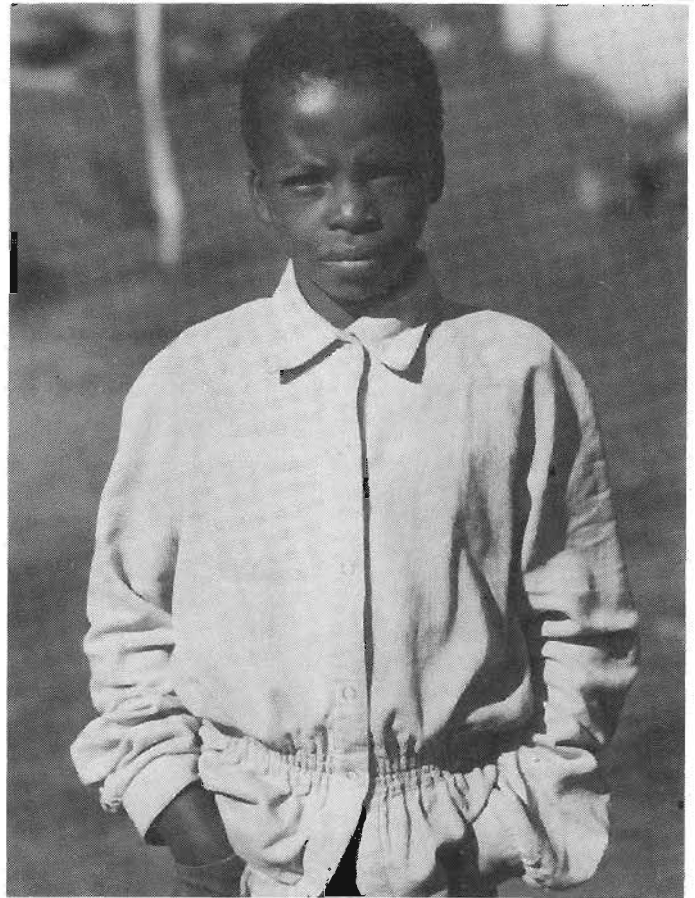
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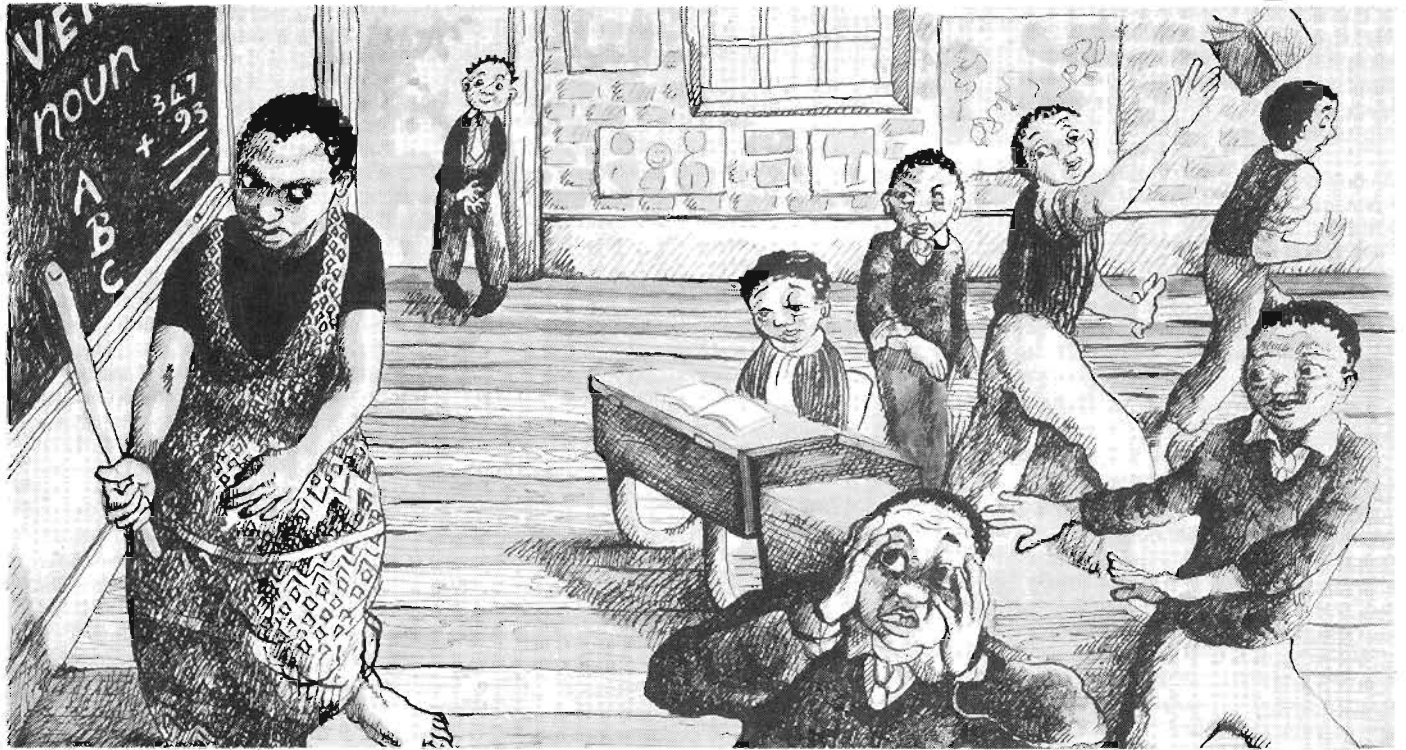
RECENTLY UNBANNED

CALL ME NOT A MAN
Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Ravan Press, 1979

The stories of Mtutuzeli Matshoba, some of which were published in *Staffrider* have won him instant respect from a wide range of readers. Matshoba's works cut open the nightmare of suffering and hatred with acutely chosen themes and a profoundly compassionate authorial presence. The setting of the stories is Soweto after 1976. The ban imposed on this Ravan bestseller was lifted in March 1985.

Those Were the Days

by Bheki Maseko
Illustrations by Susan Strachan



We must have been at least two hundred in that class. Most of us sat on the cement floor, only the tough guys occupied the few benches in the classroom. That was my first year at Sibongile Lower Primary School.

Referring back to my young mind I can still remember, though faintly, that we had two teachers. But I just cannot recall how they taught us.

Our lessons commenced at 12 noon and elapsed at five in the afternoon. Life was tough because of a guy called Monde, and his mischievous friends. The sound of the finishing bell, after the teachers had left for the staffroom, brought both relief and worry. It was the beginning of the scramble to the door with Monde and his gang in hot pursuit, stabbing us with rulers, pencils and pieces of wood.

In our class we had many boys and girls who had reached adolescence. But Bhatata, a squat heavily built guy, was the oldest. Provocative as Monde was even to older guys, he never tried it with Bhatata who was very quiet and reserved. They wouldn't dare to giggle when he could not read further than 'umama-u-u' from our text book.

One day during the rush I fell flat on my stomach, sliding on the cement floor. I broke my new slate. Ignoring the pain, I quickly stood up and looked

helplessly at the pieces scattered on the floor. Monde and the gang, imitating Barbarians we saw in action-packed Westerns, roared with laughter. My spirits broken, I picked up the pieces and limped slowly towards the gate. The fact that the slate was one day old and the fourth one since the beginning of the year demoralized me all the more. 'Break this one and I'll see where you get another one,' was a stern warning from mother. Nevertheless, a few slaps on the buttocks, and she would buy me a new one.

Mondays were check days for clean slates and uniforms. Mkhethwa, who used to sit next to me, and Killer, one of Monde's band, were regular victims of this check-up. Sometimes Mkhethwa's black trousers, which had a big white patch at the back, looked as if it had been slept in. He was from Zululand and the guys called him 'the lion that sleeps in the dark forests of Africa'. His ill-shaped face really did remind one of a lion.

I took the old slate and started writing. I had a strong desire to inform the teacher but lacked the courage to do so.

It was common those days to see black trousers with a big white patch on the back. Probably a piece from a mealie-meal sack with the trade name INDUNA still visible. And derisively, the guys would remark 'usebenza eGoli unepshi endunu' (you work in the City of Gold but you have a patch on the buttocks).

One afternoon the check-up was over and it was time to write, after the reading from Scripture. To my utter surprise, in place of my new slate that I had put on the floor beside me, was an old badly cracked slate. I took a desperate look around but it was nowhere to be seen.

I looked over my shoulder at the gang seated in the corner, they were all deeply concentrating on their work. The guy whose face I desperately wanted to see was Monde. But, most unfortunately, my view was obstructed.

Reluctantly, I took the old slate and started writing. I had a strong desire to inform the teacher but lacked the courage to do so. I knew one of the gang must have taken it.

Overwhelmed with anger, I stood up to have a good view of Monde — he was writing on my slate. Without wasting any time I forced my way through and snatched it before he could pass it on to his friends. I then crouched

quickly back to my place. When I looked back he gave me an 'I'll get you' look.

When the bell rang that afternoon, I was among the first group at the door. But I got two stabs and a good punch on the head before I could get out.

Winter was the most terrible season. There was a small stove in the centre of the classroom. Each pupil contributed a few cents or pieces of coal to keep the fire burning. But the stove was too small to warm the whole class and besides, most of the window-panes were broken. Only the teachers and those in front enjoyed the heat. Although we took turns in sitting at the front not everybody got his share, due to the high number of the class.

On Fridays we used to get rations of a powder-like stuff called phuzamandla, a kind of porridge. It was served by older boys in each class but Monde, young and diminutive as he was, was one of the servers in our class.

It was the survival of the strongest because one had to fight like mad to stay in the queue, and some went home with empty mugs or tins. Monde's ilk usually took home a larger share than most. The teachers stayed aloof to avoid being pestered over a matter they could not solve.

Bhatata never came back after failing his Sub A. He became the boss of the Navarones gang.

On Fridays we were dismissed earlier and the whole school would gather in an open space in front of the classrooms for prayers.

One day, after our rations of phuzamandla, we assembled. Miss Masuku, the feared one, conducted the service. She told us in no uncertain terms to put our mugs and tins down before we started praying.

Reluctantly I placed my mug on the ground and clutched it between my feet, keeping a vigilant eye on Monde and his friends. He was in the next row, pretending to be oblivious of my presence. To accentuate his indifference he stood on his toes as if trying to peep over the shoulder of a tall guy standing before him. He always stood behind tall guys. Every day the teachers would order him to stand at the front. But the next day he would be back to his place at the back.

I knew this tiny guy's presence meant trouble. I was right because when I opened my eyes after we had chanted amen, my mug was nearly empty. And there, between my mug and his feet,

was the tell-tale trail of phuzamandla.

So angry was I that I did not even wait for the teacher to dismiss us. I grabbed him by the scruff of his shirt and seized the mug he was trying to keep out of my reach behind him.

Clinging to my shirt front with his left hand, he tried to get hold of the mug I was holding up in the air with the other. The mug tipped, spilling the contents which painted his face white. It was the intervention of Miss Masuku that saved me from the gang's punches that had begun to rain on me.

I did not need to do much explaining; the headmaster knew her regular visitors very well. They received more cuts than I did.

Bhatata never came back after failing his Sub A. He became the boss of the Navarones gang, a position Monde & Company viewed with envy. Usually, during lunch or after school, (after the Municipal police pass raiders had passed) the Navarones would prance down the street past the school – their hats pulled over their eyes and their trousers hanging low on their hips. Sometimes we found them smoking grass at the shops. We would watch with envy mixed with awesome fear. But they never bothered us – they had no time for small fish.

In Standard One I made friends with a lanky fellow called Edward Masondo. I may attribute our friendship to the fact that we were both victims of harassment. But most unfortunately, we took different directions after school and so could not share our fear.

Edward was very fond of speaking English whenever conversing with me. I often wonder how we communicated in this foreign language because I could never distinguish English from Afrikaans then. I usually identified Afrikaans with the word 'doen' which was commonly used in the text book. But it bothered me that I did not know who 'doen' was. At times I thought it was the boy wearing a cap on the cover of the book. All the same we did communicate. I wish now that I had had a tape recorder.

Because of his small round face, the gang called Edward 'Babyface'. He hated this name more than anything else which inspired them to intensify its use. The fact that he was always dressed formally might have added to his vulnerability and their acts of provocation.

I was called Gandaganda (tractor) because of my big feet. With my sister's advice I ignored them and this discouraged provocation, but the name stuck. Later they modernized it to Gandy.

One day Edward brought his bicycle to school which in those days was very

The bike was in the toilet. We found it hanging from the rafters.

uncommon. After school he was in for a surprise. The gang hung around his bike like flies hang around a rotten carcass. Monde wanted a short ride – just a short one, while Killer sat on the rear parcel carriage, holding on to Edward's neat blazer urging him to cycle on. Some threw awkward questions at him while others rocked the bike. His small face flushed, Edward was close to tears.

At last he got free after getting a powerful shove that nearly drove him into a fence. I felt sorry for Edward but intervention would have been just inviting more molesting on my side.

He brought his machine again the next day and put it in front of the principal's office, chaining the back wheel to the frame of the bicycle.

When the bell rang that afternoon my joy for a promised short ride diminished when the gang entered my mind. I was so obsessed with the machine I had absolutely forgotten about them. To our utter surprise, the bike was missing. Edward's face reddened with anger.

We tripped round the school yard, Edward leading the way. The gang kept a low profile, laughing openly now and then.

Eventually a good Samaritan told us the bike was in the toilet. We found it hanging from the rafters. Edward wanted to report the matter to the principal but quickly decided against it. He must have thought of the harassment he would be inviting. After all, Monde visited the principal's office nearly every day, but that did not change him. They bid him farewell by throwing orange peels at him.

The next day he put the bicycle in the same place, chaining it to the pole this time. When we knocked off, both wheels were flat and the valves were missing. He had no option but to wheel it home.

'Babyface, why don't you ride your bicycle?' ridiculed Monde, his lips twisted into a smile of satisfaction.

His face contorted in bitterness, Edward continued to wheel his squeaking machine, casting an angry look time and again at this pint sized guy wearing oversized trousers and a tie for a belt. Looking up at him with a mocking smile, he adjusted his trousers now and then.

'You remind me of a teacher from

The teacher had hardly dismissed us when Edward gave him a hard one between the eyes, followed by a hot one from me.

the farms, Babyface, the only difference is that you wheel your bike instead of riding it. Had it not been for Monde's friends, who roared with laughter behind them, Edward would have strangled him. He never brought the bicycle again.

One day, just after lunch, a heavily built woman clad in traditional Zulu attire and carrying two sticks, stormed into the class. Mkhethwa followed timidly close behind her.

'Sa-wu-bo-na ma-ma!' we chanted as usual when an elder entered the classroom. But she ignored us and went straight to the teacher who was looking startingly at the woman.

'Where's the tsotsi who's provoking my child?' demanded the woman glaring at our teacher.

The teacher stared back in bafflement.

'I say where's the tsotsi who's provoking my child, can't you hear?' charged the woman pointing one stick at Mkhethwa and stamping the floor with the other. 'My child is called the lion that sleeps in the dark forests of Africa right under your nose and you tell me that you don't know. Today he was even robbed of his money for lunch.'

'Where's this tsotsi?' demanded the woman turning to Mkhethwa who quickly surveyed the room but could not locate Monde and Killer who had taken refuge beneath a bench.

Someone must have informed the headmaster for she entered the classroom and managed to cool the woman down. The culprits were hauled out, summoned to the office and punished.

Among the Standard Twos there was a stout guy with large ears and protruding cheeks called Vincent. He was new at school and Monde must have regretted his arrival because he played rough, especially with the gang, who feared him. The guys called him Vulture.

He called Monde Mousy, usually in the presence of the girls. Although Monde hated this name he never answered back. With suppressed anger he would only stretch his little mouth to its furthest, and eye Vincent with intense dislike. This indeed made Monde look like a mouse.

'I'm V.V.M. - Vincent Vezokwakhe Mthombeni!' Vulture would boast,



swaggering and eyeing each member of the gang with contempt. 'Anyone object to V.V. Mthombeni?' When none of the gang objected he would roar with laughter, pounding his chest with clenched fists. The guys would cry at the top of their voices, 'V.V.M!' with a discreet 'Vulture!' thrown in here and there. This usually happened while we waited for the music teacher, where Standard Ones and Twos were combined.

Vincent was popular because he did not trouble anybody and many made friends with him for protection. The gang avoided him as much as possible because he sometimes shoved them out of his way whenever he was in the mood.

The school was closing for the winter holidays and Edward wanted to bid Monde a fond farewell.

'I want to give him a chilly one,' he said biting his lower lip and demonstrating with his open hand. 'I want him to see flying stars.' I readily offered to give a hand in the attack.

When we assembled for prayers that

day, we stood in the row behind Monde's, my heart drumming in my ears. The teacher had hardly dismissed us when Edward gave him a hard one between the eyes, followed by a hot one from me that left my hand burning. Without waiting for the outcome we took flight in different directions. before his friends could realise what had happened. I was out of the school yard when I looked back and found them still standing there, watching me. Realising that I wasn't being pursued I stopped and started laughing breathlessly.

'We'll get you!' cried the gang in a chorus.

'Go to hell!' I responded waving them goodbye.

The way I was gloating one would have sworn that I was going for an infinite holiday - not for three weeks that would lapse soon subjecting me to Monde's music.

You had to be on the alert on the last day of school because people tended to bid you farewell by slapping you and running for it. Those were the days my brothers and sisters.

I've Heard the Rhythm of Your Blood-Flow

I
Murungi
You who bear the name of Upright One
Oh Straightforward One
why curse me with silence, my beloved
your love is the dying summer
it has paled, discoloured and fallen.

Murungi
Oh Straightforward One
why strike me with silence, my beloved
your eyes are the autumn
which pales, discolours and falls.

Oh Beloved Best Beloved
your silence is a rack
upon which I lie
stretched out no more
under you your thighs
wood-hard polished ebony
your high cheeks
your eyes
divulging all secrets
are stunning and alluring
as the earth's most precious jewels.

Murungi
whose father and father's brother
swore the oath of Batuni
allegiance to Mau Mau
whose cousin Karega was tortured
whose cousin Karega was murdered
whose mother was violated
at the hand of Royalists
and you a small boy looked on.

II
Murungi, Oh Beloved
you have returned to the land of your beginning
and I have turned to mine.
This my land is a strange, strange one
that prohibits me to love and know Afrika
as I have loved and known you.
This land is a cruel cruel one
to pronounce our love a crime.
Under your covers you asked of me
Can it be so?
I answered
Yes it is so.
On a night you asked of me
Will not the Law of Nature triumph?
Will men not be free
I answer Oh yes Beloved
It will be so.

III
Murungi The Upright One
Straightforward One
You are Afrika.

I held you sensuous and languid in these my pale arms
heard the rhythm of your blood-flow
received your honey-sweetness
and you mine.

Murungi Man of Honour
why punish me with silence?
Know you not that I am bleeding
tortured thoughts and limbs?

You identify me with the oppressor?
I am filthy Mzungu?
The predator?

Oh tear out my heart
toss it to hyenas
limbs to the lion
the sorcerer my soul.

I am bewitched.

S.G.K.

girls

leaf-twig hair,
red straw in
your shadows,
in your eyes
of mint the
chastity of
forgotten
carnivals; your
music is the rain
of the quiet, your
haste the stoney
sludge of fools.

Roy Joseph Cotton

delicate

bird rustle of
morning Sparkles
like silver songs,
Bombarding the
intricacies of
the Monotony –
with a tinkle

Roy Joseph Cotton

R

by Michael Goldberg

unaway recollections

That I had to run away from home was preordained — astrologically infused in the stars, the sun and the moon and the planets. Destination Gillian's. I was eight years old and problems were already packing in preponderously on my weary shoulders. Problems both at home and abroad — even as far afield as the exotic heady pastures of school.

Father was preoccupied at work, wherever that was, and no longer afforded me the attention I deserved as first born and heir. Little brother was presently indulging with abandon in assinely puerile pastimes, and still bedwetting to boot. Mother was heavy with child, blossoming about in maternal blooms, totally oblivious of the treachery she was creating by undermining my rightful position as heir apparent — for the second time.

Five and six had been tough as hell in Grade One — starting big school and all. Seven years old in Grade Two had been a breeze. In fact I could have skipped Grade Two it had been so easy. Now eight in Standard One was proving to be just as traumatic as Grade One. I never realised that the world was filled with such happenings, such contemplations, such revelations. Everyone was doing so much! Everyone had done so much! Their fathers and grandfathers and the rest of the paternal line, not to mention the maternals eternal — they had all been such busy bees making history and now I had to learn all about it. What with double vowel sounds, some of which I was still a bit shaky with, Afrikaans, Arithmetic, etc. etc., I now had to learn History as well! It could not be done! There surely were not enough hours in the day! Limits to life, learning and all.

I had discussed it with Louis during one cram session of spelling and we had made a pact to speak to the headmaster if the pressure hadn't let up by the end of winter. The seasons were my timescale. The God-given vagaries of the weather fascinated and terrified me. I mean, winter was okay and all, but what if God forgot (after all He had so much to do) and spring never came again? Anyway we were going to learn all about the whys and wherefores of the weather in Standard Two — as if I didn't



Illustrated by Percy Sedumedi

We were the only sweethearts in the class, lovers in the true sense of the word. We once even played "Doctor Doctor".

have enough on my plate already.

Sultry summer at the beginning of the year had by way of some pre-conceived design, given way to the autumnal tumbling of the leaves to clothe the earth in a multihued mantle of nature's fabric. Winter hit us one day with her cold front from the Antarctic somewhere and we huddled up in front of the heater in the classroom with a new-found camaraderie. Man against the elements.

Anyway Louis and I had this arrangement to speak to our teacher's boss when the first silkworm hatched in whoever's silkworm box, it didn't matter — speak to him about the labour of learning at such a rate. In the meantime since the onset of winter, Louis was irritating me beyond belief. We shared a desk and he was constantly rubbing his legs to keep himself warm. Rubbing, constantly rubbing, it didn't matter what subject we were learning. It wouldn't have been so bad, after all he had a right to the personal maintenance of his body temperature, but

with each forward thrust of his arms along his thighs he bumped the underside of the bench and then with each return, it jolted back to its former state of rest. For goodness sake, man, a boy had trouble enough learning real writing at the best of times, but caligraphy under these formidable conditions was a pipe dream! I told the teacher so — I asked to be moved. Louis was seriously hampering my appreciation of her learned ways — I told her.

She laughed uncontrollably, almost hysterically for quite some time — a strange lady our teacher — and then she demonstrated to the whole class a way of rubbing your hands together to preserve your body temperature, without upsetting your desk.

It was really quite tricky. What you had to do was hold the palms of your hands together, pointing your fingers to the heavens as if you were praying for warmer weather. Then, starting with your right hand or your left, it didn't matter, you rubbed the one hand up past the other, at the same time curling the fingers of the moving hand over the back of the fingers of the stationary hand. Joint by joint — metacarpal by metacarpal. Then the other hand pushing upwards now, straightening the fingers of the first hand and curling over the back of them in turn.

Regretfully, Louis couldn't get the movement right. He was the only one in the class who couldn't do it. He didn't have a motor co-ordination problem or anything — after all he was the only one in the class who could do a proper headstand and stay up for a minute and a half — but he just couldn't get the finger friction concept right. I told him to practise at home. He did try, I know it, his sister told me, but after a week the desk once again began to pursue its path to peculiar performance. I hung on for a day, but I couldn't stand it. This time we both went to the teacher to explain our predicament. She laughed again — hysterically — a strange lady our teacher. Maybe all learned ladies laughed like that. In the end Louis was allowed to wear his grey woollen gloves (the ones his grandmother had knitted him for Grade One, so they were a little tight now) whenever he felt the urge. Solutions to problems one at a time — painfully and patiently on.

Gillian also asked to wear her gloves — being left-handed and at a decided disadvantage when it came to finger-friction, but the teacher stood by her Louis-only rule of gloves. I don't know why. Gillian had this crazy pair of gloves with each finger in a different colour which suited her fine, but the teacher was adamant.

Gillian was my girl. We were the only

sweethearts in the class, lovers in the true sense of the word. We once even played 'Doctor Doctor'. In short, we craved each other. In fact, I was planning on running away from home tonight, to her lascivious embrace; it being Friday and my problems at home aspiring to seemingly insurmountable proportions.

Tonight was the night — I was going to lay it on them in floods of fury. Learning, learning every day, I was suffering in my scholarly pursuits constantly searching for the truth, without so much as the basics of support any young man needed and deserved from his family. They were all to blame for their lack of appreciation for what I was achieving. Father too quiet, little brother too noisy and mother too busy begetting unnecessarily a larger and larger family. Hadn't she already hit the jackpot with me, I wanted to ask her. Tonight I was going to give them my Manifesto for Family Union and support and depending on their reaction, I was going to stay or leave — the decision being entirely of my own choosing.

I had only this morning given Gillian the pre-arranged signal. She was going to discuss with her mother the possibility of my moving in with them for a few years. After all, we were planning on marrying in a few years time, definitely before high school, in any case, and the extra years afforded to us in living in close proximity, possibly sharing the same bedroom, would bode well for future marital bliss.

I chose Gillian as my girl not only because of the status of her being the only left-handed person in the entire class. I chose her the day she made, in my mind anyway, somewhat of a celebrity of herself. Even at that age she was a staunch feminist with an active independent mind. What happened was, during Arithmetic she asked the teacher if she could go to the cloakroom. The teacher refused. Arithmetic was her pet subject and she didn't like anyone in the class to miss even a minute of it. Five minutes later Gillian asked again. She did it all beautifully and everything, following the correct procedure as laid down by school etiquette and rules. She raised her hand, waited for the teacher to acknowledge the signal and then asked once again in faultless English, in a respectful tone, if she could go to the cloakroom. She added that the visit was becoming desperately urgent and that she wouldn't be away more than two minutes at the utmost. Again the teacher declined the request.

It was a summer's day, heavily overcast with pent-up promises of rain. Suddenly the rain came gushing down and, in perverse synchronisation to the pittering and pattering on the windows,

there formed under Gillian's bench a growing puddle. The girl next to her stood up, screamed and pointed, both arms outstretched, at the offending pool. Then we all stood up, one by one, boys and girls, peering in the designated direction. There was a hushed stillness about the class, the only sound being the rhapsodic rancour of the rain. And then, puppetlike I raised my hands and began to clap. The whole class took up the applause, slowly at first, softly and in time, but growing in pace and intensity with each successive clap. Gillian stood up, performed a cute curtsey, burst into tears and ran from the room, grasping her raincoat about her.

The next day we performed our sacred rite of love, Gillian and me. Each holding onto a separate branch of the poisonous oleander, at the entrance to the school, we swore eternal faithfulness — the wayward to be damned to hell and struck down by all the poison from that particular branch onto which he or she was holding. I noticed that Gillian's branch was smaller than mine, but it mattered not because she was little; than me and I was sure that the poison, even from the smaller shoot, would do the required job.

At big break that day, fired by our new-found love we set out to practise headstands, in a brave bid to smash Louis's one-and-a-half minute record. Love adds new qualities to life, but more so for boys than for girls, I think. I discovered new dimensions to the technique of standing on my head that day. Love imbued me with a new sense of balance, a clearer head, a more perceptive mind, a heightened sensitivity for the aesthetic.

I broke the one-minute barrier and my own record on my first attempt, but then my neck, even though strengthened by the ardour and lust coursing through my veins, gave way, and I collapsed over backwards in a dishevelled heap of triumph. Subsequent attempts, after a lengthy rest, carried me well into the second minute and precariously close to Louis's amazing achievement.

I managed one minute fifteen seconds that day. Gillian was encouragement personified. She clapped, she shouted, she did cartwheels, she even composed a special headstand war-cry which attracted half the kids on the playground. Confidentially, I've always played better with an audience at hand and it was on my final try, with thousands of schoolchildren standing around cheering, that my little body, inspired to greater strength, withstood the battering of time eternal, seventy-five seconds in all on my head, before fading on me.

We went to the boys' cloakroom — we agreed that it was the lesser of two evils, a girl in the boys' rather than a boy in the girls'.

Gillian was positively hopeless. As gifted as she appeared to be, with that natural feline grace of the athlete, her talents obviously did not extend as far as headstands. She tumbled truculently time and time again, cussing and throwing her lithe little body around in a robustly morbid display of disequilibrium.

Back in class she ran into a problem of paramount proportions. Throughout headstand training I had been wearing my school cap which afforded me that extra bit of balance, as well as protection from the elemental nature of the playground grass. Sadly Gillian had not taken the same necessary precautions. Five minutes into mental arithmetic and she began scratching assiduously at her scalp. The young lady next to her took note, stood up and screamed for the second time in two days, pointing this time to a runaway red ant which had dive-bombed miraculously from Gillian's scalp, to land next to her answer to the third sum, which incidentally was incorrect.

Bravely Gillian raised her arm and asked to visit the cloakroom. This time no explanation was necessary, the teacher assented immediately. I also raised my hand requesting to accompany her. Teacher regarded me, a dazed expression on her face, and nodded numbly.

We went to the boys' cloakroom — we agreed that it was the lesser of two evils, a girl in the boys' rather than a boy in the girls'. We scrubbed at her ant-infested hair for the better part of the lesson, combing out the offending interlopers and drying her off as best we could with the lining of my blazer — there being no towels.

We arrived back at class, Gillian's hair still dripping and my blazer sodden. Teacher grimaced at the sight of us and resumed the mental test which she had held over in our absence. We wondered at the prophetic peculiarity of Gillian being twice wet in two days, once below and once above. We meant to ask the teacher after the school day, but she surreptitiously beat a hasty retreat and vanished. We both scored top marks in the mental test, Gillian coming first and myself a close second.

Now some months later the scene for the runaway was set. Mother fetched Gillian and me from school — the lift-scheme of love. Little brother was

Song for Ben

Ben you found me
thin as glass
Woodstock in winter

Ben I found your
drunken seminar
in an Alex shebeen

midnight in Guguletu
watching for cops
boot full of pamphlets

Modderdam road
they bulldozed the shack
where we met others
and plotted our victory

drinking brandy
playing Crazy Eights
singing Working Class Hero
reading Lenin

we brawled over the car
you dented at 'bush'
but you always had plans
were always full of places and people

Ben I miss you
you always knew
the blood-roads ahead

your project of
taming the gangs
turned their anger
against the system

second time around
(what went wrong?)
they struck you down
in Cape Town

Ben Louw is dead
I hear the news
across a thousand miles
of exile

and I hear your voice, back in '77
calm in an argument's heat,
reminding us of those
who have left and who return

may the freedom songs sung
beside your grave
echo and re-echo
and make us brave

may the earth around your death
rich with your memory
bring forth a dark red
wine of freedom

Patrick FitzGerald

screaming his head off in his own special way in the back seat, so both Gillian and I crammed into the front seat. When we dropped Gillian off, I performed once again the pre-arranged signal, a subtle wink of the left and then the right eye. Almost not a wink, just a lowering of the lid. She smiled in acknowledgement. The die was cast — she would speak to her mother right away.

I worried that mother had perchance picked up the runaway vibe, so on the way home I set about settling her suspicions by introducing new concepts to the car, such as percentages, about which I had heard some prefects talking at break. I told her as a matter of fact that I had come top of the class and achieved the remarkable score of seven percent for the last spelling test. Mother frowned. I had come tops, but I wasn't exactly sure about the percentage story. Still so very much to learn.

After lunch and homework, twenty-five jumps on the trampoline and checking to see if any silkworms had hatched, I settled down to some heavy meditation. I had to prepare in my own mind the sequence in which I was going to confront the family with my lamentable list of grievances. I'd start with the lesser evils, work my way through the mediums and then hit them with the heavies at the end.

She told me
that she had had one hell of
a time convincing her mother
of the absolute necessity of
my moving in.

Father always came home a little later on Fridays, settled into his favourite chair and read the paper, watched TV and drank his ritual cup of coffee all at the same time. Multi-talented. I approached the dinner table with nervous foreboding. Mother lit the Sabbath candles and father said the prayers. I indulged in more than my usual drop of red wine to bolster my flagging resolve.

I stood up ceremoniously.
'I wanna talk about a few things,' I said with soft subtle dignity. No-one paid any attention. Father was once again watching TV. Mother was serving up with fine precision. Little brother was racing his favourite Ferrari around his soup plate, using crusts of bread to demarcate the course.

'I wanna talk about a few things,' I said more loudly. Still no attention. This was no good — a radical route was to be resorted to. I waited a moment and then yelled out my introductory sentence again, at the top of my voice. This time father did look at me briefly

before turning back to the TV. Mother was scolding little brother who was pouring his soup in lines over the white tablecloth.

I was still standing, stunned, numbed by my inability to play out my drama as planned. Then in a fit of dire frustration and pique I screamed at the top of my voice. 'You don't love me!' I burst into tears and ran from the room. I grabbed my knapsack, pre-packed with my travelling essentials and hit out onto the road in flannel pyjamas and gown, heading for Gillian's.

Flooding tears obscured my path. Tears salted with abandonment, exasperation, helplessness, hopelessness, disbelief, fraught with pain and fear, flowed to the ground. Suddenly the earth fell away from my feet and I was heaved higher and higher towards the heavenly abode of my Maker. Death comes so swiftly, so surreptitiously, stalking up and snatching at the sacrificial lamb.

'Of course we love you,' shouted father above my dying dirge. He folded me limply over his shoulder, my face snuggling into the warmth of his back, bumping against him as he walked back to the house. I howled for a while longer, the howl subsiding to a cry, a weep, a whimper. Then I relaxed and relief overcame me. I was twice blessed. Snatched from the Gates of Heaven and returned to the bosom of my loving family — all in one shot.

Gillian phoned just before bedtime to confirm that everything was set at her end. She told me that she had had one hell of a time convincing her mother of the absolute necessity of my moving in. She had forced her mother's irresolute hand by suggesting that she might possibly be pregnant. That always managed to get everyone 'shook up' in the movies, she told me wryly. Her mother had become quite flustered, but had finally acceded to her demands, on condition that they put the baby up for adoption.

I explained to her that I had re-evaluated my situation. I couldn't leave them just yet I told her. It just wouldn't be right. They weren't quite yet able to cope without me. She was bitterly disappointed, but she understood.

I went to bed wondering about the concept of pregnancy. Wishing for the coming of spring. Hoping for a new improved family relationship of living, loving and working together. Worrying that my silkworms would hatch before the mulberry leaves bloomed. Considering the necessity to purchase new marbles for the forthcoming marble season. Working out a plan to get my favourite smokey back from Lous. ●

The Life and Adventures of Matthew Pavlichenko

by Isaac Babel

Comrades, countrymen, my own dear brethren! In the name of all mankind learn the story of the Red General, Matthew Pavlichenko. He used to be a herdsman, that general did — the herdsman on the Lidino estate, working for Nikitinsky the master and looking after the master's pigs till life brought stripes to his shoulder straps; and with those stripes, Mat began to look after the horned cattle. And who knows, if this Mat of ours had been born in Australia he might have risen to elephants, he'd have come to grazing elephants; only the trouble is, I don't know where they'd be found in our Stavropol district. I'll tell you straight, there isn't an animal bigger than the buffalo in the whole of our wide region. And a poor lad wouldn't get no comfort out of buffaloes: it isn't any fun for a Russian fellow just getting a laugh out of buffaloes! Give us poor orphans something in the way of a horse for keeps — a horse, so as its mind and ribs can work themselves out at the far end of the fields.

And so I look after my horned cattle, with cows all around me, soaked in milk and stinking of it like a sliced udder. Young bulls walk around me — mouse-grey young bulls. Open space around me in the fields, the grass rustling through all the world, the sky above my head like an accordion with lots of keyboards

— and the skies in the Stavropol district are very blue, boys. Well, I looked after my cattle like this, and as there was nothing to do, I used to play with the winds on reeds, till an old gaffer says to me:

'Matthew,' says he, 'go and see Nastasya.'

'Why?' says I. 'Or maybe you're kidding me.'

'Go,' he says, 'she wants you.'

And so I goes.

'Nastasya,' I says, and blush black in the face. 'Nastasya,' I says; 'or maybe you're kidding me.'

She won't hear me out, though, but runs off from me and goes on running till she can run no more; and I runs along with her till we get to the common, dead-beat and red and puffed.

Why did you hang your head, Matthew, or was it some notion or other that was heavy on your heart?

'Matthew,' says Nastasya to me then, 'three Sundays ago, when the spring fishing was on and the fishermen were going down to the river, you too went with them, and hung your head. Why



Illustrated by Joanne Bloch

did you hang your head, Matthew, or was it some notion or other that was heavy on your heart? Tell me.'

And I answer her

'Nastasya,' I says, 'I've nothing to tell you. My head isn't a rifle and there ain't no sight on it nor no backsight neither. As for my heart — you know what it's like, Nastasya; there isn't nothing in it, it's just milky, I dare say. It's terrible how I smell of milk.'

But Nastasya, I see, is fair tickled at my words.

'I'll swear by the Cross,' she says, and bursts out laughing with all her might over the whole steppe, just as if she was beating the drum, 'I'll swear by the Cross that you make eyes at the young ladies.'

And when we'd talked a lot of nonsense for a while we soon got married, and Nastasya and I started living together for all we was worth, and that was a good deal. We was hot all night; we was hot in winter, and all night long we went naked, rubbing our raw hides. We lived damn well, right on till up comes the old 'un to me a second time.

'Matthew,' he says, 'the master fondled your wife here there and everywhere, not long since. He'll get her all right, will the master.'

And I:

'No,' I says, 'if you'll excuse me, old 'un. Or if he does I'll nail you to the spot.'

So naturally the old chap makes himself scarce. And I did twenty versts on foot that day, covered a good piece of ground, and in the evening I got to the Lidino estate, to my merry master

Nikitinsky. He was sitting in a room upstairs, the old man was, and he was taking three saddles to pieces: an English one, a dragoon one, and a Cossack one; and I stuck to his door like a burr, stuck there a whole hour, and all to no purpose. But then he cast his eyes my way.

'What d'you want?' he asks.

'A reckoning.'

'You've got designs on me?'

'I haven't got no designs, but I want straight out to . . .'

Here he looked away and spread out on the floor some scarlet saddlecloths. They were brighter than the Tsar's flags, those saddlecloths of his; and he stood on them, the little fellow, and strutted about.

'Freedom to the free,' he says to me, and struts about. 'I've tickled all your maternal parents, you Orthodox peasants. You can have your reckoning if you like; only don't you owe me a trifle, Matthew my friend?'

'He-he,' I answers. 'What a comical fellow you are, and that's a fact! Seems to me as it's you that owes me my pay.'

'Pay!' the master shoots out, and he knocks me down on my knees and shuffles his feet about and boxes me on the ears for all the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost's worth. 'Your pay! And have you forgotten the yoke of mine you smashed? Where's my ox-yoke?'

'I'll let you have your yoke back,' I answer my master, and turn my simple eyes upon him and kneel before him, bending lower than any earthly depth. 'I'll give you your yoke back; only don't press me with the debts, old fellow; just wait a bit.'

And what d'you think, you Stavropol boys, comrades, fellow-countrymen, my own dear brethren? The market kept me hanging on like that with my debts for five years. Five lost years I was like a lost soul, till at last the year Eighteen came along to visit me, lost soul that I was. It came along on lively stallions, on its Kabardin horses, bringing along a big train of wagons and all sorts of songs. Eh you, little year Eighteen, my sweetheart! Can it be that we shan't be walking out with you any more, my own little drop of blood, my year Eighteen? We've been free with your songs and drunk up your wine and made out your laws, and only your chroniclers are left. Eh, my sweetheart! It's not the writers that rushed about over the Kuban those days, setting the souls of generals free at a distance of one pace. And Matthew son of Rodion was lying in blood at Prikumsk at that time, and there were only five versts of the last march left to the Lindino estate. Well, I went over alone, without the detachment, and going up to the room

I went quietly in. The local powers was sitting there in the room upstairs. Nikitinsky was carrying round tea and billing and cooing to them, but when he saw me his face fell, and I took off my Kuban hat to him.

'Good day,' I says to the folks. 'Accept my best regards. Receive a visitor, master; or how shall it be between us?'

'It's all going to be decent and quiet between us,' answers one of the fellows: a surveyor, I notice by his way of speaking. 'It's all going to be quiet and decent; but it looks as if you have been riding a good way, Comrade Pavlichenko, for your face is all splashed with dirt. We, the local powers, dread such looks. Why is it?'

'It's because, you cold-blooded local powers,' I answer, 'because in my looks one cheek has been burning for five years - burning in the trenches, burning on the march, burning with a woman, will go on burning till the Last Judgement. The Last Judgement,' I say, looking at Nikitinsky cheerful-like; but by this time he's got no eyes, only balls in the middle of his face, as if they had rolled those balls down into position under his forehead. And he was blinking at me with those glassy balls, also cheerful-like, but very horrible.

'Mat,' he says to me, 'we used to know one another once upon a time, and now my wife, Nadezhda Vasilyevna, has lost her reason because of all the goings on of these times. She used to be very good to you, usen't she? And you, Mat, you used to respect her more than all the others, and you don't mean to say you wouldn't like to have a look at her now that she's lost the light of reason?'

'All right,' I says, and we two go out into another room, and there he begins to touch my hands, first my right hand and then my left.

'Mat,' he says, 'are you my destiny or aren't you?'

'No,' I says, 'and cut that talk. God has left us, slaves that we are. Our destiny's no better than a turkey-cock, and our life's worth just about a copeck. So cut that talk and listen if you like to Lenin's letter.'

'A letter to me, Nikitinsky?'

'To you,' I says, and takes out my book of orders and opens it at a blank page and reads, though I can't read to save my life. 'In the name of the nation,' I read, 'and for the foundation of a nobler life in the future, I order Pavlichenko, Matthew, son of Rodion, to deprive certain people of life, according to his discretion.'

'There,' I says, 'that's Lenin's letter to you.'

And he to me: 'No! No, Mat,' he

says; 'I know life has gone to pot and that blood's cheap now in the Apostolic Russian Empire, but all the same, the blood due to you you'll get, and anyway you'll forget my look in death, so wouldn't it be better if I just showed you a certain floor-board?'

'Show away,' I says. 'It might be better.'

And again he and I went through a lot of rooms and down into the wine-cellar, and there he pulled out a brick and found a casket behind the brick, and in the casket there were rings and necklaces and decorations, and a holy image done in pearls. He threw it to me and went into a sort of stupor.

I wasn't going to shoot him. I didn't owe him a shot anyway, so I only dragged him upstairs into the parlour.

'Yours,' he says, 'now you're the master of the Nikitinsky image. And now, Mat, back to your lair at Prikumsk.'

And then I took him by the body and by the throat and by the hair.

'And what am I going to do about my cheek?' I says. 'What's to be done about my cheek, kinsman?'

And then he burst out laughing, much too loud, and didn't try to free himself any more.

'You jackal's conscience,' he says, not struggling any more. 'I'm talking to you like an officer of the Russian Empire, and you blackguards were suckled by a she-wolf. Shoot me then, damned son of a bitch!'

But I wasn't going to shoot him. I didn't owe him a shot anyway, so I only dragged him upstairs into the parlour. There in the parlour was Nadezhda Vasilyevna clean off her head, with a drawn sabre in her hand, walking about and looking at herself in the glass. And when I dragged Nikitinsky into the parlour she ran and sat down in the armchair. She had a velvet crown on trimmed with feathers. She sat in the armchair very brisk and alert and saluted me with the sabre. Then I stamped on my master Nikitinsky, trampled on him for an hour or maybe more. And in that time I got to know life through and through. With shooting - I'll put it this way - with shooting you only get rid of a chap. Shooting's letting him off, and too damn easy for yourself. With shooting you'll never get at the soul, to where it is in a fellow and how it shows itself. But I don't spare myself, and I've more than once trampled an enemy for over an hour. You see, I want to get to know what life really is, what life's like down our way. ●

TALKING STORY

A *Staffrider* feature in which writers and critics discuss storytellers and their work.

In this issue MIKE KIRKWOOD writes about Isaac Babel's 'The Life and Adventures of Matthew Pavlichenko'.

'You are my old master, you have had the command long enough, now I am your master' — said the slave Maurits van Mauritius to Cornelis Coetzé one day in the year 1800, on a lonely farm in the Roggeveld, moments before he beat his old master's brains out with a crowbar. No doubt words and blows to the same effect had been meted out before. No doubt they would be again. Nor have we outlived the dream of the rising and the retribution. Sometimes it seems to paralyse us, culturally speaking. Obsessively contemplating the moment of apocalypse, the dawn of liberation and the new society, few of our writers have been able to create the scene between Maurits and Cornelis — in all its variations — with any conviction. Perhaps Babel's version of Nemesis, set in the Russian revolutionary period, has something to teach us.

Its author had, of course, one great advantage. Born in Odessa in 1896, Isaac Babel had lived through the Russian revolution — Matthew Pavlichenko's 'little year Eighteen, my sweetheart' — when he came to write this story. Afterwards, he joined Budyonny's Cossack cavalry for the Polish campaign of 1920. The anti-Semitism of the Cossacks (Babel was Jewish, and so were many of the Polish civilians in the communities ravaged by the war) and their reckless, pulsatile physicality (Babel was slightly built, wore glasses, and didn't ride well) made his decision to enlist with them remarkable. A number of the resulting stories (published in English as *Collected Stories* in the Penguin Modern Classics) turn on the mixed feelings the Cossacks have about him, and on his need to find some measure of acceptance among them if he is going to get to grips with his subject. (One thinks of Mrutuzeli Matshoba among the migrant workers, of Njabulo Ndebele or Mbulelo Mzamane and the street gangs that figure in their stories of childhood.)

In deliberately seeking out experience which can be shared, and actively identifying himself with his 'material' in order to allow it to speak and tell, Babel was choosing to go down the old road of that 'timeless tradition of storytelling' mentioned by Njabulo Ndebele when he introduced the Turkish 'teller', Yashar Kemal, in our last issue. (Was he also choosing the 'road' of the story rather than the 'map' of the novel, a mode of fiction which establishes a qualitatively different connection with experience?) Other attributes of the storyteller stand out in him too — more than this brief article can hope to itemize — but this one may merit special notice because it touches on a theme implicit in the *Staffrider* literary project from the beginning: the nature of 'committed' writing. I believe that the more one considers the possibility of storytelling in the contemporary world (the 'global' as opposed to the 'organic' village, perhaps) the more one is driven to conclude that it is the method which declares the committed writer rather than the subject addressed. It is *how we allow a subject to speak* rather than *what we make it say* that ensures its accessibility to a *participant* rather than a *reflective* readership.

The Long and the Short of It

As with oral storytellers, so with the writers there are those who like to spin it out (another great Russian, Leskov, is

like this) and those who like to cut it to the bone. Babel is definitely in the latter category. In this story it is not only the life of Pavlichenko which is anatomized in deft, seemingly careless strokes: the ancient and modern history of rural Russia are compacted into his few pages, together with the political economy of the landowner's estate. Babel's striking ability to select the most telling 'moments' in his story is part of this. So is the sharply focused, emblematic way in which he depicts the physical world — from the wild energy of the horses working out 'at the far end of the fields', beloved of the peasants, to the scarlet saddle cloths 'brighter than the Tsar's flags' on which the master 'strutted about'.

Both of these skills in the writer draw on oral storytelling. The shifts in the story happen quite naturally within the narrative style which Pavlichenko uses — a style which, one imagines, Babel had often encountered among the Cossacks he campaigned with. This talent for laconic compression, for leaving out what it is not necessary to say, is imbedded in peasant speech. '“Nastasya,” I says; “or maybe you're kidding me.”' This is the style of love declarations down Stavropol way.

Similarly, in creating an emblematic physical world Babel stays within the limited field of vision of his storyteller, but explores the resources of peasant experience and spoken idiom to bring out the full significance of ordinary things. Thus Pavlichenko describes himself as being 'soaked in milk and stinking of it like a sliced udder' and then tells Nastasya that his heart is 'just milky, I dare say. It's terrible how I smell of milk.'

Pavlichenko the Storyteller

In some of his stories — like this one — Babel creates a storyteller figure within the tale. More than this, he creates a community of readers: people who, like the village audience in the oral tradition, have something to gain from their participation in the storytelling. They gain in entertainment, certainly; also by way of what Walter Benjamin¹ calls 'counsel' — the kind of wisdom that can be put to use in one's own life. About counsel Benjamin remarks that 'it is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding. To seek this counsel one would first have to be able to tell the story. (Quite apart from the fact that a man is receptive to counsel only to the extent that he allows his situation to speak.)' Compare this with Ndebele's formulation in our last issue: '... 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.'

The first community of readers suggested by the story is that of the Cossack revolutionary soldiers immediately addressed by Pavlichenko, a community of which Babel had first-hand experience and which, as we have seen, played a vital role in the generation of his work. A further, or underlying, community is glimpsed in the narrator's references to 'our Stavropol district' from which this Cossack general comes. It is also worth noting that the storyteller is first identified as someone from both these communities who is familiar with the story of Pavlichenko's life. It is only at the beginning of the second paragraph, in one of those surprise strokes through which the story is impelled forward (and the reader/listener's pleasure considerably enhanced) that we discover Pavlichenko himself to be the narrator.

Sluk

To surpass the grandmasters
 One must not just deprive them
 But denude their inheritance.
 One must crawl in under the skin
 Of landscape – wriggle in
 Beneath the rough hide

Let your little incisors
 Bite through the fat, the uppermost crust
 With its bosveld and koppies
 And camouflage stuff.
 Cleave a path for your body
 Through its neutrals and sombres
 To that soft underbelly
 Be nourished and sluk.

Pertinent devils
 Nothing is neutral now
 There are rivers of heartblood
 There are rivers to cross.
 Past grainfields of labour and dorpies
 Of law
 To that mythical homeland
 Where the mountains shout down
 'Dig as you crawl
 There is blood enough
 Sluk.'

Damian Garside

Elizabeth Villet

this city

there is a moment
 in this city
 when the eyes of the city
 are closed
 and the mountain's body sleeps –
 even the newspaper boys
 are curled under their light coverings
 in corners
 like caterpillars in dried leaf cocoons
 waiting to emerge
 with newsprint wings
 and the city waits to dream . . .

there is a moment in this city
 when the city lies defenceless
 as a sleeping child
 that can't be harmed –
 a moment between the breath in
 and the breath out –
 a moment in this city
 of my waiting breathless heart

Elizabeth Villet

Untitled

ambivalence is a word
 that cannot explain
 my inertia.
 Stagnation is a pit
 and failing to see
 the dying fires is
 no excuse.
 Hell is sort-of-comfortable,
 but basically rotten.
 I've seen and felt it –
 all my life.

Of widows and orphans

black veils and rags
 strength and unity
 tears and laughter
 the presence of an absence.

windowless houses
 and gateless fences
 bleak futures and
 inevitable departures
 the resonant sound of
 the knock that never comes.

lunch packs without lunches
 and coalboxes without coal
 warm donations and
 endless thank yous
 the echoes of laughter
 that once was.

permeating happiness
 and eerie forgetfulness
 days of chips and
 rays of sunshine
 the presence of a new
 semi-unknown and semi-wanted.

white veils and velvets and
 laces and flowers
 laughter and tears
 the presence of knocks and
 happiness and anger and
 hateful regrets.

Untitled

Chained to womanhood
 I couldn't fight nor try nor win
 – they thought.

Unsupported I should fall
 and rise and fall
 – they perceived.

Insecured I would call
 and cry and beg
 – they assumed.

Deserted I couldn't mend
 and build and
 – spread growth.

They didn't know me . . .
 They may have thought
 I was just ---
 a
 woman!

Hector P.

It could have been anywhere
 but it was here
 It could have been anybody
 but it was you
 It could have happened anyway
 but it was this way
 It could have been due to anything
 but it was this
 It could have stopped anything
 but it was you
 Maybe it could not be helped
 by us unwary mortals
 It was never planned
 but by the jittery hands
 of a few . . .

We remembered you again
 yesterday.

Untitled

I buried it in a
 shallow grave
 somehow expecting
 rains to open it up
 that i might get
 a glimpse of it
 again.

Chris van Wyk

THE REASON

The reason why
 murderers and thieves
 so easily
 become statues
 are made into monuments
 is
 already their eyes are granite
 their hearts
 are made
 of stone

Chris van Wyk

The LiteMaster story

Photographs by David Jooste
by Richard Ntuli

Introduction and interviews by
Jon Lewis and Mark Swilling

INTRODUCTION

For over a year 130 MAWU members dismissed from LiteMaster in Wadeville have been meeting three times per week at Morena Store, Katlehong, waiting for the results of a court case which will decide their fate. These regular meetings maintain the workers' morale and solidarity. They also provide education. The tactics of the employer and questions of trade union organisation are debated in detail. These meetings are highly disciplined and structured – people speak only through the chairperson. At the same time all members are encouraged to participate. The debates are interspersed with song.

Richard Ntuli's story was a collective effort. Although he provided the main narrative his story was constantly corrected and added to by other members. Richard Ntuli was the first chairperson of the first shop steward council set up on the East Rand in 1981.

PHINEAS TOLO: I started working for LiteMaster on 13 May 1954 – making score (doing piece work). The score was too high to reach. We were under pressure every day. There was no time to go anywhere. I worked so hard – until my fingers were bleeding and painful. The basic wage was R6.93 per week. Working 7.00 a.m. till 7.00 p.m. and Saturday 7.00 a.m. till 4.00 p.m. you could earn R9 to R11.

I joined MAWU on 7 March 1981. Before the union came workers had no power. There were no strikes. If you talked, if you were late, if you mentioned wages, if you didn't make the score – then you were chased out. So as soon as you reached the score they increased it.

DAVID KHUBEKA: I started working for LiteMaster on 23 September 1963. I worked in the Automatic Department operating many machines. We had to work faster all the time.



Richard Ntuli points out the LiteMaster factory.

I was changed to one machine making lampholders. I was working so hard that my hands were burning and bleeding.

During that time management were 'boxing' the workforce. If you said anything you were chased out – no going to the office to discuss it.

When a foreman wanted to move you, you were taken roughly – not asked nicely.

A white mechanic was hitting a black worker – and the worker was chased out.

The work was dirty but there were no overalls. During that time you were not allowed to ask for an increase. If there was an increase it was one or two cents – no more. They were chasing out workers all the time. There was no union then. Before MAWU came there was a TUCSA union, but they started by seeing management and then came to us. This was not the right way.

WORKING FOR LITEMASTER

I started working for LiteMaster on 19 January 1975. They told me there is a score (production target) at LiteMaster. I asked them what is a score? I told them I had come to do any job and I know all the jobs, so they employed me. Mr Lampke and Mr Mdamane employed me.

I first worked in the Appliances Department making toasters, irons, fans and table-lamps. There were no overalls at the time. I worked there for eight months. I then moved to the Stamping Department. I was sent all over the factory doing different jobs. I told them I only wanted to do one job. I was left alone with five machines. I made parts for toasters. There was a coloured man, Len Con, who set the machines. He was a clever guy because he kept his job.

There was a time when they gave me an increase of three cents. I took the amount out of the envelope and gave it back to the foreman because I was not satisfied.

After they realised I was a hard worker I was shifted to

STOP PRESS VICTORY FOR WORKERS!

Nearly 2 years after the dismissal of 65 LiteMaster workers, they have now won their jobs back with back pay as from 10 November 1984 by order of the Industrial Court. Throughout this period they con-

tinued to maintain discipline and solidarity. Thirty LiteMaster workers were, however, not awarded their jobs back. Ntuli promises that they will continue to fight to have these workers reinstated.



A union member makes a point at a meeting.

the Stores. We worked hard in that department — with bare hands and wearing only dustcoats.

There was a misunderstanding over bonuses. I refused R7 because I was working hard. This was increased to R21. It was coming only to me — not to the others. They tried to keep me quiet. At this time they were moving me around departments to work on sorting. This was 1977. I was connected with some black consciousness guys and they showed me how to secure the position for blacks.

JOINING OUR UNION

I had read about the Natal Metal union joining our union in the newspaper *Ilanga*. There was a guy from Salcast in Benoni and he took me to the Bree Street offices of the FOSATU Project. (The FOSATU Project was set up to recruit members before extending industrial affiliates in the East Rand). There I met an organiser, Aaron Mati, who explained how the employers rob the workers and about trade unions. Andreas and I joined. When we got back to the factory we recruited five guys and took them to the offices in Johannesburg. They also joined. After that we spread it to all the workers. I was called in to see the foreman, Mr Lampke. He told me that if I was not satisfied with the job I must go and find another. I replied that if he was not happy he should look for another job as well.

This was 1979. With so many guys joining we withdrew from the FOSATU Project to join MAWU. It was difficult to speak to workers about the union. But at this time management tried to bring in its own union and this gave us a chance, a platform to explain what a union was.

From 1979 secret meetings were held outside the factory at lunchtime with Moses Mayekiso of MAWU. We were formulating ways of organising the workers inside the factory. On Saturdays we would visit the MAWU offices to ask what is a union, what will it do for the workers. As membership grew we met on alternate Saturdays in Johannesburg and in the locations — at Kwesime Hostel and then Inrokoza Higher Primary School.

By this time management knew what was going on and some people were speaking evil to them about me.

One day at Kwesime Hostel in Katlehong we were confronted by the police. They gave us fifteen minutes to get out. Our membership was very high there. At the following meeting in Johannesburg we elected shop stewards and met with shop stewards from Scaw Metals, National Springs and Henred Fruehauf. In 1980 the office was opened at Morena near Katlehong and after that we started to hold local shop steward council meetings.

At this time Moses Mayekiso and I planned a meeting at the Hall in the location and sent out pamphlets. The purpose was to organise all the workers of Germiston. After the

meeting we — the LiteMaster workers — approached management to ask for an agreement, to see if they would work with MAWU. The management was still working with the liaison committee. We asked the question: 'Who elects the shop stewards and the liaison committee?' We also have the right to remove them. We asked the liaison committee: 'What good have you done for workers?'

They answered: 'We have persuaded management to build good toilets. We have asked them to build a canteen where we can have meals with the white workers. We have asked them to make good gardens around the factory.' I answered: 'We have toilets in the location or you can answer the call in the veld. We are here to work, not to eat — we eat in the location. We are not here to relax in green gardens and look at beautiful flowers. What have you done for workers?'

THEY TRIED TO CONFUSE THE WORKERS

When management tried to get us to work with the liaison committee we refused. There they tried to confuse workers. Gerald Mamabolo, the personnel officer, was sent to ask workers if they knew about MAWU and to tell them there was already a union and it was the same thing. In the end there was a vote of workers. Out of 300 workers only 19 voted for the liaison committee. The rest voted for the shop stewards. From then on we met with management. This was in 1981.

At the first meeting with management we demanded a minimum of R2.00 per hour and an increase of twenty cents per hour across the board. The company told us they had no money. We fought vigorously. We knew production was going well. At the second meeting they said they would give five cents — not more. We reported back to members to take the mandate after each meeting. At the third meeting they offered eight cents and then it was deadlock. The next day the Technical Manager, Paul Derer, asked to meet with only two of the shop stewards — myself and Gibson Xala. It was not easy. We pressed hard. In the end we were offered ten cents.

When we reported back to the workers we were mandated to tell management that we were not satisfied and to ask the Technical Manager to come and address the workers. When he came he was asked many questions, but he could not answer and left us standing without solutions. The workers called him back to explain. He then ordered us back to work, but no one moved. The shop stewards tried to speak to him again. Paul Derer said 'I can fire twenty workers now and have twenty at the gate and pay them more than you get.' He also said we were not using our brains in asking for a minimum of R2.00 per hour. Then he said we were all dismissed.

When we reported back he followed us. We told him to go back to the office and arrange our payments immediately. Then the workers all agreed to go back to work. All this happened before 3 o'clock tea time, so it did not take long. When Paul Derer returned he pretended to be surprised to see us working, and said he had prepared our pay packets. He told us that there were some elements who should be fired. At 5.00 p.m. the paymaster and the managers were waiting at the gate with the pay trolley to pay everyone out. The workers refused to accept this and Samson Dlamini and I opened the gates to let workers out. Next morning — Thursday — we started work as normal but there were no clock cards. Nothing happened that day, but the foreman recorded that we were working.

SILENCE BETWEEN MANAGERS AND WORKERS

On Friday the clock cards were returned. Now there was

silence between management and workers. Friday afternoon we got paid, but we were suspicious when the pay trolley started at the last department instead of from the office as usual. Some people's packets were not in the trolley and they were told to go to the office for their money. Mr Xala and I accompanied workers to see what was going on. The vice-chairman of the shop stewards had already accepted his packet, which included his unemployment card. Twenty-two were dismissed.

THE UNION STEPS IN

We informed the union. The union rep came the next week and stood at the gate to see management block the 22 from entering the premises. He went with them to collect their pay and to check what papers they were given to sign. This was October 1981.

The union then went to the Industrial Council Court to demand reinstatement. The struggle was hot; some cowards withdrew from the movement. The dismissed people continued to meet in the Morena office to hear what was happening in the factory, and with the Industrial Council. Inside the factory we put pressure on with a go-slow. We held a meeting with MAWU officials from Cape Town and Pietermaritzburg and the surrounding areas to discuss the problem and to encourage the workers in the struggle.

When management tried to get us to work overtime to cover for the dismissed workers, most people refused but management approached a few individuals who agreed. These people were confronted and beaten. They were forced to stay in the factory at night. They phoned the manager for help with transport, but he was no help to them – he just went back to bed. Next day they all went home, but they would be paid for the day. I asked Paul Derer if I could also go home to sleep and still get paid? He asked, 'Who beat the overtime workers?'

Next day we all received the December bonus and then the company closed down for the holidays. During that time we contacted lawyers to continue the case. When we returned to work in January 1982 the management was still talking about overtime, but now no one tried to work overtime. Management was annoyed at the case and said if I attended I would be fired. I attended the case and on the last day the director took me back to the factory in his car. There was no discussion, only silence. As a result of the case all the workers were re-instated with six weeks back pay for half the time they were out. When they returned on Monday the company refused to let them in, so Mayekiso and Bernie Fanaroff arrived to talk with management. They said these people had been fighting and stealing food from the canteen and that they only had work for three workers. Mayekiso reported back to the 22 workers. They said they were not prepared to send only three back. They had all been fired at the same time for the same reason.

We reported this to the Johannesburg office, who went back to the lawyer. The company agreed to meet the union with Mayekiso and Fanaroff present. The management called in the workers and each was sent to their previous jobs. Some were not given back their jobs: Wanda Masemola – a driver – was employed as a gardener. Livingstone Nagoxo – an inspector – was made a clerk, and Gibson Xaba was moved from storekeeper to parts supplier. The 22 workers received their back pay and found that money had been deducted for the pension fund for twelve weeks.

MEETING AT MORENA

After two or three days a general meeting was held at Morena Store when we planned to go ahead with negotiations for a

recognition agreement.

Negotiations were tough. We met sometimes three times a week with management for six months, each time there was a deadlock. The Agreement was signed on 22 July. Most of the problems were over grievance procedure. By this time we were also pushing for another increase, but management would not agree to two sets of negotiations at once.

About this time management introduced the 'value arch', with two workers from each department meeting management to plan the jobs.

AN UGLY INCIDENT

There was also an ugly incident at this time. A group of workers who belonged to Steel, Engineering and Allied Workers Union went to management complaining of intimidation by MAWU. The management called in the police and these workers pointed out some of our members. Most of the shop stewards were on a training course at the University; only three were left in the factory. Two were arrested. The accused were called in to the office, told there was something wrong with their pay packets, and then put in the police van. The third, Enoch Khowane, suspected and refused to go to the office – so the police came into the factory to take him. Everyone stood up and followed the police. The police pulled him into the van and drove off. The workers refused to go back to work. Management phoned the union to complain that workers were not working. The rest of the shop stewards returned: by this time the workers had gone. Management called the stewards into the office but we refused to go.

On Monday the Elsburg police went to the location and arrested more members, including Samuel Skhosane, Peter Mdonsele and Selby Shabalala. The three arrested on Friday were released on R300 bail, after being charged under the Intimidation Act. Six people were arrested during the week, but the company had them released because of the pressure of the workers.

WE ASKED FOR EXECUTIVE CARS

From there we demanded that management give us transport to go and lay charges against the non-MAWU people – as management had given them transport. We were offered a truck. We refused and asked for the executive cars. We were taken up to the Elsburg police station in two Mercedes, two Golfs, six Audis, and a Ford three litre. The station commander tried to get us to drop charges – but we would not because he had accepted the earlier case. We returned in the cars, with the station commander, to hold talks with the company to settle out of court.

The company said they were not responsible for the arrests. We said they had provided the transport to the police station. The commander said he was going to stop the case. We were given papers to sign to drop our case against the others, but we refused. When the case came up – on 4 November 1982 – it was dropped. All this disturbed negotiations which only resumed in January 1983. Then the director resigned and we were told there could be no more negotiations until his replacement arrived on 1 May.

In 1981 we had received the Industrial Council increase plus ten cents. In 1982 we just received the Industrial Council increase. We kept pushing management and in March 1983 got twenty cents plus a promise of ten cents to be paid in July (the starting rate was R1.58 at this time). We received the extra ten cents in July for one week, then we were all fired. But before this they fired the man responsible for the 'value arch'. Forty were retrenched, a technical manager, Mr Horne, was fired because he was on our side. On the twelfth

or thirteenth of July we were all dismissed and then one day later selectively re-employed. A list of 88 were not taken back. The management said we were fighting, carrying bars and striking. But stoppages were caused by management refusing to negotiate with workers. The sacked workers formed a steering committee at Morena. We met management who said the 88 would be re-employed group by group. By the following day management started hiring coloured workers. Those members left in the factory started to leave to join us at Morena; it was obvious they would have to teach the job to the coloureds — and then be fired themselves. The company sent a security guard to Morena to see what was happening and to complain that workers were being beaten and told not to work. This was not true.

WE TOOK THE CASE TO THE INDUSTRIAL COURT

It took a long time to get our case to the Industrial Court due to misunderstanding with the MAWU organisers. The first lawyer we saw believed the company's side of this story. The general secretary at the time, Mr Sebabi, said we had a weak case and it would cost too much. In the end we used our own pension contributions to pay a deposit for a lawyer to take the case. In the early days we went to the East Rand Administration Board. They said they would not register any new workers for LiteMaster. At the Manpower Department they sent us next door — but they would not help us. On 2 May 1984 our case was heard before the Industrial Council, but there was deadlock and it was referred to the Industrial Court. We are still waiting for the case. Of the original 88 dismissed and the 40 who supported them, 100 to 130 still meet three times a week. We meet to push the case and to teach the merits of unity. Someone from Wits came to teach about union activity.

WAITING FOR JUSTICE

There have been several reporters come here and a woman from Germany enquired about our case. LiteMaster's headquarters are in Germany. That was in August or September 1983, and we haven't heard anything since then.

It has been very difficult without work. We had to depend on neighbours and friends. We wrote letters for assistance but there has been little outside support. Now many of the members are behind with rent and have been served with eviction notices.

In LiteMaster there are still some union members left but we hear rumours that most have had to leave the union. The stop orders come to only R17 or R19 a month and subs are R1.20 each.

YOUNG MALE WORKER: I blame the government which is in favour of the white population. We are suffering because of the colour of our skin. No white suffers. The unions were created to solve this problem.

FEMALE WORKER: I am still prepared to go forward. I am not prepared to work for a company which has no union in it.

MALE MIGRANT WORKER: In the homelands you find a man is given a place which is full of trees and this is supposed to be the field he is to cultivate. First it has to be cleared and at the first harvest you may only get 100 bags. But next time you will try to get more. In other words I am still prepared to go forward with the struggle.

All of us are prepared to go forward with the struggle.
Phambili Ngno
Forward

Andries W. Oliphant Farouk Stemmet

The Invisible Men

The men who left Ulundi, Umtata, Salisbury
And Lorenzo Marques
For the city of gold
What happened to them?

They left
First on foot,
Then on horseback.
Later on wagons
Now they leave on railway buses
And overcrowded third-class trains.

Does gold make man invisible?
Who built the skyscrapers
And tend to the gardens of luxurious homes?
Who inhabit hostels,
Crawl out of shacks
And sleep with women who worship men?

Coming in from a windswept night
To the warmth of a cave
I am told:
Gold makes man live underground.

In Maputo the men who left for the city of gold
Arrived triumphantly with Frelimo.
In Harare they march
With the Seventh Brigade.
In Umtata, Ulundi and Goli
I continue searching for the men who dig gold.

Andries W. Oliphant

Untitled

another just-too-short weekend draws to a close
while
another much-too-long week looms ahead
and like all faithful cogs in the unstoppable machine
I will take my place.

Whenever I can
I quietly slip out
of the unstoppable machine
and lodge myself into the new one:
the one not quite complete,
the one only just starting to move,
but the one which promises, once in motion,
to not merely stop the unstoppable,
but to put it out of existence —
totally, completely, once and for all!

I feel comfortable in this new machine —
for it is not of iron and steel,
but of flesh and blood . . .

Farouk Stemmet



'My name is Johnny!'

He said it with such pride, such assurance that I didn't doubt it for a moment. I had at the time, other things on my mind and had resented the intrusion of the shrill doorbell on my privacy. I instantly regretted not having peeped down the hall through the glassed front door to see who it was. Had I looked, I wouldn't have answered it. Shit! Not another begging black man with the inevitable yellowed formal letter proclaiming the right to collect money with the small shabby black dog-eared donation book — Smith 50 cents, Mrs Malherbe 30 cents . . . all in pencil, all spidery, all resentful. All succumbing to either some taut conscience or obscure Christian catechism. I suppose I had taken pride in never having scrawled in that book — those supplicating black men or sometimes snotty nosed umfaans could do what they like with my 'donation'. But like a ringing phone, I was consumed with curiosity as to who was at my door. And then, seeing the same old ritual again, the listening to the half sob half truth, half untruth story of vital bus fares or the train or dead fathers or the church gentleman with the officially stamped see through

plastic folder — but all untruths. And if I didn't have money, then it was candles or old clothes. The countless times that after half listening to the requests or holding up my hand to signify their victory over my reticence to donate, I would leave the now silent figure, fingering his tatty black hat while I half closed the door — not shutting him out but not inviting him in — freezing it all for a moment in time and obeying the darkening of my fortunate white skin, searching through the small change; the little dilemma of how much to give knowing that Mrs Malherbe had given thirty cents. I didn't have that, perhaps I had a fifty or ten.

Fifty was out of the question — two fifties make a rand, so ten it was. Both weathered hands appeared gently to take my little offering — the little cheap pay off. He looked down at the shiny piece, no doubt disappointed, turned and left. I knew he would react like that — ten cents, not even worth the traditional gesture of those two unarmed hands. What did he expect? A rand? And so, after paying off my dues, I returned to my own comforts, momentarily atoned, discharged of my duty as one 'on the other side'. And then, sitting down, consumed with the doubt that I had not shut the door

firmly, that the Yale had not slotted staunchly into its female slot — it does that sometimes so again I got up and checked. It was shut, securely. Until, of course, the next prick arrived. The same ritual. The same reaction. The same hunched black figure shuffling away to be greeted by the hysterical barks of my neighbour's grubby poodles.

He gazed at me with hooded glazed tired eyes, cold with no emotion on his wrinkled shiny features.

But not Johnny, Johnny was different. My name is Johnny — joyfully slurred with so much aplomb and the same sinking feeling as his fetid breath forced me to step back, the feeling that I would have to listen to yet another tragedy which he appeared to resolve in drink. I half listened, bored with the incomprehensible slurs through a toothless mouth. Johnny was small, painfully thin — a little light brown face with almost Bushman features that seemed barely supported on a scrawny neck. He was dressed in filthy blue overalls and torn veldskoens — shiny and gaping with age . . . too big of course.

by Christopher
Charles

WHITE LIES

'What do you want Johnny,' I said in desperation — anything to resolve this little farce.

He stopped his blubberings a few moments after I had tripped up his ramblings. He gazed at me with hooded glazed tired eyes, cold with no emotion on his wrinkled shiny features. I don't think he really saw me, he was too pissed for that, I was staring at a blind person. Slowly, out of the depths of despair, he geared himself to speak again — a slow smile creased his face.

'No master.'

'I am not your master.'

He laughed at that. Not out loud — that must have died long ago.

'No master,' he repeated and I let it go.

'What can I do for you Johnny.'

'No you see master . . .'

He swept an unsteady hand in the general direction of my colourless garden.

' . . . I'll do a good job . . . Ja Johnny Johnson will do a good job for you Master.'

He paused to gather his thoughts, swaying all the time and then he continued . . . rambling on again about how 'good' the job would be. And while he talked, I looked at the crumbling concrete footpaths that had been severely gripped by rampant Kikuyu and then at the 'flow garden' — over run with everything but, and buried under decomposing warm grass cuttings that I had been too lazy to clear up a week ago.

'OK Johnny.'

I said knowing that it would require a bigger donation but at least one with obvious results.

I then walked out with the little pissed man into that very hot sun and gave in simplistic terms my idea of how the garden should look. Armed with an old rusty pair of shears, Johnny Johnson set to work. I watched him for a few moments as his first hesitant snips missed the weed and lopped off the only blooming wild flower that graced my front wilderness. Not wanting to see anymore I quickly turned away, bitterly regretting having 'employed' this sad jack of all trades (or so he claimed). I briefly thought of the rules and regulations of employing black labour, but not knowing them, disregarded them.

For the rest of the afternoon, he plodded fitfully around the garden — extracting the more obvious weeds in his stupored state.

An hour or so later, the little forgotten man rang my doorbell for a long time. I had to answer. He stood there — sweat pouring down his forehead.

'I'm hungry master.'

It was inevitable, how bloody boring but I had to feed him. I shut the door and walked through to the kitchen, cooked up a couple of fried eggs and smothered two purposely thick slices of brown bread. It occurred to me that he probably only ate white bread, when he ate, but I only had brown because I had been led to believe that it was healthier for me. Well he needed some health. And then the debate of what to present the meal on. Was it to be the tin plate with the old bent knife and fork and the plastic mug? (They like plenty of sugar in their tea don't they?) I placed it on a china plate, an odd one from no set. I hadn't realised that it was cracked.

So bearing the coarse offering, I took it to him which he received with the expected enthusiasm. After that, I left him to his own devices but couldn't help noticing the apparent lack of progress in my garden. Still, it was still early, he had all day — he started at ten so he should at the least finish at five. Or so I thought, at least that's what I would have expected from me — but then Johnny Johnson was not me.

About half an hour later, he called me again, not through the door bell but shouting from the back door. I wearily stopped my sedate activity and strolled to the kitchen door. There he stood with a scrupulously clean plate in his hands with both knife and fork laid neatly across it. He had washed it. I took it together with the thanks. I washed it anyway although not right then, after all I didn't want to insult him.

For the rest of the afternoon, he plodded fitfully around the garden — extracting the more obvious weeds in his stupored state. I despaired, and considered how much this was all worth, knowing full well that I could have completed the job in a few hours. But my decision to employ him in the first place was made all the more palatable by the easing of my conscience, for three rand. For a moment, my mental debate considered that he needed it. Three rand would buy a can of pilchards, bread and cigarettes although he did at a later stage borrow some of my tobacco (that bit that had dried out too much for my own use) and rolled it into a scrap of newspaper. When I paid him, I knew that his labours were not worth it but I could afford it, what was three rand to me? And so, I had the feeling as he stared at the money in his hand that he had expected more but I was determin-

ed that that was my limit. He looked up at me in silent appeal.

'Look Johnny, that's all I have at the moment — I have to go to the bank.'

He didn't answer, didn't believe, but merely left me, mumbling his misfortune. And in time I forgot all about Johnny Johnson, I had so many things on my mind and apart from that I left my house for work I had in Cape Town, a month's stay in a little heaven, that I would have liked to make permanent.

Her role as the 'live in lover' deteriorated quickly and anyway, she had not bothered to cut the grass.

During my absence, I had organised an actress to look after my place. The arrangement was at that time fraught with ulterior sexual undertones. I had dearly hoped that on my return, the 'lodger' would stay thus leading to 'something' more without the problems of haunting the occasional boring actors' party for women and the accompanying incumbencies of cost and ritual to get her into bed. It would, I hoped, happen 'naturally', a quiet evening, too much wine and the 'ah well', that was good; a brief partner proving the membership of that not so exclusive club or normality in the extremely competitive milieu of actors. And indeed, it did happen as I had planned it, an interlude that soon dulled when I discovered that on a night's stay of a female friend that my 'lover' was bisexual, an activity which I could plainly hear from the other room in the hush of the late night, but from which I was excluded. Her role as the 'live in lover' deteriorated quickly and anyway, she had not bothered to cut the grass which had now grown to unmanageable proportions. She had stayed however, it suited me. Then, I like to think that whatever had passed between us had resolved itself into a friendship. But I realised that just as I had been using her, she had used me. It caused no great problem to me for I left the house for another few weeks after sorting out the grass problem.

I returned to Johannesburg in the late evening to find an unfamiliar black man hearing a broken blackened pot over a ten litre drum outside my garage. I immediately confronted the brash, comfortable, but still oh so attractive lady.

'Oh that . . .' she replied: 'Simon had no place to stay, and you weren't using the garage.'

Which was true but I could see the

inhabitants of the flats opposite gawking down into my yard and feared their reaction to this intrusion into their safe white area. That evening, I felt that I had to resolve the problem. I could not deny that my garage was vacant, but all the same, I feared the decision that she had taken so lightly. After all, the garage was not fit to live in by anyone, or so I desperately wanted to believe.

I took a torch with me and knocked on the decaying doors. The hubbub inside immediately ceased. At that moment, I was so aware of the darkened flat windows opposite, hoping that none would light up. I peeked through the gaps in the wood and could just discern the light from a candle and a hissing primus stove. I knocked again. A few moments later, the door opened and Johnny stood there in a string vest and a dark overlarge pair of trousers. There were seven people in that garage and as I paused on the step, I could see in the flickering clandestine light, bodies under scrappy blankets or newspapers. There was a smell of soured cooking and smoke.

'Johnny, you can't stay here, nor can your ...'

He said nothing and I realised that nothing could be resolved then.

'OK then, tomorrow, I want everyone out.'

I left it at that, postponing the inevitable tearing of my conscience. I had to explain my stance.

'It's the police Johnny, what happens if they raid the place?'

But it didn't happen for five days. Johnny had given me the stock answers that the garage was (although unfit to live in) at least better than staying exposed in some rotten disused backyard, open to raids and the elements. During those five days, I tried to extricate the problem.

'Johnny I told you, you and your friends ...'

'My wife ...'

'Yes I realise Johnny, but you can't stay here ...'

'Where must I go?'

'I don't know Johnny ... what happens if the police raid me?'

He was as much in the dark as I was but I bitterly resented being the target, the guilt of something that I had never created. On the fifth evening, when I had returned from a party, flushed with drink, the doorbell was rung incessantly. I apologised to the friend I had brought back for coffee and walked down the darkened hallway to the front door. I opened it and a torch was flashed into my eye. I couldn't see who it was but I smelt officialdom, it seemed then to emanate from the uniform that the Sergeant was wearing.

In my drawn state I then attempted to placate him.

'Good evening officer,' I said in my most endearing politeness.

'Ja no ...' was all he muttered as he pushed himself into the hallway, 'Are you the owner of this property?'

'I rent it.'

'And is that your garage?'

I couldn't deny it. With my affirmation I invited the burly sergeant in, but he refused to sit down. I noticed that he left his torch on despite the well lit lounge.

'We've had complaints ...'

'Would you like some coffee ...'

He continued unhearing.

'... and we've just checked, you have seven blacks in your garage.'

'Er, yes sergeant, they had nowhere else to go.'

'Did they have your permission?'

I paused before I answered, bitter that something that had always been beyond my control, now confronted me in that something that I had feared all along. Johnny and his friends had nowhere to go, I couldn't throw them out despite my begging for them to leave.

'No officer, they did not have my permission, you see I was away in ...'

'Five hundred rand my friend, ja five hundred rand for allowing blacks to stay illegally on your property.'

I was stunned and resorted to the support of my friend who remained silent.

'But where can they go? For humanity's sake I ...' He curtly interrupted my emotional response.

'Human is not worth five hundred rand.'

He paused here, resplendent in the crass authority vested in him.

'And if they are here tomorrow night, that will be one thousand rand.'

My friend burst out in righteous indignation.

'But where do they go!'

The sergeant ignored him.

'You will appear in court ...'

He issued the time and place. In my drawn state I then attempted to placate him and bitterly suppressed my rage against the people in the flats opposite, but not to Johnny, who later stood silently before my tirade. The next day they had gone.

A few weeks later, on the allotted date, I duly presented myself in the Magistrates Court in Brixton. My suit felt uncomfortable, and ill fitting for I had not worn it for so long. Most of the cases were conducted in murmured

Afrikaans and I understood little. Even less of the proceedings for I had never before appeared in a court. All I could see was the interminable cases of the accused with bowed heads bearing witness in the stand but achieving nothing. And the subdued guilty faces receiving sentences stoically and then the trooping down to the cells. My interest waned often and I felt that perhaps I would not be called after all. I then realised in the droning monotony of the court that smelt so heavily of blacks and fear that I had not been subpoenaed, nor had I been summonsed for 'illegally harbouring black persons.' My indignation grew as the minutes drew on. Perhaps I had the wrong date but then in all the casual comings and goings of policemen in uniform, and in plain clothes, of prosecutors in black gowns and the bespectacled bored magistrate, I saw the sergeant enter, conferring in lowered tones with a constable. His uniform was crisply pressed and in his hand he bore a brown file which he handed into the clerk of the court's desk. Having done so, he looked over the public gallery and saw me. He came across, oblivious of sentence being passed in duly subdued tones over some trespassing garden boy. I smiled up at him, thankful perhaps that at least there was now purpose in my presence. I also smiled to curry his favour. I slid across the extremely hard wooden bench as he approached. He bent down to whisper something into my ear in conspiratorial tones.

'You could make it ...'

I involuntarily replied that it was a pleasure but knew that it was far from it. I patted him in a friendly, warm fashion on his shoulder. He then walked back to the front bench and settled back, satisfied. Still perplexed with the proceedings my concentration waned again until out of continuing stupor I heard, or thought I heard my name called. But then the street address was wrong, they had named the one parallel to mine. After a few drawn out moments, the magistrate scanned the gallery for any reaction. There was none so the clerk repeated the call. It was certainly my name but again the wrong street. Could I get out on what is known as a technicality? The thought flashed through my head. The sergeant, in his tightly bound uniform turned round and stared at me.

But they know me in Pretoria, Johnny Johnson, yeh definitely sure they know me, they know it.

I shrugged an embarrassed smile but answered his silent bidding.

I walked a little shakily to the wrong dock, that of the accused. The magistrate mumbled something and the court clerk directed me to the witness stand. He coughed. On cue, the black gowned gentlemen floated across.

'Is your name . . . ?'

I replied in my deep booming voice.

'And you live at . . .'

I corrected him there which was duly recorded.

'Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?'

'I do.'

The accused were solemnly led, all seven of them into their stand.

The prosecutor came up to me. I looked down at his tightly curled greased hair. After a moment he turned to me and whispered:

'If they did have your permission to stay in the garage, they'll only be charged with staying illegally in a white area but you'll be charged with illegally harbouring them, minimum five hundred rand. If however they did not have your permission, it'll be a fine and jail for trespassing . . .'

Did it matter either way? It is true that they were staying there, that it was my property. How would I then look to the court?

'Did the accused have permission to stay on your property?'

'No sir.'

He wrote down my reply as the accused were allowed to cross question me since they had no defence attorney. The black policeman explained the procedure to each one in turn. Each one merely shook his head and lowered it. So it was with the first five. The ritual of justice in defence carried on slowly and methodically until the sixth. He blasted his rage against me.

'You lie, I came to you that day, I'd been in hospital and needed a room to rest in and you said yes!'

He lifted his shirt showing a heavy bandage strapping his waist. I was stunned, shocked, silent. Me lie? I had not seen him before. The magistrate stared at me, willing an answer which I could not give. Unsure of himself now, he dismissed that evidence. And now it was Johnny's turn. What would he say now remembering back on the occasions that I had begged him to leave?

Johnny stood up straight, proudly, 'I am a coloured your Lord.'

'Where are your papers?'

I lost them when I was drunk, my Lord.'

'But you are coloured.'

'Yeh, definitely sure, I have no crimes, I was never six months.'

'You are very dark for a coloured.'

He was too, I had never thought of him as that. Coloured, he was alright then, he could stay where he liked, but not in my garage.

'Why did you not re-apply for new papers?'

'Where do I find bus fare and photographs?' he replied.

'But they know me in Pretoria, Johnny Johnson, yeh definitely sure they know me, they know it.'

The magistrate, frustrated by this upsetting 'technicality', dismissed me abruptly along with the case against Johnny. The other six I never saw again. I smiled broadly at the Sergeant as I left with a slight shrug, leaving that vile smell of fear absorbed in the wood, and the even viler defilement of my conscience. What I did, what I said, I did for myself — perhaps then the Sergeant was right, I couldn't afford humanity at five hundred rand a night.

It was months later before I saw Johnny again, it was a replay of the first time I had seen him. He still had the annoying habit of 'sitting' on the door-bell as he swayed, bleary eyed before the front door. I can't say that I was particularly pleased to see him again. I knew that I would employ him again for no other purpose but to salve my guilt.

Certainly what pathetic effort he expended on my garden would never show.

Beyond my wooden fence which divides my house from the vacant lot behind lies a rotting car, and uncared for wild vegetation that reasserted itself many years ago after the house there had been condemned as a slum. Very little remains apart from a tiled foot-path between two palm trees. The rest is disgusting as many people have dumped refuse there, ridding themselves of their problems but creating others for those who live close by. In amongst all this rubbish, Johnny established himself. He proudly presented Hettie, his wife, a quiet weathered woman whom he claimed he had met 'many years ago'. I was thus presented with more of a problem. Not only would he stagger ponderously around my garden, but so did Hettie. I now had to feed both of them although he never asked for an additional 'fee' for their work. It appeared that 'Lucky Star' pilchards in tomato sauce was one of their favourites but the price was so high. I wished I could feel that the money I did give him was spent on food but I knew that he would disappear for days after being paid and spend it all at the bottle store. There was little I could do about that. He needed drink, he claimed, he wanted to forget his past.

'I'm bad in memories, in memories I

am very bad.'

I had stopped checking the washing line to see if anything was missing.

'You are my lord . . . good bloke.'

I cannot say that I revelled in his opinion but at least we had made a relationship, a truce. He came to me when he needed money and I started to pay him even if he didn't work for me that day. It was only when he was very drunk that he had a conscience, demanding that he work for the money, perhaps he still had some vestige of pride within him.

Late one afternoon, I saw a police van draw up alongside the vacant plot in the next road. Someone wanted this human refuse dump elsewhere. Johnny had had some friends staying with him and the thriving community now had an extra seven people. Within seconds, two black policemen overseen by a white constable waded into the waist high grass with truncheons. Johnny beat at the wooden gate and I realised his predicament. It took some time for me to find the right key and by the time I had opened it, Johnny's cries and banging had ceased. I walked across to where the unfortunates were being stuffed into the van — Johnny and Hettie were holding back, clinging onto the steel mesh door with all the failing strength that they could muster, despite the forceful attention of the black policemen. I politely inter-

I even offered him wine from a glass which he swallowed in one large gulp.

rupted and explained to the constable that Johnny was in fact coloured, Hettie I was not too sure of, but I claimed that she was also coloured. The constable claimed that they lied. I lied that I had proof and started to get angry. The constable obviously couldn't understand why I was defending them. Was I? But he let them go, with a paternal warning 'not to make trouble.' I left it at that not expecting nor receiving thanks. Perhaps to them, a jail at least had a roof and food at no cost. I was smarting that I could not retort to the constable's suggestion that they should: 'Fuck off back to Kaapstad.'

Johnny came to see me later, more inebriated than usual. He requested that I give him the red, hard hat that I had lying around the back. He laughed and put it on. With his blue overalls he looked very smart, very employed as a construction worker.

'To tell you the honest fact,' he stated and lost his train of thought, 'so

me myself, I'm getting tired — I'm fifty one . . . and with this . . .'

He tapped the hard hat.

'The police think I'm employed and will leave me alone.'

How ironic, it was that that hat had given him so much security for the police, to get a hat like that, ' . . . and a red one,' he added, his employer would have had to have seen his papers and then employed him after applying for the correct permit. His 'employer' must have had the confidence to do so even in these times of depression. So instead of his papers, he had a hat and that was good enough. I didn't remind him that he was already a 'legal person' in that he was coloured (although he didn't look like one.) Best just to avoid 'trouble'. So I became his willing accomplice, I even offered him wine from a glass which he swallowed in one large gulp (it was expensive wine). I hesitated before I refilled it.

I quizzed his past. What he told me was all disjointed but he started to cry when he said that his mother had passed away. When I don't know. Shit! But there was no stopping the incoherencies.

'My father was a grand boy — he is like my lord.'

I told him that that was out of the question, it was unfit to be lived in and anyway where would I park my car?

Through the apparent contradictions, I realised that his father who had been a bedding boy in De Aar with the SAR, now lived in Kimberley in his own house. It was too complicated to dispute. Johnny remembered that he used to sell water for sixpence a time. As the wine broke him down he started to cry again.

'I write him letters since my mother have passed away but he don't answer me.'

'Just one thing I have to know, I'll go there, I want to know and if I correspond, if I correspond in reply paid — I put on stamps, he just have to answer my letter, but he don't answer my letters, what's it?'

It occurred to me that he had no address to which he could receive correspondence in 'reply paid' but I did not pursue my puzzlement.

'Johnny, why don't you go back to Cape Town?'

'You know what, if you're a man, you must go places where your faith is. 'You know what, I'm a straight forward guy, Johnny Johnson — I'm clean, and clean with my heart, no matter what

anybody says, and the train fare? Where is the train fare? I want to stay in the garage.'

I told him that that was out of the question, it was unfit to be lived in and anyway where would I park my car? He didn't accept that straight away, I didn't expect him to.

'Johnny what about Cape Town?'

'I have a sister in Cape Town . . .' he replied. 'She's as white as you but where do I get the train fare?'

'Well then, can't you find anywhere here?'

'What they make to Sophiatown, what they make to Newclare? and my papers are up to shit.'

He slumped to the concrete floor. He was becoming more of a problem than I had anticipated. Would he leave? Could he leave? I imagined that it was all frozen in the moment — he neither wanted to go backward or forward, everything stood still. His expression changed, he wanted to say something but it seemed so difficult to do, a sort of melancholy sedation that he didn't want to disturb — a lingering instant without responsibility. Please Johnny, just go away, I can do no more for you. As if in answer to my thoughts, he replied harshly, the spittle gathering on his lips.

'I try to forget the past but now you come and take it!'

He could have it back, I didn't want it.

'And if I go to Cape Town,' he continued, ' . . . the people will laugh at me.'

He tugged at his blue overalls.

' . . . how can I go like this?'

There was no dignity here, just some obscene vestige appearing of socialness, dead now for countless years.

'You know what, I'm a straight forward guy — my father too Johannes Johnson, I'm clean.'

Little thoughts sparked him, dredged up and smelling.

'You know what master? I am in the escort police six months.'

'Escort police?'

'Umtata before independence, I work for the Bantu Commissioner.'

How bloody ironic, how the hell could he do that? Incredulously I replied, patting my chest, 'Wasn't it sore here?'

He didn't see the gesture but rambled on: 'No, sometimes you get right blokes, sometime you get blokes who are very difficult then we have to give them handcuffs . . .'

His small head sank to his chest and his eyes closed. Suddenly, boldly, proudly he stated clearly once again, 'I am Johnny Johnson!'

Oh God! I realised the depths to

which he must have sunk. His whole life, his whole reason for living hinged on his name. Was it possible to survive on name alone? Was that all he had left? I shut the door on him because it was very cold that night.

A week later, Johnny replete in his red, hard hat called over the fence.

Master have got food?'

With an air of resignation, I walked back into the kitchen. I found some sliced bread that was a week old. I carefully scraped off the green mould. Armed with that, I scanned the pantry shelves for a tin of something that I didn't really want. I saw a can of Tuna, one of soup and a can of Lucky Star Pilchards. With just his helmeted head over the fence, he watched me as I approached with the bread.

Johnny stared up at me, and I involuntarily stepped back.

'That's all I have Johnny, I must go to the supermarket.'

He took the bread slowly.

'Have you got pilchards?'

I visualised the tin I had only seen moments ago.

'No Johnny, no pilchards.'

He smiled, resigned to the bread I had given him.

'Thank you master, you are my lord.'

The head dropped from sight behind my high wooden fence. I walked back to the kitchen and stared at the can of Lucky Star, and examined why I had lied.

Two days after this, I was mowing the grass late one afternoon and tipped the grass cuttings over the fence into the vacant plot. The second time I did it, something caught my eye. I unlocked the gate and carefully walked across to the thing lying in the high grass.

Johnny stared up at me, and I involuntarily stepped back. I knelt beside him to see if he was all right. I couldn't bring myself to touch him.

'Hey Johnny! Wake up man!'

He didn't answer. I then plucked up courage and shook him. As his head lolled to one side, a fly flew out of his open mouth and settled on his exposed eye. I shot back in disgust and noticed that his red hat had disappeared along with his blue overalls. I glanced down to the bottom of the plot, but his 'family' had also disappeared. As I stared down at the body, more green flies settled on his face.

I realised that I would have to call an ambulance. And wondered if I would have to pay for it. Shit!

The Eye of the Storm

On a blue night
 Staggering under the weight of the world
 I contemplate:
 Who contends against
 The power of malignant men?

A name stirs within
 The centre
 Of my being:

Steve Biko, your head hovers above
 A multitude
 Of towering fists. You speak
 In your characteristic sharp and candid way.

Your voice ignites
 A black fire without any dread of death.

In court, you call the law to justice.
 Under house-arrest you speak.
 In solitary confinement,
 You are one with all incarcerated people.
 Naked under the interrogators' lamps,
 You mirror the dignity of man;
 You are the eye of the raging storm.

On a night as blue as prison bars
 The locusts came
 To prey on your brain.
 You declared yourself
 Open to frank talk
 They replied with brutality and chains.

You live
 In life and death and far beyond;
 A black fire
 Burning brilliantly night and day

Andries W. Oliphant

Untitled

Some never live
 to say it all.

In time we understood
 your few words.

We cried for you again
 yesterday.

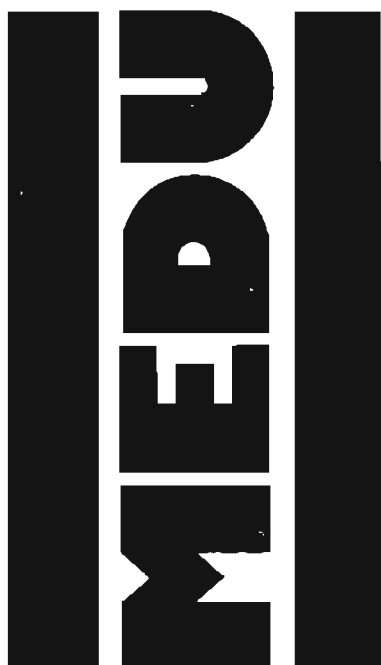
We hated to admit
 that our pace has
 failed to match yours.

But in our hearts
 your glow still burns
 and your spirit
 is still leading.

We still see you
 as a guardian
 and pray never to
 disappoint you
 tomorrow
 Bra Steve.

Thembeke Mbobo

MEDU Newsletter is the quarterly publication of the Medu Art Ensemble, based in Botswana. Contents include short stories, interviews, graphics, poems and articles on cultural work in Southern Africa. Medu Art Ensemble posters are regularly enclosed with the newsletter.



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By Jan Esmond

Grand Mal

Illustrated by Percy Sedumedi

'Unfortunately there is still a common belief that the main thing one should do for someone having a fit is to force something between their teeth so as to keep them from biting or choking on the tongue. This manoeuvre should never be attempted as it may damage the sufferer's mouth. I'll finish off the lecture by reminding you that the most important contribution you can make if someone has an epileptic fit in your presence is to ensure that the person is not in any physical danger during the fit. Thank you. That is all.'

Downing always finished his lectures with a formal 'that is all', as if the information imparted would be incomplete without it. Many a student, eager to get down his every word (after all he did make it clear that the exams would be based on his notes) would find the rushing pen taking down those completing words. This session however, books were closing as he said 'you'. News had come down from the main campus that a protest meeting had been called. It was always a mystery how these rumours circulated, like nerve cells in the brain communicating by

sending tiny electrical signals back and forth.

I wonder if there will be anything more than just talk this time.

We drove out of the now world famous Grootc Schuur hospital where Chris Barnard had recently performed his first heart transplant, passing through a number of stop streets, only yielding, over the bridge and onto the highway leading to the main campus a mile away. Above the busy highway, looking down onto the hospital, lie hundreds of acres of sloping lush fields and forest where deer graze contentedly at the feet of Cecil Rhodes, his vision cast northwards, all the way to Cairo. A view taking in wealth and poverty, rolling hills and desolate flatness, neatly laid out suburbs and sprawling shanty towns whose tin walls reverberate to the sound of jet engines passing so low overhead that makeshift holes in the ground latrines can be seen from the aircraft windows.

'I wonder if there will be anything more than just talk this time.' John's father had recently been arrested and was being held in detention with no fixed trial date. 'All they seem to do at the meetings is pass resolutions. Fancy words and no action. We need to get out into the streets and take our protests to the people.' His father was a well known commercial attorney, who, to the surprise of his contemporaries, had started taking on more and more political work. 'We are so cut off here on the campus what's the point of meetings and sit-ins. Look at it,' he said pointing. 'Sure it is the most beautiful campus in the world, but it must be the epitome of the isolated ivory tower. It looks supercilious sitting there on the side of the mountain way above the main road, like an observer, watching, disapproving, criticising but not getting off its bum to change anything.' He was silent a moment. 'Look how Jameson Hall juts out from the side of the mountain like a chin waiting to take a blow. Maybe it is freedom that is going to get a beating,' he said almost to himself.

continued on page 26

Working women

Mabel was a garment worker for twenty years – until she discovered that the dresses she made in one day sold for more than a week's wages.

I don't remember the year, but I left my two kids at home and went to look for a job in Parktown.

I left my children. I said to myself, 'These children can talk, they can say "I'm hungry" or "I want to pee". They are clever enough.' So I left them with my granny and went to work.

I got a job as a domestic. I was there five years. The madam was nice, the master was nice. I liked the work.

But I left because of my grandmother. She became ill and I went to look after her. I took two weeks off. In the second week my granny passed away. There was nobody to look after my kids. I started to panic.

I started to look for a job where I could come home every night – factory work or something.

I struggled to find work. So I took some of my savings and went to an industrial school. You know, there's a school to learn sewing on industrial machines. I learnt how to use overlock, line stitch, buttonhole. I paid R25 per month for six months, and I learnt how to sew.

It was in the sixties – there were ten of us in the class. We got jobs in a clothing factory. I started with overlock, waistline, and sideseams.

I worked for many years – in three different clothing factories. I left my last job in 1980. This is what made me leave the job. They started to make funny ways of work – they were very strict with us. We had to make twenty-two dresses a day. They didn't care about the patterns. If it was

a difficult pattern we could only make three or four dresses a day. But they just wanted the work. If you couldn't make a large amount they would shout at you and threaten to fire you. At that time I was earning R52,95 a week.

One Tuesday we were doing tennis dresses. You know, a tennis dress is a little thing like that. And those dresses cost R59 and some coins!

Anyway those dresses were wrong – the collar. They had come from another factory. The supervisor called me. She knew: Mabel is here, Mabel can fix it quickly. She piled all the dresses in front of me.

The thing that made me mad was this. That dress was R59 and I was earning a lower wage than that dress! You know, if you were doing alterations they used to take off the price-tags. You mustn't see the price. But this time they forgot.

I started to sew – two, three, four dresses. The supervisor asked me to hurry because they were waiting for the dresses.

Oh I was cross. I said to the supervisor, 'Come here. How much is this?' I took out my payslip and pointed out the amount I was earning. 'And how much is this?' I showed her the price-tag. Then I said, 'Do you want all these dresses this week?' She said yes.

I said, 'No, I'm leaving now.' I didn't say anything else. I just put my scissors, my tape – everything of mine – in a drawer and I went out. Until today.

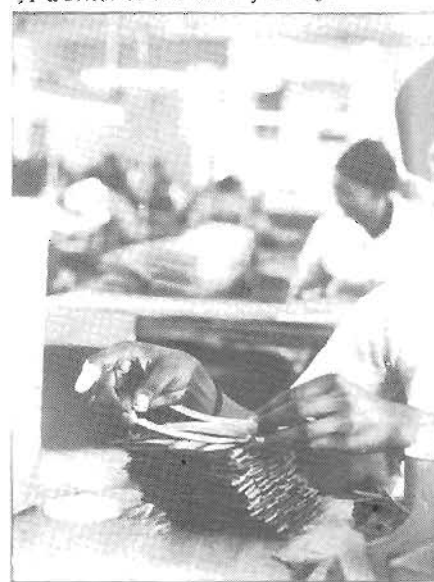
It's been two years since I last worked in a factory. I'm at home sewing and selling what I make. I won't work in a factory again.

(Mabel was interviewed in November 1983.)

A cashier in a parking garage.



A worker in a leather factory.





Workers in a clothing factory.

South Africa's black working women are the most exploited and least protected group of workers. They work during the day in jobs that are insecure, unskilled and badly paid. At night they come home to their second job as domestic workers in their own homes.

The position of working women is explored in Ravan Press/SACHED's new book 'Working Women'. This book contains more than eighty photographs, and twenty-one interviews with working women. If you would like to be informed when the book becomes available, write to: Ravan Press, P O Box 31134, Braamfontein 2017.

Photographs by Lesley Lawson



Connie Radebe prepares food for her own family. During the day she works as a canteen cook.



Nurse with blind patient, Elim hospital, Gazankulu.



Elsie Mbatba, domestic worker.



He was dedicated to his medicine, yet would often walk away when classmates sat talking shop. As if he could be dedicated on his own terms but not as part of a group. Prior to his father's arrest he was seldom outspoken, not often imposing his opinion on a discussion. It was not that he did not form opinions on issues, but rather that he kept them to himself. Since his father's arrest he had become so outspoken that his friends warned him he would end up with his father in the same prison. Maybe that is what he secretly wanted!

I turned off the highway onto the road winding up to the campus like a broken life line on a hand, past a sign, black print on a white background — 'Private Property, entrance restricted to members of the University and people on official business.'

From the parking lot we walked up the wide stairs two at a time, our white coats, worn out of habit — a badge of identification — flapping around the knees. 'The meeting must have already begun. There aren't many people sunning themselves on the steps.'

'There must be two thousand people here,' I whispered to John as we pushed our way into Jameson Hall beyond the rows of people standing at the back, keeping their options open, easy escape if the proceedings did not meet their interest. On one side of the stage I counted twelve people standing, each holding a sign 'FREE ME' written in large capitals with a name underneath. As we moved forward someone whispered, 'that's John Hansen,' and people made way for us to get closer to the stage. Wherever John went people would point, whispering about his father. He had acquired the status of a cause since his father's arrest. People either kept away as if he would contaminate them or they approached him like some overnight guru, anxious to hear what he had to say.

Remember that some of those shouting the loudest amongst us are probably "visitors".

Jeff Allen, the leader of the student body was addressing the meeting.

'... So, we have just been advised that the minister has refused to accept our petition to charge or release the twelve.' John's father was one of the twelve, arrested two months previously and since held in prison with no access to family or lawyers, no charge, no trial date, while "evidence was being gathered". 'In fact we are reliably informed that the petition was summarily torn up

before it even reached the minister's hands, though he knew of its contents.' He uttered the last words in a louder voice to be heard above the swelling jeers. 'So now,' he shouted, 'we have to decide on our next step.'

A few voices in the crowd started to chant, 'march, march, march.' The call was taken up by a larger number and seemed to echo harshly off the panelled walls of the hall, crowded with golden names of those honoured for sporting achievements and academic distinction, more accustomed to hearing the gentle applause of a graduation ceremony or the sounds of a symphony concert. As the chanting grew I noticed the glint of light off cameras. The usual contingent of plainclothes police was in the hall taking pictures of every person who opened their mouth. They stuck out in the student crowd like a penguin amidst a group of seals. It was a standing joke that if you yawned at a meeting Boss would have a photograph of all your fillings.

Jeff raised his hands to quieten the crowd. 'Remember that some of those shouting the loudest amongst us are probably "visitors" who would like nothing better than to spark confrontation. We must think carefully about our options. Let's not get carried away by our emotions.' He was highly respected by most of the students. A few of the radicals said he was too cautious. He had shown remarkable diplomacy in walking the very thin rope of confrontation. He had been arrested, but only for questioning and never detained. The house he shared with two other students had been bombed and nobody arrested.

I sensed John about to speak. 'We must take our protest to the people. We must let them see and partake in our cause otherwise we are wasting our time. I think we should go to town.' He sat down to the sounds of cheering endorsement.

When the noise subsided Jeff said from the stage, 'I can understand the way you are feeling John, but we mustn't let our personal emotions sway our decision. We must act rationally in a way that will be most effective to our cause. I personally don't think we should march through town today. I was given some information before the meeting which most of you have probably not heard. The chief magistrate has banned meetings of more than twelve people in the city area for a period of thirty days. We all know he will extend that as he wishes. So if we march we must do it with the awareness that we will be breaking the law and that the police will probably use forceful means to break it up.' He paused for

a moment in which there was a muttering around the hall.

'But, most importantly,' he said raising his voice above the rising noise, 'most importantly, I don't believe that such action will serve the best interests of those with whom we are concerned, the people in whose name this meeting was called.'

John said,
'You know if you continue to smoke you'll get cancer.'

This last statement was greeted with reflective silence; like that after an absorbing play before the audience starts to applaud. Then different voices were heard at the same time. Suggestions as to what should be done — 'I think... ' 'We should... ' 'Why don't we... ' None of the suggestions reached a conclusion. Finally a decision was made to disagree, a resolution was passed condemning the continued detention without trial, and a small committee elected to meet that afternoon to continue the search for a means of action. The meeting broke up rather than ended. There was a tangible feeling of discontent as people filed out of the hall, blinking into the bright light of the summer afternoon. I needed a toilet and as I manoeuvred my way down the stairs outside the hall I picked up snatches of conversation.

'I think Hansen was right... '

'He's good but too cautious... '

'What's the point of another resolution... '

Words winding together, a mosaic of dissatisfaction, evaporating like steam as they wafted over the heads towards the suburbs below.

When I returned to the area outside the hall, I was surprised to see so many people still there. Usually the call of lectures or the beach led to a quick dispersion. I walked back slowly to the stairs looking for John. The tenor of the conversations had changed.

'Oh well, I guess I should go and do some work in the library... '

'Who wants a lift back to Sea Point?'

'Let's go get some lunch... '

The balloon of anticipation was slowly deflating. People started drifting away and had a security police car not pulled up at the bottom of the steps at that moment there probably would have been a complete dispersal. The black Ford Fairlane glided quietly to a halt. A man in the back seat started to photograph those people still standing or sitting on the stairs. It was as if the sound of the clicking camera sent invisible drumbeats through the air

which were picked up around the campus. The numbers grew rapidly. Four people, including John walked up to the car. The crowd was silent, words held in suspense.

John walked round the car and stopped in front of the driver's window. 'You are trespassing. You have no business here. Didn't you see the sign.' His voice carried to the steps. The driver continued smoking, looking ahead as if John did not exist. The camera continued to click. One of the four positioned himself in front of the camera window, blocking the photographer's line of view. John, seeing he was getting no reaction said, 'You know if you continue to smoke you'll get cancer.' The doctor in his white coat. The driver looked at John for a moment acknowledging his presence for the first time. Then he quickly regained his composure. 'So you aren't deaf. Please remove yourselves before we have to get the university police to remove you'

'Fat chance,' someone called out from the crowd.

With the photographer's view now blocked by others from the crowd, the driver started up the car. As the car moved away from the curb the driver found his tongue. 'You just wait to see what you are going to get,' hung threateningly in the air. John walked back to the stairs to ironic applause.

We sat silently on the stairs, waiting, looking at the view below our feet. The slight south easter playing with the smoke from the power station near the airport, a beacon for a weather conscious city. The south easter bringing good surf on the Atlantic coast, and fine days. The northerly bringing up the surf on the Indian Ocean, and rain.

A rumour circulating that the police were coming in force to clear us away was greeted with disbelief yet almost with hope. Action of some nature was wanted. The numbers on the steps were being visibly augmented by new arrivals.

'What do you think?' I asked John. 'Do you reckon they will actually come up here in numbers to clear us off?'

'I wouldn't put anything past them,' he replied.

'John, I don't know if you want to talk about it, but I have been wanting to ask you about your dad. In all the years I have known your family he didn't seem to be politically inclined at all. Do you know why he got involved?'

'That's just what I was thinking about,' John replied. 'I gave him that book on Mandela. Do you remember the one I showed you. I brought it back from London hidden in a nightie I bought for my mother. Any boooooks,' he said laughing, imitating the airport customs officer's call. 'One night I woke

thirsty and went down to the kitchen to make myself a cup of tea. The light was on in the study. I was surprised to see my father, pipe in mouth, reading. He was so absorbed that I stood there for a few moments before he became aware of my presence. He was reading the speech, 'Black man in a white court.' I made him some tea as well and we sat and spoke. In some ways I think that was the beginning of his interest in the African cause.' He paused for a moment. 'Though maybe that's too simple a way of looking at something so complex. How can we ever really know what causes a person to act, to stand up for something they really believe no matter what the consequences? Maybe we can only really understand when it happens to us. Sometimes I blame myself when I see where he is now, yet I think he is happier within himself, having acted. So few people really do something in which they passionately believe.' He was interrupted by the sounds of vehicles, and somebody running from the direction in which the noise was coming, calling out, 'The police are coming, four truck loads!'

Right. I am
Colonel Visser. I have
instructions to clear these steps
within fifteen minutes.

My first reaction when the vans came into view was to laugh. It looked funny. Like a scene from *Kelly's Heroes*, the vans approached like tanks driving between the placid ivy lined academic buildings. Talk about overkill. Any laughter was short lived. They parked their vans in the places reserved for the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Dean and started off-loading the Alsatians. Swiftly and efficiently the police and dogs lined up at the bottom of the stairs.

'Christ, there are forty of them,' John exclaimed. Dog leashes in one hand, batons drawn in the other, looking like they would enjoy nothing more than the order to charge.

Their commander strode out in front of his troops, loudhailer in hand. His voice echoed loudly in the amphitheatre created by the surrounding buildings. 'Right. I am Colonel Visser. I have instructions to clear these steps within fifteen minutes. This is an illegal gathering. If this area is not cleared within fifteen minutes then I will order my men to clear it for me.' The attention of the crowd was drawn to three people who stood up and walked down towards the road and the police. It looked like they had decided to leave. They stopped

and sat down a few feet in front of the row of dogs, as if defying them to have a go.

'They must be crazy,' I whispered to John as the crowd applauded this move.

'Not so crazy,' he replied. 'It looks brave but if the charge comes they will probably be least affected. A lot of people will be thrown down the stairs. They at least are already at the bottom.' He stood up. 'Colonel Visser, you and your men are trespassing. You have no right to be here. This has been a peaceful meeting. We are affecting no-one. What you are doing is illegal.'

'You have twelve minutes,' he replied.

John turned to the crowd. 'We have every right to be here. We must stay put and not be intimidated by this show of brute force.' He sat down.

There was an anxious buzz through the crowd. Nobody seemed to be leaving. A solidarity which was not usually evident at political meetings.

'You have ten minutes.'

'Look,' John said pointing upwards to the roof of the library building, four storeys high, to the right of the steps where we were sitting. At either end were two flat-topped concrete pillars ending at the same height as the roof. Some people were sitting on top of the pillars. 'Witnesses to the end of civilisation as we know it,' John said jokingly.

I wouldn't mind being up there now,' I said trying to capture the same spirit but sounding nervous.

'You have five minutes.'

One of the law professors appeared at the bottom of the stairs. Despite an almost imbecilic appearance, a round jolly face, protruding buck teeth and stomach, he was one of the most brilliant people to teach at the University. 'I have been told to ask you all to move. That comes from higher authority not from me. You must make up your own minds. You have every right to be where you are but it may be a painful right to uphold.' He walked away to cheers from the crowd. The tension broken for a moment.

'You have four minutes.' The dogs understood that their moment was drawing near, straining tightly at the leashes. One let out an undisciplined bark. A yelp of anticipation.

'You have three minutes.' The same formula as a mechanical clock.

I felt sweat gathering on my brow and lip. I was aware of my tongue licking the salty beads. 'I'm terrified,' I said to John. 'Look at those teeth.'

'I'm also shit scared,' he said putting his arm around me. 'We mustn't let those bastards see the fear. Link arms everybody,' he said to those around us. The whispered asides stopped. Time didn't.

'You have two minutes.' The silence dragged. I noticed for the first time that I could hear the dim sound of traffic from the highway below. My toes were itchy but I could not scratch them because my arms were linked. And then all I could hear was the dog's panting, the sounds of their rough tongues rubbing against their teeth. I shivered, the tingling feeling flowing along my upper arms and up the back of my head.

'You have one minute. Get ready, men.'

Time longer than rope, the thought repeated itself over and over in my mind, seeming to speed up as the seconds passed. Hazily I heard, 'Clear these steps.' As if in slow motion I saw the first line move forward, roughly throwing the brave band of three behind them. 'John was right,' I thought. Then slow motion speeded up accompanied by the most terrible sounds, vicious barking, screams, the dull thuds of wood on flesh, tearing flesh. Everything in front of me looked like fast action captured on slow speed film, a blur of movement, hands feet dogs clubs. They progressed up the stairs. People in front of us tried to get up and run backwards, falling like dominoes, adding to the crush. I bowed my head freeing my arms to protect my body as best I could. It was like a fight in a turkey coop with feathers flying everywhere. The line of police was drawing closer and closer. Slow but steady progress up the steps. Madness seemed to have overtaken our world.

Suddenly I was aware amidst the chaos, of strange movements from John. He sat up straight and then his body started shaking, like a witchdoctor in trance. His face contorted uncontrollably. I tried to shake him, his eyes rolled back and I realised what was happening. He was having a fit. Words echoed in my mind, 'The most important thing is to ensure that the person having a fit is not in any physical danger.' The police were upon us. I screamed, 'He's having an epileptic fit, for Christ sake give him room!' I felt the blow of a baton on my back. The pain, I struggled desperately to protect John with my body. I was ripped off and thrown backwards. He lay convulsing on the ground with batons and dogs all over him. I seemed to be the only person who knew what was happening. His movements seemed to incense the dogs and the batons flew into his body with repeated thuds. I tried desperately to get to him, no longer feeling my own pain. As I was flung backwards again I saw that the people on the roof of the library were standing up now, hands raised over the scene below, dead still, in a Hitler salute. ●

With Endless Love to Victor Jara

Though his songs
are strong and powerful
and bitter and determined
and angry and violent
and revolutionary and uncompromising,
they have at their very base,
at their very foundation
a certain happiness.
A happiness
which is like a star to a child,
though it appears little and close by,
it is in fact large, very large,
large enough for all to see,
to feel,
to experience,
(for some to embrace — heroic and visionary,
for others to fear — irritating and defiant)

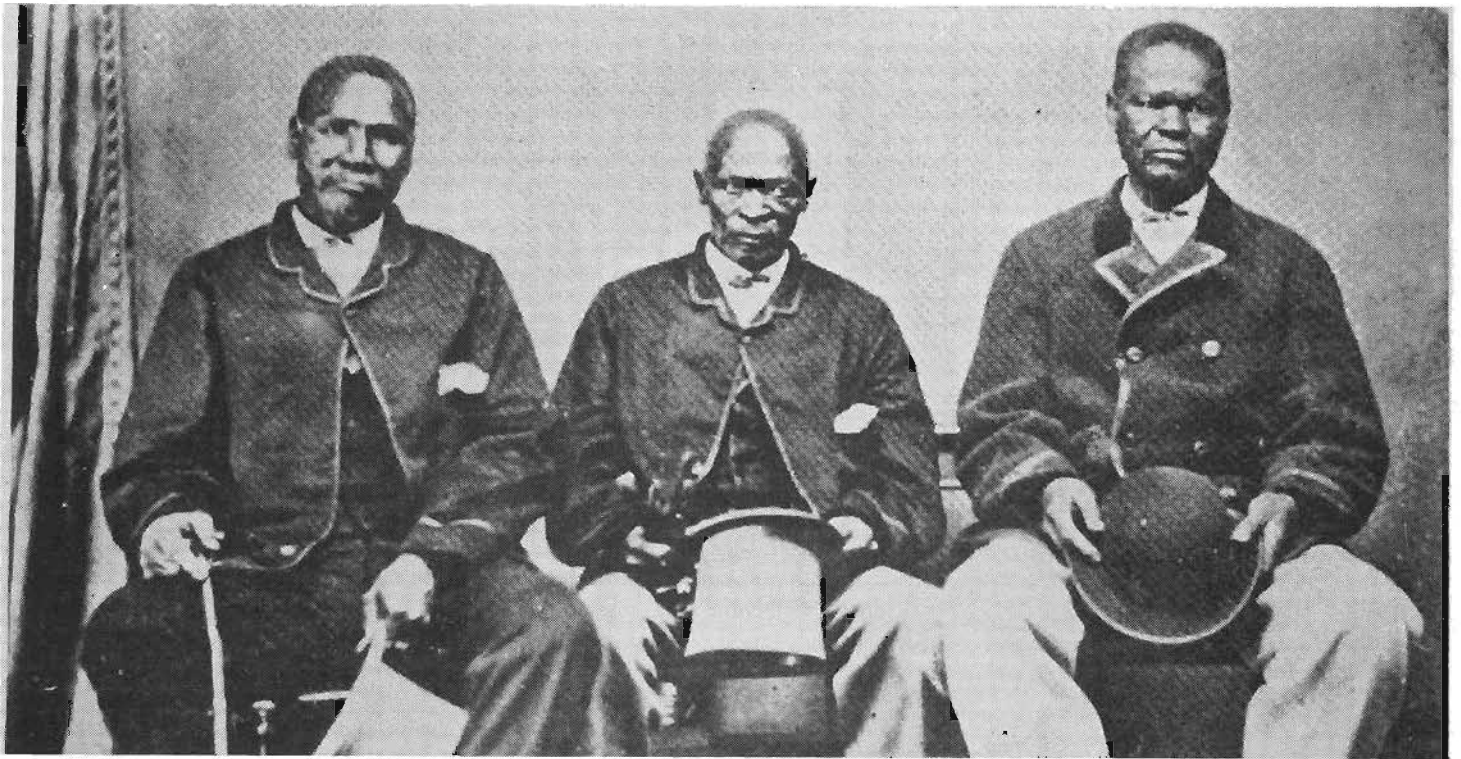
a happiness which stubbornly rejoices
at a victory certain to be won
But yet so deep,
so deep within him,
so far
that no bullet could ever reach it.

Victor Jara is dead
His hands were broken
his body was smashed
But the defiant happiness
which they sought to kill,
was not only in Victor,
not only in the stadium,
not only in the songs,
or Santiago, or Chile, or Latin America . . .
but embedded in the bosoms
of the rising oppressed

So must we remain
We, who rise before the sun
and rest only after it has gone
We, even though we harden ourselves like steel
to fight,
even though our armoury
includes the bitterest of bitter
the angriest of anger
the most violent of violence,
we must nurture and cherish
within ourselves,
within our furthestmost recess
that which makes us human.
For otherwise
we will be
them

Farouk Stemmet

Farouk Stemmet



Macoma, Siyolo and Xoxo after their release from Robben Island.

by J B Peires

ESIQITHINI

'Esiqithini' is a Xhosa word meaning quite simply 'on the Island'. No particular island is named, but it would be difficult to find a Xhosa person who did not know exactly which Island is meant. Even in English, the phrase 'the Island' has only one meaning for most South Africans. Robben Island, that pleasantly named home of seals, has attached itself ineradicably to the collective consciousness of us all. We know it as a place of banishment, loneliness and misery, but we also recall the bravery of those who suffered – and are still suffering – the agonies of exile on its shores. The holy of holies, Mtuzuzeli Matshoba called it, consecrated by the self-sacrifice of its victims.

The best-known of Robben Island's early prisoners was the giant prophet and wardoctor Nxele (Makana), who attacked Grahamstown in 1819, was banished to the Island, and drowned trying to escape. But there were other exiles too, now sadly forgotten. This is the story of the Xhosa chiefs imprisoned on the Island in the 1850s and of the

lepers and lunatics who shared their fate.

Governor Sir George Grey and Commissioner Maclean wanted to dispossess the Xhosa of all the territory they then still occupied in what is now the 'white corridor' between East London and Queenstown.

The Prisoners

Siyolo, son of Mdushane, was the first Xhosa political prisoner to be detained on Robben Island after the death of Nxele in 1820. He was the only chief on the Ndlambe side to fight in the War of Mlanjeni (1850-3). 'I have no cattle,' he said. 'I have no home. But I am determined to live like a wild beast and do all the damage that I can.' Isolated from the other Xhosa leaders, Siyolo rode to Fort Murray to open negotiations with the local Commissioner, Colonel John Maclean. Maclean called him into a

private room 'to hear his statement read over,' and there treacherously took him captive. Siyolo was condemned as a rebel, and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The other Xhosa prisoners were victims of the Nongqawuse cattle-killing Disaster of 1856-7. Governor Sir George Grey and Commissioner Maclean wanted to dispossess the Xhosa of all the territory they then still occupied in what is now the 'white corridor' between East London and Queenstown. The Nongqawuse starvation forced most of the people into labour on the white farms of the Karroo, but the chiefs remained behind to safeguard the Xhosa national lands until their men returned. Grey and Maclean were determined to get rid of them.

They established military tribunals to convict as many Xhosa chiefs as possible under martial law. The accused chiefs were allowed to call witnesses but they were not permitted defence lawyers, and, as they were unaware of British legal procedures, they were easily convicted.

Mhala, the great chief of the Ndlambe whose lands stretched from the Komga to present-day Berlin, was accused with his councillor, Kente, of raising war against the Queen. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, but the injustice of his trial was so obvious that this was reduced to five years.

Maqoma, the greatest military mind among the Xhosa, was charged with sending his men to kill a police informer, and sentenced to twenty years. His brother, Xhoxho, convicted of stock theft, broke out of King Williams Town jail but was recaptured when he foolishly visited his old homestead. He was imprisoned on the Island with an increased sentence.

The Gquhukhwebe chief Phatho, who fought on the Colonial side in the War of Mlanjeni, learned his mistake the hard way. Together with his sons, Dilima, Mate and Mpafa, and his brother-in-law, the chief Stokwe, he was convicted for stock theft and transported to Robben Island.

Fadana, a former ruler of the Thembu kingdom, was the leader of the Nongqawuse believers in the Queenstown district. He remained defiant, despite the failure of his hopes, and raised an army of 500 starving believers to plunder the opponents of Nongqawuse of the cattle they had saved for themselves. Fadana was captured together with chief Qweshu of the amaNdlungwana and sent to Robben Island for seven years.

Robben Island

Robben Island was known to European sailors for its valuable seal skins (rob is Dutch for seal) long before the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652. When, resisting the occupation of their land, the Khoi raided the Dutch herds, Van Riebeeck fed his soldiers on penguin meat and penguin eggs from the Island. The first Colonial officials were sent to the Island to breed sheep and rock-rabbits (dassies) for meat. In 1658, South Africa's first political prisoners – Khoi leaders known to us only as Harry, Boubo and Jan Cou – were transported to Robben Island.

Hundreds of physically and mentally crippled people were housed in the old cells and jails and the male lunatics were set to work in the stone quarries.

The Island was valued as a prison not only because the prisoners found it difficult to escape, but because it



On Robben Island, Xhosa chiefs banished by Sir George Grey.

concealed the terrible conditions under which the convicts lived, and the dreadful punishments they suffered. Convicted prisoners were often sentenced to whippings with the cat-o-nine-tails, to branding and pinching with red-hot irons and to the chopping off of their hands. Hard labour could mean up to twenty-five years quarrying stone and burning lime, working and sleeping all the while in irons and chains.

The British conquest of the Cape (1806) eased most of these cruel punishments, but it did not change the essential function of Robben Island as a remote place where those who defied the Colonial system could be dumped, punished and forgotten. It was only in the 1840s, when an energetic official named John Montagu became Colonial Secretary, that the situation was altered. Montagu saw that hard labour convicts could serve the Colonial economy more efficiently by building roads, harbours and transport infrastructure than by toiling away unproductively on the Island. Thus in 1844, the regular convicts left the Island for hard labour at 'convict stations' throughout the Colony.

Lepers and Lunatics

At this time, lepers, lunatics, the destitute and the chronic sick were housed in public institutions at 'a very heavy annual expense' in Montagu's view. Moreover, the appalling state of these places bore embarrassing witness to the heartlessness of the selfish and acquisitive Cape society. Hundreds of physically and mentally crippled people were housed in the old cells and jails, and the male lunatics were set to work in the stone quarries – because hard work was thought to keep them quiet. Little attempt was made to rehabilitate these social discards. Lepers (a category which included syphilitics and skin

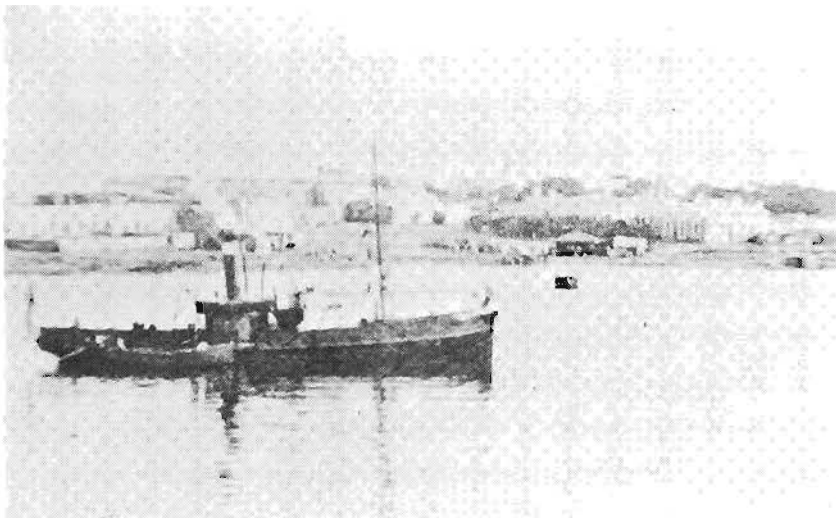
cancer victims) and lunatics mingled with each other, the peaceful with the violent and the hopeful with the hopeless. They rarely saw friends or family, and they had very little chance of ever getting out again. When the Xhosa chiefs arrived in 1858, Robben Island was little better than a junkyard for the Colony's unwanted human rejects.

It was at Murray's Bay, described as "one of the bleakest and most wretched spots on the face of the earth," that the Xhosa chiefs were settled.

In Transit

When the soldiers brought the Xhosa chief Mhala down to East London, harbour, they put him under a crane and pretended that they were going to hang him. They even put a rope around his neck. Mhala remained calm and dignified throughout this ordeal, but as soon as he was put on board ship, he let out three loud and piercing yells. He had never been so close to the sea before, and thought that the waves which dashed against the tiny sailing-ship were coming to get him. An observer reported that Mhala was very dejected as the ship sailed away, and that he 'sat on deck looking wistfully at the land that was once his own.'

We do not know whether the other Xhosa suffered similar experiences. Certainly, they travelled in chains. Fadana's irons were so heavy that they rubbed his skin right through. Maqoma's chains were 'heavy enough for a ship's cable' but he did not notice them. He was expecting to see Sir George Grey, hoping not only that the governor



View of the Robben Island Leper and Mental Asylum taken from site of present day harbour in 1896.

would reverse his sentence, but that he would return the land Maqoma had lost in the War of Mlanjeni. Sadly, for Maqoma's high hopes, Grey was not interested in meeting his victims. After some weeks in Cape Town jails, the Xhosa chiefs were moved to Robben Island.

Murray's Bay

Table Bay once swarmed with whales, and in 1806 a Mr John Murray was permitted to open a small whaling station at a sheltered inlet to the north of the main village of Robben Island, which became known as Murray's Bay. In 1820 the imprisoned prophet Nxele and thirty comrades stole one of Murray's boats in a brave attempt to escape. They failed and Nxele was drowned, but the authorities were sufficiently alarmed to force Murray to close down his business. It was here at Murray's Bay, described by a visitor as 'one of the bleakest and most wretched spots on the face of the earth,' that the Xhosa chiefs were settled.

Prison Village of the Chiefs

Dwellings in the usual Xhosa style, but covered with tarpaulins instead of reeds, were erected for them. They received adequate food and tobacco but were denied the comfort of liquor. Siyolo and Maqoma were accompanied by their wives. Phatho's wife arrived in Cape Town, but the old Gqunukhwebe chief was bedridden in Somerset Hospital and was released shortly thereafter. The wives of Mhala and Xhoxho flatly refused to join their husbands. The letters of the exiles contain pathetic requests for news of distant homes and children. Clearly, the prisoners suffered most from a lack of human warmth. One of the young chiefs made love to a leper woman. They were detected in a field, and the young man was sentenced

to solitary confinement on half-rations.

Boredom and meaninglessness were the main enemies of the Xhosa prisoners. Siyolo, who had arrived earlier than the others, was allowed to tend and herd a flock of goats. But then the nurses complained that he disturbed them by driving his goats along the main street in the village, and he was forced to sell all but twenty of them. In 1863, Governor Wodehouse gave the prisoners four cows. But the pasturage on the Island was very poor. The cows gave no milk at all between December and May, and by 1865 half of them were dead.

The prisoners made repeated but vain appeals to be released. One problem was that only Dilima, who had been educated by the missionaries, spoke any English. When he was released in 1865, the isolation of the others was complete.

The chiefs were forced to submit quietly to the abuse of white lunatics. A visitor described the encounter between Xhoxho and one of these:

The lunatic's eye first fell on the unhappy Xoxo, who seemed to cower before him . . . Xoxo, feeling that his presence was not further welcome, pointed to his brow, and whispered quietly that our friend was 'bayan malkop'.

Then Dilima entered the room:

The lunatic poured forth on him a pitiless, pelting storm of insults. Ultimately, he stood erect immediately in front of Dilima, and raising his head, stuck out his lips . . . Dilima, no way frightened, simply imitated with exactness, the actions of the lunatic.

Gradually, the chiefs found themselves joined by other Xhosa invalided out to the Island. Tyuli, transported to Cape Town for theft, contracted leprosy there and was then shipped over. Zidon served out his sentence, but was afflicted with an ulcer and could not be moved. Signanda had gone blind. Nkohla's one arm went dead on him. All these helpless invalids joined the small Xhosa community at Murray's Bay.

This most brilliant of Xhosa statesmen and warriors cried bitterly before he died "of old age and dejection, at being here alone — no wife, or child, or attendant."

No doubt the chiefs did what they could to resist. There are obscure references in the official papers to repeated 'misconduct' by Siyolo. The wives of Siyolo and Maqoma smuggled messages to Xhosaland. Hope often gave way to black despair. One of the invalids tried, unsuccessfully, to slit



The main street on Robben Island. Anglican Church, water tank. Two mules walked in a circle all day to pump water up.

LISTEN

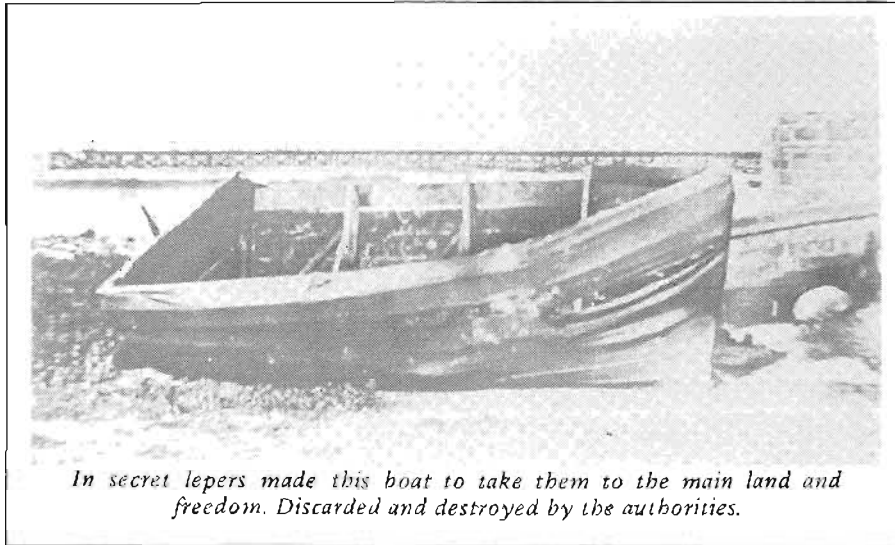
Listen to the sound
Of the cowhide drum
Crossing the message.
Listen to the African drum
Invoking the spirits.
For the son is born
For culture is restored.
For today is Heroes' Day.
For the bride is expectant,
Willing to give birth to Africa's love.

Listen to the ululating voice
Of the African woman
For her husband comes in triumph.
Listen to the sound of the pestle,
Listen to the groans of the mortar
For maidens are pounding millet in the lair.

Listen to the bellowing bull
Ready for the plough.
Listen to the murmur
Of the young one, on mother's back,
The fecund womb of Africa
Nursing freedom,
Taking the spear
And the shield
And Ogun wakes
In anger
To trample on the oppressors.

Listen to our songs
As we whet our spears
On the shores of the Tugela
Listen to our songs
As we cleanse
Our regalia in the river Limpopo
Listen to the voice of the imbongi
For Africa is no more dark
For Africa is no more a slave.

Dombo Ratshilumela



In secret lepers made this boat to take them to the main land and freedom. Discarded and destroyed by the authorities.

his throat. Maqoma vented his rage by wrongly blaming the officials on the Island for his imprisonment. His wife Kayi falling sick refused medicine, telling the doctor, 'No, my heart is sore. I want to die.'

Freedom — and After

One by one, the Xhosa chiefs served out their sentences, and in 1869 the last prisoners, Maqoma, Xhoxho and Siyolo were released by Governor Wodehouse. On their return home, they found their lands lost and their people scattered. They were forbidden to own land or to summon their followers. Phatho died quietly in 1869 and Mhala followed him in 1875. But Maqoma, in extreme old age, refused to abide by the regulations imposed on him. Twice in 1871, with no aim in defiance but defiance itself, he left his appointed place of residence and returned to his old territory near Fort Beaufort. He was easily captured and, on the second occasion, he was summarily returned to the Island without a hearing or a trial. This time he was alone, utterly alone. He spoke only a few words of English, and there

was no one on the Island who spoke any Xhosa. When in September 1873 he started sinking after 18 months of solitude, the Island authorities sent for an interpreter and companion, it was too late. This most brilliant of Xhosa statesmen and warriors cried bitterly, according to the Anglican chaplain who witnessed his last moments, before he died 'of old age and dejection, at being here alone — no wife, or child, or attendant.'

Siyolo and Xhoxho remained quiet until the Ninth and last Frontier War (the War of Ngeayechibi) broke out. Though the causes of the war were irrelevant to them personally, neither had any hesitation. 'I would rather die in the field, eaten by vultures,' said Siyolo, 'than die in my bed and be carried out on a board.' Both the old chiefs were killed in battle. So was Sandile, the senior Xhosa chief west of the Kei. His son, Gonya Sandile, was the first of a new generation to be imprisoned on Robben Island.

Photographs by courtesy of C. Struik from the book *Secure the Shadow* by T. McNally, and *Robben Island*

The English Association Literary Competition, No. 24, requires a Science Fiction Story of a maximum of 6,000 words.

Closing date for entries is 31st August, 1985.

1st Prize, R500.00, 2nd Prize R300.00 and 3rd Prize R200.00. Prizes will be awarded according to the discretion of the judges appointed by the Committee of the English Association.

The results will be announced at the Annual Dinner, November, 1985, and immediately afterwards in the main newspapers throughout South Africa.

Entry forms and copies of the Rules may be obtained from The Competition Organiser, The English Association, P.O. Box 1180, Cape Town, 8000. Entry fee is R1.00 for every manuscript sent.

by GM Mogwe

The Hill

Illustrated by
Percy Sedumedi



The storm clouds hung heavily, surrounding him with a humid greyness that did nothing to relieve his boredom. Of course rain was what everyone was praying for. It had been the worst drought in history or as far as his father could remember. The only reality of all this talk of drought was the hollow, rotting carcass of his cow. It had shocked him. He thought of the day it was born and felt a deep sadness even though he had never viewed it in the same way as he viewed his dog, a mongrel that an old Afrikaner farmer had given them years ago. They had returned from Morakeng the night before. The image was still fresh in his mind. The dust was beginning to annoy him, everything he did, everywhere he looked, this fine brown dust, in his eyes, covering his legs, in his finger nails. It even managed to invade the privacy of his bedroom.

It was the abstract centre of his deepest thoughts.

He often gazed at the hill from his bedroom window. For him it held a mystical quality. It was the abstract centre of his deepest thoughts.

Treasuring his solitude yet on a definite search for stimulation of some sort, he started climbing. He knew that

there were supposedly leopards living at the top. They would sometimes appear in the early morning. People said they were looking for water. He interrupted some goats who studied him for a short time but quickly lost interest and continued with their incessant nibbling. He poked the largest one with the stick he was carrying which he now found tiresome having stripped it of all its bark.

It was frustrating to say the least and he felt empty and lost.

The boy next door with his comic books full of adventure could not satisfy his deep seated boredom. His parents didn't really approve of such comics and never bought them. He received what was considered a more educational monthly in the post from England but he had already absorbed every detail of last month's. He wondered what it would be like to have Christmas in the snow with a jolly red cheeked Father Christmas. His father worked for the colonial administration and had been allocated a house in the compound next to the Reynolds, an English family. He had to admit that Mrs Reynolds did act rather strangely and Tommy was not always the best of company. It was frustrating to say the

least and he felt empty and lost. There were things to do; various chores which would be considered useful and constructive but they didn't appeal to him. He had looked forward to his mother's treat of scones and jam but that had proven to be a momentary pleasure, a bit of an anti-climax really.

He scrambled up a large boulder, using its natural cleavage, fashioned from unnumbered centuries of wind and rain, as a shelf upon which to rest his feet. He sat and contemplated the scene which lay before him. His mother was just a small speck in the cluster of colonial structures, isolated with its shiny tin roofs and mass of white walls from the sprawling village below which meandered off to join thorn trees and koppies in the distance.

He saw a branch swinging, it was rearing its head.

The village fitted so perfectly with its surroundings that he wondered why it wasn't considered to be a natural phenomenon. After all ant hills were manufactured by ants just as houses were manufactured by man He didn't see it until it was next to him on the rock. It was light brown with many small black spots and flecks. He saw a branch swinging, it was rearing its head and moving its solid, shining body in a swaying motion, advancing, hood spread. Stay still, his father had once said, very still. Were words reality? Could he reach out and stroke its glistening skin and perhaps feel moisture on his fingertips. He jumped, stumbling over a cushion of tumbling rocks. The goats fled bleating but not knowing. Why wasn't he a mouse? One of those with the three stripes on their backs. It was their role in the hierarchy of life and death to die at the mercy of a snake. He was flying, not like a bird but as humans fly, just as he had done in his dreams. He had better let his mother know where he was. She was sure to be worrying by now. Thorn trees tore at his skin with their gnarled fingers, trying to pin him down, but he felt no pain. What was his mother going to say. She had warned him. His brain spun a fantasy of questions which he knew were logical but which wouldn't form themselves satisfactorily. He couldn't sort them out. Words, judgements, experiences; where did one end and the other begin? He ran towards a mellow golden circle of sunlight which pierced the dark blanket of storm cloud. It was that late afternoon light that he liked so much. Relief spread through his tense limbs, earth, wind and fire seemed to unite as he fell.

The cool rain washed his small dusty legs

Kelwyn Sole

Pregnancy

*'A poem should be palpable and mute
As a globed fruit*

*Dumb
As old medallions to the thumb*

*... A poem should not mean
but be.'*

Archibald MacLeish

Archibald MacLeish believes
a poem should not mean
but be (as a dumb fruit,
I think he said)

but like Baraka sometimes
I think a poem must be mean
(fuck poems and they are useful)
to be intelligible

here.
For instance
my wife seems to be pregnant,
expanding parcel of flesh
in which the bomb of the future
kicks its tiny feet

(I write this down to form it:
anneal to husband and poet
in the cosy mansion of the poem
when the outside world is too cold
or quiet to love her in).

But, today war has descended on us
suddenly and finally.
Tongues lash out at enemies,
the radios one can buy
goosestep as soon as plugged
their collective noise popping
my speech's flimsy bubble.

From this poem

the news is I am warm,
and sit in front of a veering fire
which unfortunately used to be
my house

while words' meanings tick in my throat,
nervously.

Kelwyn Sole

AKUA'BA*

The wind of God
rattles pods to pollen
when women choose their time
with minds bound in rainbows

but my lover is a snake
his eyes as
hard as jewels

akua'ba
I have felt your fist
tug my hair
cleaved your body to my back
and known the weight is blessed

touch the womb
to truth
where all seed
falls in silence
Kelwyn Sole

* An akua'ba is a Ghanaian fertility doll women carry on their backs
when they are having difficulty conceiving.



Cherry Clayton

TWO JERUSALEM GATES

The Golden Gate is always shut,
the Dung Gate always open.
That seems about right.
Human beings are full of shit.
Gods come only once.
So we kill them, then sit
praying for miracles.

JERUSALEM FREAKS I

Some madmen in this city say
the Messiah could arrive
any day. What an amazing
event that would be: blazing
Glory at the Golden Gate, sweetness
on the air: it would be He.

What I wonder is:
would it feature in the supplement
to the *Jerusalem Post*? That
Christ had arrived with his
heavenly host? Would we stop
and stare on our way to town?
Would it bring the Likud and inflation
down?

The whole city rests
on this fantastic hope.

But if it really happened —
would they call
the Pope?

JERUSALEM FREAKS II

Holy cities must breed
oddballs. They stick
like Jerusalem flies
to a place where they can feel
it's real. God might be here.
In the meantime, there's tons
of dope.

And if he's not here now
he might come soon. Wow.
Outasight. Over the moon.
It's better to be stoned
than sorry. They live
on hope.

So loony people with glowing eyes
wander about. Their lips move.
If they can hang in here where
it might, one day, all hang out,
they might just find it:
boundless love.

Cherry Clayton

It was 8.30 p.m. on a hot summer evening at Park Station, Johannesburg. Ominous clouds had begun to gather over the derricks straddling the serrated mine dumps that had mushroomed over the Rand in search of gold.

Vuyo stood on Platform 18, ostensibly waiting for the Dube train, wondering where on earth he was going to spend the night. For about a year he had been telling Tandie that he and Mavie were going to pull this job and how they were going to be in the moolah. She would not have to slave, working for peanuts, not any longer, oh no, not after they pulled this job, and the next, and the next.

The incessantly dripping water quickly filled the old-fashioned chamber pot which had to be emptied continuously through the plank window.

Tandie had kicked him out of her White City, Jabavu shack of corrugated iron — a shack too cold in winter, too hot in summer. They had had to move the bedless mattress on flattened-out carton boxes several times, as the numerous patched roof sprung leaks when it rained. The incessantly dripping water quickly filled the old-fashioned chamber pot which had to be emptied continuously through the plank window Vuyo had nailed together to alleviate the airlessness and stifling heat in the shack. Keeping it company were other bedraggled pondokkies, some made of flattened-out paraffin tins, others of old plywood and boards. For the most part they were sack-built by those luckless enough not to have found anything better to build with so that the place was called Masakeng — an eyesore besmirching the grassless, rocky Highveld comprising the richest earth in the world.

The night before, exhausted from skondai, Tandie more so from working for whiteman boss than from Vuyo's seemingly tireless and inexorable ups-and-downs, thisways-and-thatways, ins-and-outs: they lay panting listening to the gurgling and gargling of the vlei that streamed nearby with its cargo of garbage, faeces, urine and what-have-you.

'I can't take this shit any longer!' Tandie blurted out suddenly.

'What?' Vuyo asked, knowing very well what she meant.

'You're forever talking about this job that never materializes, how we're going to get married, how we're going to live in one of those posh houses in Dube, how — ag, forget it! . . . If you don't

Go away, we're asleep



get your ass to the pass-office and register for a job, don't come back here tomorrow night,' she said.

Tandie was as frigid and indifferent as the spruit outside, listless and lifeless with its trash.

Vuyo thought: What! stand in an endless queue all day long, be emasculated by being tribalized in a pass-book: Name and present address? Place and date of birth? Name of chief? Name and address of last/present employer? Wages? Fingerprints? Income tax? Native tax? Hut tax? . . . be told to come the next day at 6 a.m. from one day to another, then, after fourteen days, be given a police escort to go to God-knows-where in some uninhabitable, demoralizing, backward, so-called bantu homeland? . . . Aloud he said: 'What the fuck's wrong with you girl? I'm not going to work my ass off for two rand a week in some Jeppe sweatshop just to get by! Actually, I am not going to shit, shave or bathe till I get me some bread!'

'If you don't go to the zangan office, you're not sleeping here another night!'

by J Makunga

Vuyo decided to change his tactics.

'Come on baby,' he said, fondling Tandie's ample breasts with one hand while trying to caress her pubic hair with the other. Tandie was as frigid and indifferent as the spruit outside, listless and lifeless with its trash.

Vuyo fingered the change in his dungarees. 'Six lousy pennies!' On an impulse, he bounded up the stairs three at a time to the 'msechi' — barrier attendant. 'Huit,' he greeted Nzo, who did not even ask for Vuyo's train ticket. He knew that Vuyo didn't have one and rode the trains from Randfontein to Springs 'staff' with disgusting effrontery.

Vuyo had suddenly thought about Tsidi who worked in Parktown North where all the millionaires lived. He could have kicked himself for not having thought about her sooner. With Tsidi he could live like a king, sleep like a lord, eating and drinking what she served her masters. Imagine spending

one night in Meadowlands, another in Pünville, another in Kliptown, another in — goddamn! I am becoming a regular hobo, he thought.

He hummed inaudibly as the bus passed the Johannesburg zoo. He gazed wistfully at the huge mansions.

He swung onto the For Natives Only trolley bus at the corner of Fraser and Diagonal streets just as the bus was leaving, paid his five cents and headed for Parktown North. He hummed inaudibly as the bus passed the Johannesburg zoo. He gazed wistfully at the huge mansions, with oversized yards and carefully manicured lawns. It was like being transported from a derelict, barren Masakeng into a garden of Eden. The contrast between Shantytown and Parktown turned his stomach.

Approaching Tsidi's working place, he nimbly swung off the bus with an agility he was accustomed to, taking the momentum of the bus on his dirty tennis shoes. Soundlessly walking in the shadows, he crept towards Tsidi's 'dog's-meat' home, so-called because when the maddie went shopping, part of the meat she bought was allotted the servant. 'These fucking dogs live and eat better than we do,' Vuyo thought.

Stealthily he went to the backyard where the servants' quarters was located, hoping that the bloody dog would not bark. The massive mansion in front was built rococo-style, of rough-hewn granite bricks with creepers climbing up to the cupola-like roof. Vuyo thought this was a lot of money spent in bad taste. Facing the street was a white-railed veranda with deck chairs where the masters had their sundowners. Surrounding the house was a hedge of well-trimmed rhododendrons.

The servants' quarters comprised a block of three brick rooms — one for the maid, one for the cook, the third for the gardener. Adjoining the maid's room was a lavatory next to a coal-shed. Vuyo thought the set-up looked sumptuous compared to Tandie's hovel and its raggedy companions.

He tapped lightly on Tsidi's door. No answer. He tapped again, a little louder.

'Who is it? Tsidi asked.

'Vuyo,' he answered, thinking that living in Johannesburg was a pain in the ass because one was always suspicious of knocks at night: if they were loud and peremptory, it was the police or the boss; if they were soft and timid, it was a hustler or a poor relative.

After what appeared to be a long pause, Vuyo was about to knock again



when a baritone voice growled: 'Go away, we're asleep.'

He tiptoed into the lavatory. It was too small, and spending the night on the commode was very uncomfortable.

Vuyo sucked in his breath sharply and cursed softly. He was thinking fast: The shit's up the creek for me. There's nowhere nearby where I can spend the night. I'm bound to be picked up by the prowling 'flying squad' if I leave here. My pass-book isn't in order and I'll be arrested for not having worked for the past year or so. The last bus into the city has already left . . . I don't have bus fare anyway. It's past 9 p.m. and the curfew for blacks in the city is on . . . goddamn!

He tiptoed into the lavatory. It was too small, and spending the night on the commode was very uncomfortable, as he discovered after he had tried it for a while. He then explored the coal-shed. It was as black as some of the pondokkies he had been in in Masakeng. Lying next to some bags of anthracite were some empty sacks. He spread two on the floor as if he was making up a sick-bed in a hospital. He sat on them, knees hunched, arms folded, chin on chest, craving a cigarette, staring at the blackened wall, thinking about Tandie's warm tender body, calling Tsidi a regular rubber-neck — bitch. It was hard for him to believe that he was in Parktown spending the night on sacks as if he was in Shantytown. 'Hit the sack, Jack,' he said to himself, resignedly, and tried to sleep.

Illustrations by Percy Sedumedi

After about an hour he heard a key turn, a door open, the toilet door close. He quickly slipped out of the coal-shed, stepped lightly into Tsidi's dark room, and locked the door behind him. Taking out his gonie he relaxed; he even grinned wryly when he discovered in the dimness of the room that it was Tsidi who lay in bed. He could just discern a man's pair of pants, jacket and shirt on a chair; the man's shoes were under it. He climbed fully clothed, with his sneakers on, into the bed without disturbing her.

'That was quick,' mumbled Tsidi. She sounded very sleepy and pooped from screwing, Vuyo thought.

'Mm,' Vuyo responded indistinctly, anonymously. A few minutes later the doorknob turned. Then:

'What the hell! Tsidi, open the fucken door!'

Vuyo had the blade of his gonie on Tsidi's neck as he hissed:

'One squeak out of you and you are a dead duck!' Loudly, he said in a baritone voice:

'Go away, we're asleep.'

Norman Ramuswogwana Tshikovha

You were a stranger and they took you in

To my friend and patron Rashaka Frank Ratsbitanga

you were a stranger
and they took you in
and when i heard the news
i scarce could believe my ears

i hope they welcomed you
even when i was not there
i believe they to you
a hand of friendship extended
and even patted your back
for ever you were workaholic

i learned to know you
working the Univen garden
the deathly '83 drought
never dampening the
fuelled flame of your spirits
and the beginning of '84
i saw your struggles
planting the green turf
in the varsity soccer field

i learned to know your figure
your form and your shape
your shabby clothes
the bushy black beard
your registered trade-mark
your unrefined appearance
and your spectacles

now i will miss you
inside your closed cell
where you are trapped
a hare in a snare
you are caged
your mouth is shut
tight
you are silenced

why is the question
because is the answer
reason it yourself
you may get an answer
mine is a ?

i hope you are well
wherever you are
and were you ever sore
the day they took you in
to be their visitor?
i hope even now
you are not bitter
my childish innocence
labels you 'not criminal'

this innocent song
i sing to you:
you were a stanger
and they took you in
and when i heard the news
i scarce could believe my ears

Norman Ramuswogwana Tshikovha

They have themselves to blame

Branches in the height of spring
bending and tossing
as the wind calls the tune
reeds in flooded rivers
as if bowing in prayer
hearken to the call of waves.
All life's pitiable creatures
always on their knees
in humble submission
never daring to complain
have themselves to blame.

Norman Ramuswogwana Tshikovha

The black spots

there are too many of them
blackspots quite too many
squatters' camps
mass removals
resistance movements
blackspot in Sophiatown
blackspot Langa Cape
blackspotted Mogopa
the blackspots that stain
the pure whiteness
of the white angry
gluttonous leopardess
the pure white S.A.
a leopard without spots?

Norman Ramuswogwana Tshikovha

i sing this song to all who trust others

dis song i sing to dem everybody
dem dat faith on oders have
dem dat even one in darkest moments trust
when all life's hopes are very bleak

dis song i sing to dem dat trust oders
to dem dat are by gossips not betrayed
to dem dat are by defamation not misled
to dem dat condemns after dey have tried

dis song i sing to dem everybody
dem dat oders wid responsibilities trust
dem dat widout doubt faith in oders have
when all oders have oders libelled

dis song i sing to dem dat never brushes
oders aside as if dey from leprosy suffers
even widout deir diagnosis of de carriers
dem dat not oders let in isolation live

dis song i sing to dem everybody
to dem dat never feeble tings despises
to dem dat from fickle tings never retreat
to dem dat closest to oders live

dis song i sing for de few
de chosen few of all life's multitudes
for individuals dat for oders ever cares
dis song i sing derefore to dem

Norman Ramuswogwana Tshikovha

Hugh Lewin

JACK*

The man
who died last night
would not want to be remembered
by name.

Remember Looksmart — he would say —
he was murdered in the struggle.
Remember Mini
he was hanged in the struggle.
Remember Nelson
he has given his life to the struggle.

The man
who died last night
would not want to be remembered
for his part in the struggle
not for the secret sacrifices
not the unknown raids
the silent contributions
not for any of the necessary schlectering
not even
for the time of trial
and the twelve years
twelve years in prison
the price of principle
Cheap at the price, he would say.

The man who died last night
would not want to be remembered
as hero.
Can a hero cry — he would say —
scream in the night
cold nights of fear
scream, question, doubt, dig, delve?
Patched humanity
stripped, laid bare
a little bit of man, is man
he would say
stunned in the face of
what he would call
private failure.

The man
who died last night in London
would not want to be remembered
an exile from home.
Home
was Cape Town
home was the beach
the sun
the sun which shines on everybody
— he would say with a smile —
nature's simplicity
home was the camaraderie
rugby
carnival
struggle
home had a taste of salt
biting, strong, demanding
home is where we'll be, he would say,
when we can call it
home.

The man
who died last night
would be amused to be remembered
a writer
who could breathe laughter into life
with just a touch of tragedy
pinpointing priorities
pillorying the pompous
silencing the strident, shattering shibboleths
always, painfully, seeking perfection
truth encapsulated in four lines of doggerel.

The man
who died last night
you should remember
spent twelve years of his life
in prison
a necessary contribution
he would say.
But remember
twelve very long years
ill sick falling asleep sick
alone in a cell sick
heart attack sick
not allowed remission sick
twelve years sick.

And when he had finished the twelve years
they banned him, restricted him,
alone again sick
young, as he would say, at heart
but confined in an old man's body
struggling on with an old man's heart

which burst.

The man
who died last night
would not want to be remembered
by name.

His name was Jack

Hugh Lewin

* Jack Tarshish, a leading member of the Congress of Democrats in the early 'sixties, received a twelve-year sentence in 1963, at a time when the political community 'inside' was still very small and the going correspondingly tough. Tarshish was in bad health throughout his sentence, suffering from narcolepsy, a complaint which brings on sleep without warning.

He made several fruitless attempts, while inside, to become married to Gillian Jewel, with whom he had a relationship at the time of his arrest. Often detained, she later left South Africa and lived in London until her death by suicide.

Towards the end of his imprisonment Tarshish suffered the first of a series of heart attacks. When he was released in 1975 he was placed under a restriction order which confined him to Cape Town. A heart operation at Groote Schuur hospital did not improve his condition.

In 1976 he was permitted to leave South Africa and lived with his sister in London until his death at the end of the 'seventies.

At last year's Zimbabwe Book Fair Njabulo Ndebele received the Noma Award for his book *Fools*, published by Ravan Press. Here is the full text of his acceptance speech.

NOMA AWARD

Photographs by Bidy Partridge

Acceptance Speech

by Njabulo S. Ndebele

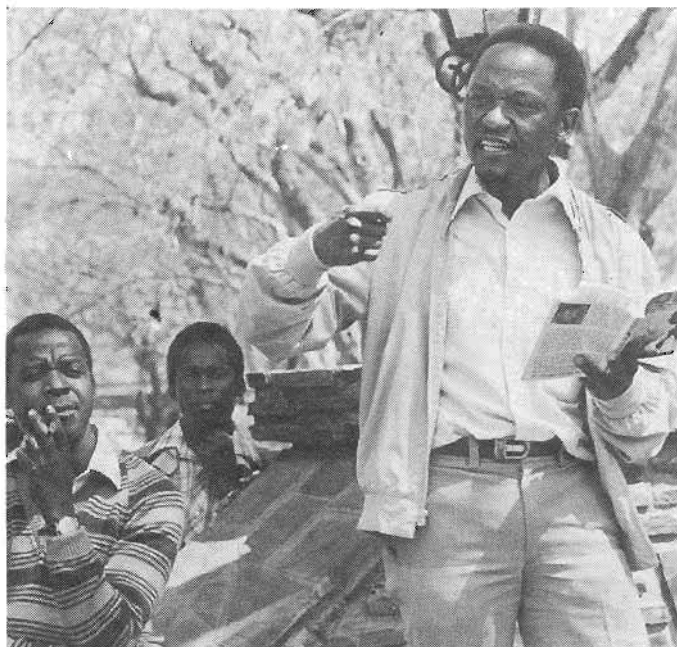
Sometime after the notorious Land Act of 1913 was passed in the white South African Parliament, a Lands Commission was established to look into the effects of the legislation. This Act, it will be remembered, was the one responsible for the granting of only 13 percent of land in South Africa to Africans, while the rest was to be the domain of the white man. One of the most critical observers of this phenomenon as it was unfolding was Sol Plaatje, one of the major figures in African writing in South Africa. His book, *Native Life in South Africa* (1916) is a landmark in the historiography on South African political repression. The book is remarkable not only for its impressive detailing of facts but also for its well considered rhetorical effects which express intelligent analysis, political clarity, and a strong moral purpose.

In his analysis of the Report of the Lands Commission, Sol Plaatje notes, among other observations, that

while the ruling whites, on the one hand, content themselves with giving contradictory definitions of their cruelty the native sufferers, on the other, give no definitions of legislative phrases nor explanations of definitions. All they give expression to is their bitter suffering under the operation of what in their experience has proved to be the most ruthless law that ever disgraced the white man's rule in British South Africa. (355-6)

Plaatje's observation here is of very special interest to me. He documents here one of the most debilitating effects of oppression: the depriving of the oppressed of any meaningful, significant intellectual life. Because they no longer have an effective hand in controlling history, they seem doomed to respond and seldom to initiate. Those doomed to respond seldom have the time to determine their real interests. That the capability to initiate action has been taken out of their hands implies also, that their ability to define has been drastically reduced. Plaatje notes here, how the African oppressed appear to have been reduced to the status of being mere bearers of witness. They do a good job of describing suffering; but they cannot define its quality. The ability to define is an intellectual capability more challenging, it seems to me, than the capability to describe. For to define is to understand, while to describe is merely to observe. Beyond mere observation, the path towards definition will begin only with an intellectual interest in what to observe and how to observe.

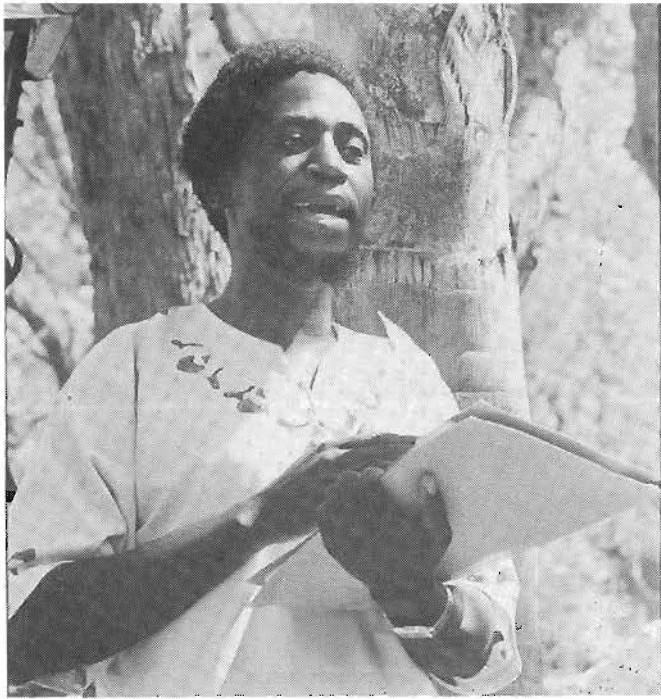
It seems to me that a large part of the African resistance to the evil of *apartheid* has, until recently, consisted of a largely descriptive documentation of suffering. And the bulk of the fiction, through an almost total concern with the political theme has, in following this tradition, largely documented rather than explained. Not that the political theme itself was not valid, on the contrary it is worth



Njabulo Ndebele, Noma Award winner reads from his book *Fools* to an attentive audience at last year's Zimbabwe Book Fair.

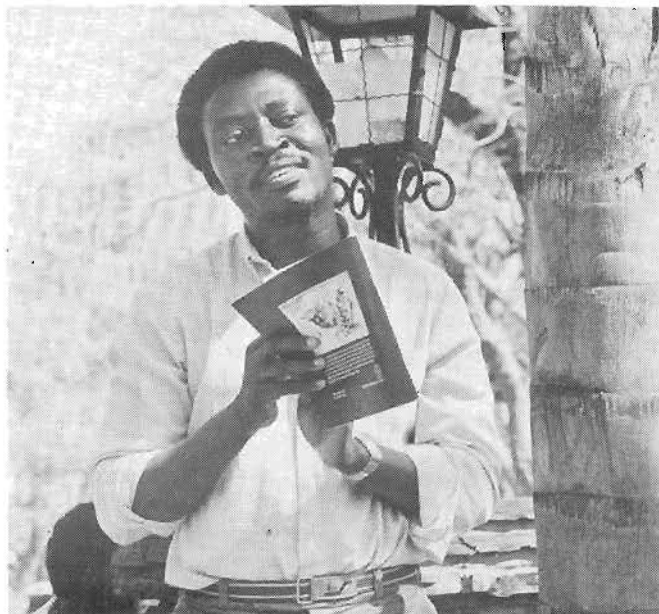
exploring almost as a duty. It was the manner of its treatment that became the subject of increasing dissatisfaction to me. Gradually, over a period of historical time, an image emerged and consolidated, as a result, of people completely destroyed, of passive people whose only reason for existing seemed to be to receive the sympathy of the world. To promote such an image in whatever manner, especially if such promotion also emanated from among the ranks of the oppressed themselves, was to promote a negation. It was to promote a fixed and unhistorical image with the result of obscuring the existence of a fiercely energetic and complex dialectic in the progress of human history. There was, in this attitude, a tragic denial of life.

I came to the realization, mainly through the actual grappling with the form of fiction, that our literature ought to seek to move away from an easy pre-occupation with demonstrating the obvious existence of oppression. It exists. The task is to explore how and why people can survive under such harsh conditions. The mechanisms of survival and resistance that the people have devised are many and far from simple. The task is to understand them, and then to actively make them the material subject of our imaginative explorations. We have given away too much of our real and imaginative lives to the oppressor and his deeds. The task is to give our lives and our minds to the unlimited inventiveness of the suffering masses, and to give formal ideological legitimacy to their aspirations.



Chenjera Hove, Zimbabwe

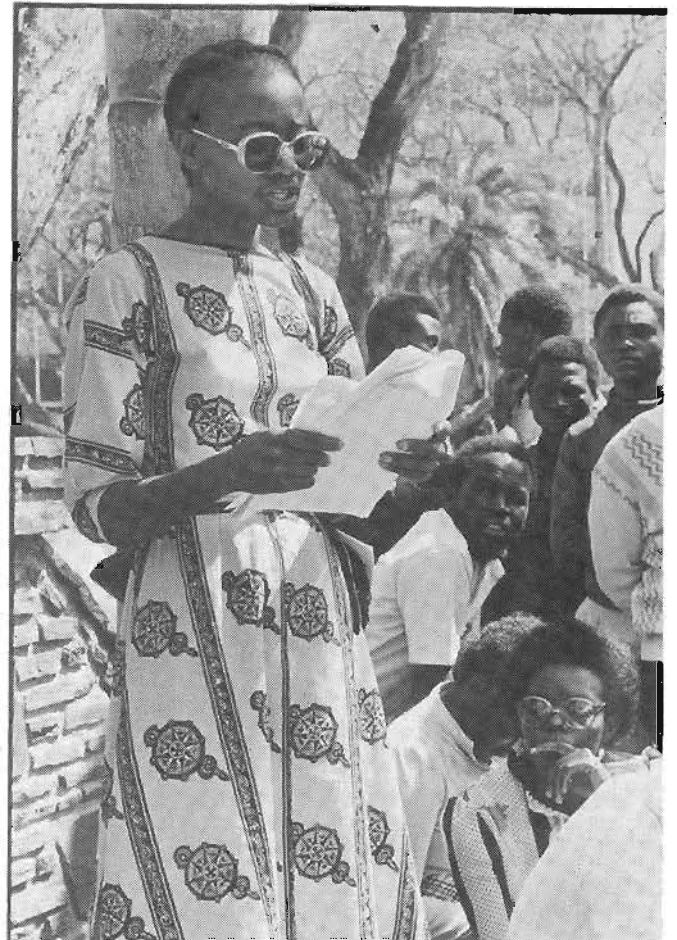
When I started writing, it was with the notion that art was an act of self-expression. But I realized that it was something else: it was an act of knowledge through self-confrontation. But it is a self-confrontation that takes place within the community of people who emerge out of one's pen, as it were. I realized that self-expression was not the essence but merely the end product of art. What I found in the struggle with the form of fiction was that next to their material interests, and surrounding those interests, people maintain a strong and vital ethical interest in the conduct of human affairs. This interest is expressed in their public, or in their private lives, and it involves a range of vital human concerns. It involves questions of loyalty and betrayal; of bravery and cowardice; of anxiety and contentment; of rigidity and adaptation; of cruelty and compassion; of honour and dishonour; of pride and humility, and a variety of similarly conflicting attitudes all of which excite a very strong human, ethical interest. I felt, as a result, that I had to attempt to bring into the active consciousness of the oppressed, through a total evocation of their life, an active philosophical interest in the complex dialectic of human existence. The very



Mesback Asare, Ghana

resources of living should constitute the material essence of the search for personal and social meaning.

All of this means that the task of the new generation of South African writers is to help to extend the material range of intellectual and imaginative interest as far as the subject of life under oppression is concerned. It is to look for that area of cultural autonomy and the laws of its dynamism that no oppressor can ever get at; to define that area, and, with purposeful insidiousness, to assert its irrepressible hegemony during the actual process of struggle. That hegemony will necessarily be an organic one: involving the entire range of human activity. Only on this condition can a new creative, and universally meaningful democratic civilization be built in South Africa.



Christina Rungano, Zimbabwe

This year's award, I believe, is in essence not for the two books selected. It is rather, in recognition of perhaps the beginning of a new era on our continent, both the large area that is independent, and that small remaining part that is still locked in struggle with oppression. Whereas we have documented the quality of our lives; whereas we have largely diagnosed the prevalent social illness, we now have to embark upon a fundamental re-evaluation of methods not just in fiction, but in all areas of human activity. I have learned, in the craft of fiction for example, that the difference between writers is not so much in the subjects of their writings: the range of subject matter is relatively limited. Rather, it is in the inventiveness of treatment, in the sharpening of insight, and in the deepening of consciousness. The material life of Africa should be given a new formal articulation that will enlarge intellectual interest and expand the possibilities of the imagination. It is a re-evaluation which, I believe, should result in a profound philosophical transformation of the African consciousness, a consciousness that should and must endure.

Kelwyn Sole

Jazz

(based on an instruction to German dance bands, 1940)
for Jacqui

1
Pieces in so-called foxtrot rhythm
(so-called swing) are not to exceed
20% of the repertoires
of light orchestras and dance bands.

2
in this so-called
jazz type repertoire,
PREFERENCE is to be
given
to composition in a major key
and to lyrics expressing
joy
in life
rather than Jewishly lyrics
gloomy

3
as/to tempo
?
preference is also to be given to brisk
compositions
over
slow
ones (so-called BLUES)

however the pace (you break my heart)
must not exceed (when you're away)
a certain degree (my man has gone)
of allegro (won't come back till day)

commensurate

with the Aryan sense of
discipline/ & modera-
tion.
(wa wa)

On no account will NEGROID excesses in tempo
so-called hot jazz or in solo performance so-called breaks be

allowed.

4
so-called jazz compositions
'may'

contain
at most 10% s_yn_co_pa_ti_on
the remainder must consist of
a n a t u r a l l e g a t o m o v e m e n t a
devoid of the hysterical rhythmic ersatz
characteristic
of the music of barbarian races
and cond-u.

cive
to DARK instincts ooo
alien aaa
to the GERMAN PEOPLE

5
strictly prohibited (don't forget, now, baby)
is the use of instruments
alien to the German spirit
i.e. so-called saxophones of all keys
as well as mutes
which turn the noble sound of WIND (?)
and brass instruments
into a Jewish-Freemasonic yowl
(you got that, cat)
so-called wa wa and hat.

6
also prohibited are
so-called drum/
breaks
longer than//
half /^a beat /in four
quarter beat
e/x/c/e/p/t/i/o/n// s//t/y//i/z//e//d
mili (beedobee) tary MAR! /che/S
//////////!

7
The Double-
Bass must be played solely
(yeh)

with the so-called
bow
in so-called jazz and other syncopations

8
plucking of the strings
is prohibited
since it is damaging
to the instrument
and detrimental to
Aryan musicality

9
musicians are
likewise
forbidden to make vocal
improvisations (so-called scat)

10
skoo-bee-doo!

Kelwyn Sole

Mankunku

Dark golden boat
on a sea
far away, rock with me
rock with me:

deep-throated bird
gentle me home
past the mud-lined street
where thoughts stick fast

and children pick rubbish
hungrily
the night flakes notes
from the scalp of my sorrow —

hide in my pillow
and cry for me.

Kelwyn Sole

Index

SOUTH AFRICA: PASSPORT REFUSED TO SOUTH AFRICAN ACADEMIC

Sheila Sisulu, Project Head of the Turret Correspondence College, administered by SACHED (South African Council for Higher Education), was told on 3 September 1984 that her application for a passport — to enable her to follow a three-month course in Britain — had been refused.

Turret Correspondence College prepares secondary school students and adults for the JMB (Joint Matriculation Board) 'matric' examination. The college attempts to compensate for the poor standard of teaching in many black secondary schools — one of the reasons for continuing school boycotts and black township unrest. Few black schools enter their students for the JMB matric because of its 'difficult' reputation: among those black students who sit it, the failure rate is notoriously high. Only six correspondence colleges offering the JMB matric exist in South Africa. Recently there were attempts by the JMB to prevent correspondence college students from taking the JMB matric. SACHED's Turret College caters specially for black and disadvantaged students: at present it has some 400 students, of whom 200 are practising teachers.

Sheila Sisulu was to have attended a course with the National Extension College in Cambridge from September to December. She was sponsored by the British Council, who were to pay for her fare and her stay. Her application for a passport was made to the South African Department of the Interior in mid-June. In July, when she had been promised the passport, she was interviewed by the police: there seemed to be no problem and they wished her a pleasant journey. When in August her passport had still not come through, she became apprehensive and made enquiries. She was informed on 3 September by the British Council office in Pretoria that they had been advised by the British Embassy of the South African government's refusal to grant her a passport. This was Sheila Sisulu's third application for a passport. Her first, in 1980, was refused. On her second, in 1983, she was required to submit travel documents which were not returned. Mrs Sisulu's father-in-law, Walter Sisulu, was sentenced in 1964 to life imprisonment. Her husband, Mlungisi Sisulu, a businessman, was detained without charge from 7 to 21 August this year; those arrested with him are still detained. But her brother-in-law, the formerly banned journalist, Zwelakhe Sisulu, was granted a passport in mid-May and is currently studying in the United States.

The blocking of Sheila Sisulu's travel to Britain would seem to be the result of continuing victimisation of the Sisulu family. Not only is she denied the opportunity to improve her contribution to the work of the correspondence college, but a blow is dealt to the work of SACHED generally.

SOVIET UNION: THE DEATH OF VALERY MARCHENKO

On 7 October 1984 the Ukrainian writer, Valery Marchenko, died of kidney failure in a Leningrad prison hospital. He was 37.

Valery Marchenko began a promising career as a writer in 1970 when he graduated from Kiev University, a specialist in Ukrainian and Azeri philology. He soon became a regular contributor to *Literary Ukraine* and other cultural journals. At the same time, his fascination with language and cultural tradition led him to challenge government policies towards the culture of the non-Russian peoples of the USSR. His career underwent an abrupt reversal when, like many intellectuals of his generation, he was accused of Ukrainian nationalism and, in June 1973, arrested for 'anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda'.

Valery Marchenko spent six years imprisoned in a strict-regime labour camp in Perm region, and two years exiled to a remote village in Soviet Central Asia. Ironically, it was during these years that he wrote his most famous essay, *Letter to Grandfather*. Marchenko's grandfather was the historian, Mikhail Marchenko, who became the first Soviet rector of Lvov University in 1947. In his letter, which was never published officially, Marchenko reproached him for what he was as his subservience to the 'Russification' of Ukrainian culture.

Valery Marchenko's health deteriorated considerably during his imprisonment and when he returned to Kiev in 1981 he was suffering from chronic nephritis and hypertension. His request to go to Italy for treatment was rejected by the authorities in 1982. In 1983 he was re-arrested and charged with 'anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda' — this time for letters and statements he had written during his previous imprisonment.

At his trial in March 1984 Valery Marchenko was already gravely ill. Nevertheless, the court sentenced him to 15 years' imprisonment and exile and he was sent to special regime camp Perm 36-1. In an urgent worldwide appeal for his release the human rights organisation, Amnesty International, expressed its deep concern that he had been given the maximum possible sentence to be served in the harshest category of labour camp. Valery Marchenko died seven months later.

UGANDA: JOURNALISTS HELD

The editor and three employees of *Munnansi*, two journalists from the *Uganda Pilot*, and two journalists from *The Star* were arrested during November and, according to Amnesty International, are detained, without charge, under the Public Order and Security Act.

Munnansi (The Citizen) is a weekly English-language paper which has close links with the Democratic Party (DP), the legal parliamentary opposition. Its editor, Anthony Ssekweyama, is also the DP's deputy publicity secretary. He was arrested on 6 November — together with Paul Ssemogerere (DP leader) and M. Ojok-Mulozi (DP publicity secretary and Chief Whip) — and charged with uttering seditious words and publishing a seditious press release. Ssekweyama was also charged with sedition on two further counts referring to their publication in *Munnansi*. The charges refer to a letter — released at a press conference on 26 October and published in *Munnansi* on 31 October — allegedly written by Chief Justice George Masika to President Milton Obote regarding the trial of Balaki Kirya and five others of the Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM), a political organisation engaged in guerrilla warfare against the government of President Obote. Ssekweyama and the other two men were remanded on bail to appear in court on 17 December.

On 23 November, Ssekweyama was again arrested, released on police bond and told to report to the police on 26 November when he was served with a detention order; he

is now in Luzira Upper Prison, near Kampala. His detention may be connected with an article in *Munnansi* on 21 November which criticised the presence of North Korean troops in Uganda. Two *Munnansi* journalists — Andrew Mulindwa and John Baptist Kyeyune — were arrested on 2 November and held at various places. Mulindwa was transferred to Jinja Road police station in Kampala on or about 20 November; Kyeyune to Kampala central police station on or about 23 November, where he is reported to have been tortured. Another *Munnansi* journalist, David Kasujja, was arrested at Entebbe Road airport on 31 October, released on bail, rearrested and served with a detention order; he is believed to be held in Luzira Upper Prison.

The *Uganda Pilot*, also a weekly English-language paper, has a large Roman Catholic readership. Two of its journalists — Sam Kiwanuka and Francis Kanyehamba — were arrested in early April after the *Pilot* published a story criticising and satirising the government's proposed Women's Charter. In May they were charged with 'writing and publishing a false and malicious publication intended to incite the public' and held in custody until November, when they appeared in court. Although acquitted, they were immediately rearrested and served with detention orders; they are believed to be held in Luzira Upper Prison.

The *Star* is Uganda's only non-government English-language daily. Its editor-in-chief, Drake Ssekkeba, and chief sub-editor, Sam Katwere, were arrested on 8 November after the paper published a front-page story accusing government ministers of being corrupt. They too are reportedly in Luzira Upper Prison.

SOUTH AFRICA: WRITER RANTETE DETAINED

Johannes Rantete, 20-year-old author of *The Third Day of September* — an eye-witness account of the Sebokeng unrest — was detained under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act 1982 on 23 November 1984 until his release in mid-December.

Sebokeng is one of three townships 60 kilometres south of Johannesburg in which black demonstrations first erupted in late August. The demonstrations called for a one-day boycott of work and schools to protest against rent increases and inferior education, and sparked off widespread unrest when, on 2 September. South Africa's new constitution came into force, providing for limited Indian and 'coloured' representation but excluding the black majority in a tri-racial parliament. Large numbers of police were mobilised, using rubber bullets and live ammunition to break up demonstrations and gatherings. On 23 October, Sebokeng was the scene of an intensive security operation in which — what is seen as a new stage of repression — the army joined the police in a house-to-house search, ostensibly for instigators of the unrest which had continued since early September.

Johannes Rantete, a resident of Sebokeng, wrote an eye-witness account of the events of 3 September, and took a reel of colour photographs, mostly of buildings and vehicles destroyed. He sent both to Ravan Press, who published the account, illustrated by black-and-white sketches based on the photographs, as the first in the new Ravan Storyteller series, in late October. On 23 November, security policemen arrested Rantete, and then visited Ravan Press, demanding his photographs. But because of their documentary interest, Ravan Press had posted the photographs to another of their authors, who is currently working on an illustrated history of South Africa since 1976. The photographs never reached their destination. In a telephone conversation with the publishers, a Captain Kruger of the Security Police stated

that until the photographs were recovered, the interrogation of the author could not begin.

The book was formally banned by the Directorate of Publications, but on appeal from Ravan the ban was later lifted.

In his book Rantete writes. 'As a resident of Sebokeng I was also concerned by the events that were to take place, but was hindered by my parents to remain within the yard. In all my born days I had never found myself amidst a striking crowd, and thus the hindrance laid on me by my parents was as painful as the heart of a divorced man. I multiplied two by two to get an easy outlet from the yard. Thus, by doing so, I secured my curiosity which is the first thing a newsman should have.' It was, it seems, his 'newsman's curiosity' which led to his detention.

SAUDI ARABIA: THREAT TO FREEDOM OF EDUCATION

Saudi authorities have issued an order requiring the state to review all research undertaken by its nationals studying abroad for doctorates or masters degrees. This infringement of academic freedom has implications worldwides as most of those affected conduct their research outside Saudi Arabia.

The National Security Council of Saudi Arabia (equivalent to the FBI in the USA), headed by the Interior Minister, Prince Naif Bin Abd al-Aziz, issued an order in October 1984 instructing presidents of universities as well as educational attachés at Saudi embassies abroad, to make it obligatory for Saudi students studying for their masters and doctorate degrees to submit a copy of their thesis/dissertation to the National Security Council in Saudi Arabia before handing it to the university. The Council may approve or reject any research submitted for its inspection. A rejection means that the student cannot then submit his work to his university.

It is believed that the order is meant to discourage students from researching sensitive political or social issues. Previously, doctorate research undertaken by Saudis in foreign universities was being banned from entering Saudi Arabia despite the fact that the researchers held prominent positions in Saudi Arabia. Students were required to deliver a copy of their graduate research project to the educational attachés at the local Saudi embassy after graduation. Embassies reported any irregularities in the research at their own discretion.

The order of the National Security Council is a serious infringement of academic freedom, not only in Saudi Arabia but all over the world. There are some 15,00 Saudi students studying abroad at institutions of higher learning worldwide, most of them in the United States and the United Kingdom.

INDEX is published by courtesy of *Index on Censorship*

Past Midnight

It's way past midnight and I am trying
To get some sleep. The room
Smells drunk. The bed reeks of
Sour body odours. I can hear you breathe.

It's way past midnight and the dark room
Is a cage hurtling through space
Towards daybreak. I feel your lips
Whispering close to my toothless mouth:

It's way past midnight and I want to feel
You over and inside me
Before the cock crow of the compound siren.

Andries W. Oliphant

My Blood

Illustrated by Percy Sedumedi by Walt Oyisipho Ka Mtetwa

'What! If I say stop it! I don't like it! my wife knows I mean just that. She has to stop whatever she was doing or saying. And that must be done instantly,' boasted Mshengu.

'Haykona Mshengu', protested Nyambose, shaking his head, 'that is not the decent way to speak to a wife, umfazi wezinkomo. Stop it! stop it! What is that?'

'You are too soft, Nyambose, just too soft. That's why women are so obstinate, because you beg and console and condone them instead of reprimanding them for having done anything you disapprove of,' continued Mshengu.

'We Mshengu', chipped in Mangethe who had all the time been eavesdropping, 'women are also human beings and therefore should be recognised and treated as such. These tender hearts should be handled with care, they are fragile.'

'Women are also human beings, that's an obvious fact,' said the loquacious and voluble Mshengu.

This was a conversation by the workers of Mathetha Supermarket during lunch time. Their abysmal ignorance of the socio-politico-economic set up of their country was very strong. They had never bothered themselves about forming their own organisation as workers. They knew nix about trade unions. During dinner time a handful of men would gather under an oak tree to play umrabaraba, another group (Mshengu's) would bask in the sun, chat, crack jokes among themselves and giggle aloud disturbing those who have decided to sleep. The topics for discussion in Mshengu's group revolved around women and liquor. They would not discuss anything relevant and constructive. That was exactly what was happening that Friday.

'Women are also human beings, that's an obvious fact', said the loquacious and voluble Mshengu, 'but they are also cunning and tricky. A woman can coax you to maintain a child not from your own semen if you are not up to date.'

'That will never happen in my house,



I can see that child from the outset,' he concluded rather conclusively, rising up in due response to the ringing of the bell warning about dinner time that had expired.

At 5 o'clock the workers of Mathetha Supermarket knocked off. As usual Mshengu was cycling behind Mangethe, his bonafide mate, along the way to Mzinoni Township where they were full time residents by virtue of their Section 10 permits.

'Mshengu, how can you stell that a child was not fathered by you?' asked Mangethe bringing Mshengu to the conversation they had had at work. The

Mshengu pedalled faster until he came to ride alongside his mate, so that they could have their tête-a-tête undisturbed.

weather had just changed and the South Easterly wind was so strong that it blew away Mshengu's voice when he tried to explain.

Mshengu pedalled faster until he came to ride alongside his mate, so that they could have their tête-a-tête undisturbed. They kept a steady pace and funny enough, no car came behind them

to interfere with their parallelism.

'Ini Mangethe? A child not from me, not of my own blood, ngambona zisuka. And to clarify that point, my findings will not be based on heredity business, I know heredity has mutations and variations a layman like myself can never understand,' he answered in his boastful manner.

Mangethe wondered why Vuyo had never run to him and perhaps opened the gate as other children did upon seeing their father.

'How can you find out then, tell me,' insisted Mangethe.

They were starting an ascending slope and had to put much effort in their pedalling to propel their bicycles forward and up the road. They started panting heavily until they reached the summit of the steep slope and were beginning to descend along the road. Neither was pedalling now but still they were riding alongside each other keeping their speed constant.

'Uyabona Mangethe, I have three children,' he said showing three fingers, the thumb and the pointing finger bent, and proceeded 'NguAfrica, Nobantu and Nobelungu.'

'What, their names!,' interrupted Mangethe.

'Let me finish first and comment thereafter. You see when I give these children a hiding, they all do one thing in common. I don't mean I punish them all simultaneously, it depends who has wronged. The one given a hiding will go to the back yard, squat there and cry there! Nobody ever told them to do so. The child that will not follow my family's crying tradition will not be of my own blood and sweat.'

Overwhelmed with amazement Mangethe did not know what to say although his mouth was wide open. Ultimately the voice came out. 'Hawu Mshengu! How did you discover such a horrible experience?'

'You call it a horrible experience?'

'Hearken Mshengu, haven't you considered that the reason why a child may run to the street may be that you will not catch him and give him yet another hiding.'

'Not my children,' blurted Mshengu, 'If he runs to the street . . . no, my child won't do that. If the child runs to the next door neighbour, his father lives there,' concluded Mshengu sophistically.

'You've got wonders Mshengu.'

'It is because I discover them. Especially those that concern children that will behave strangely and say things beyond one's comprehension.'

They cycled and entered the

township through the main road, Thelawayeka. They parted when Mshengu had to turn into Seventh Street to go home. Mangethe continued down the main road and turned at Eleventh Street.

Before long, Mangethe reached home and saw his only son, three-year-old Vuyo, playing with his mates in the yard. Vuyo merely glanced at him and continued playing. Mangethe wondered why Vuyo had never run to him and perhaps opened the gate as other children did upon seeing their father. This thought harassed his spiritual being. At that very moment the words of his friend echoed in his mind ' . . . children that will behave strangely . . . ' Slowly he opened the gate and pushed his bicycle into the yard.

The following day was Saturday, and every afternoon of this day Mangethe would go to watch a football match, but this was a strange Saturday. Instead, he took his portable radio and found a cool place and listened to mbaqanga music while drinking libazisa, a mthombo-brewed beer.

His mind was scattered but was promptly collected by the appearance of Vuyo kicking a punctured plastic ball. Mangethe stared at him intently watching his every movement; the way he kicked the ball, the way he ran after it. He studied the boy intently. If he had gone to school and studied what is called child-psychology, it would have helped him in this task, he thought. He wanted to detect whether the boy resembled him in any way. But alas, as far as he was concerned, he did not see any feature he shared with the little boy.

He remembered that a psychiatrist once said Vuyo sustained brain injuries during parturition.

'Fortunately the damage is slight and will not take long to heal,' the psychiatrist had said.

Mangethe sat there and forgot his beer for a short while pondering over Mshengu's experience. He was in wonderland when suddenly Vuyo kicked his ball towards his father and the ball, by sheer accident, rolled and bumped against the bottle containing beer. Beer spilt leaving sorghum-soaked spots on Mangethe's trousers. Half of the contents was lost.

Without dubitation, as the chance prevailed, he belted the poor boy severely without compunction. Vuyo yelled and ran for cover. To Mangethe's amazement, instead of running to the gate into the street, as he expected perhaps, the boy ran into the kitchen and crept behind the stove and cried there. Mangethe followed him and met his surprised wife in the doorway.

Mangethe believed Vuyo had run to the ancestors for protection, and not to the street or to the next door neighbour.

She had never been as surprised as she was at that moment because it was the first time that Vuyo had been given a hiding as the psychiatrist had expressively warned against it.

Without asking MaVuyo could see why the boy was crying so bitterly as the belt was still dangling in Mangethe's hand.

'Yintoni BaVuyo?,' she asked, addressing him in that special and affectionate manner.

Mangethe was very pleased with himself. He noticed when Vuyo was crying that only his left eye yielded tears, something that used to happen to him too when he was a boy. That was one positive hereditary feature they shared.

Vuyo hid behind the stove, the same place where Mangethe stored the calabash of home-brewed beer whenever he had an ancestral ceremony. Mangethe believed Vuyo had run to the ancestors for protection, and not to the street or to the next door neighbour.

Kwenzekani BaVuyo? The child is crying, you are smiling and I am asking a question but you don't answer,' MaVuyo continued. Mangethe turned his back to his wife and walked back slowly to his place soliloquizing, 'My son, my blood. Vuyo, my blood son.'

Mangethe understood now why his son did not run to him or open the gate for him as other children did.

That Vuyo's strange behaviour accrued from his psychiatric malady, ruled in Mangethe's heart and he enjoyed that.

A Contribution towards the Destruction of the Myth of Change through the Ballot or A Lesson to be learnt from Reaction

In our struggle for knowledge, our weapon must be books.
In our struggle for insight, our weapon must be discussion.
In our struggle for freedom, our weapon must be consciousness.
In our struggle for power, our weapon must be struggle.

Farouk Stemmet

TALKING STORY

What this delayed recognition achieves is quite significant. By means of a dramatic device we are reminded that the storyteller, while he certainly draws on personal experience, does so only to the extent that this experience can be offered to others, or can be shared by them. He is at once the subject of the story and a part of the community to whom and by whom it is told (a many-sided communication which is fundamentally different from the two-way writer-reader traffic of the novel). Babel's brief demonstration of the nature of storytelling serves a related function which confirms the democratic bias of the storytelling medium: a pre-eminent man is a fit subject for a story providing he and his audience are able to recognize the ordinary man in him, too. (This may, of course, be false modesty in Pavlichenko, but the story soon refutes that suspicion.)

This storytelling milieu within which the storyteller invites the participation of the community is, however, a fictional construction within what remains a written tale, a literary production determined by the medium of printed books and commodity distribution. Consequently we have to ask not only 'What is the relationship between teller and listener?' but also 'What literary purpose does the depiction of this relationship serve?' I believe that Babel provides, in this fashion, a demonstration of the mode of attention he requires from his readers.

One proof of this is the degree of identification present in the story between Babel and Pavlichenko *the storyteller* (the emphasis is necessary because a strong measure of what Ndebele called 'the kind of tense ambiguity which makes for reading enjoyment' underlies Babel's presentation of Pavlichenko *the man* and his actions.) Since this point depends on a reading of all Babel's stories, and particularly those in which he reflects – usually obliquely – on the nature of his art, I shall deal briefly with the story 'Awakening' before returning to the presentation of the storyteller in 'The Life and Adventures of Matthew Pavlichenko'.

As the title implies, 'Awakening' evokes that period in youth when the world and one's place in it are clearly perceived for the first time. The narrator, a boy of fourteen, is under pressure from his parents to become an infant prodigy on the violin (Odessa, where the story is set, 'in the course of ten years or so . . . supplied the concert platforms of the world with infant prodigies'.) Rather like Vukani in Ndebele's 'The Music of the Violin', he resists his parents' ambitions and takes to wandering around the harbour when he should be having his violin lessons. There he meets a remarkable man:

This was Yefim Nikitich Smolich, proof-reader of the *Odessa News*. In his athletic breast there dwelt compassion for Jewish children, and he was the god of a rabble of rickety starvelings. He used to collect them from the bug-infested joints on the Moldavanka, take them down to the sea, bury them in the sand, do gym with them, dive with them, teach them songs. Roasting in the perpendicular sunrays, he would tell them tales about fishermen and wild beasts. To grown-ups Nikitich would explain that he was a natural philosopher. The Jewish kids used to roar with laughter at his tales, squealing and snuggling up to him like so many puppies. The sun would sprinkle them with creeping freckles, freckles of the same colour as lizards.

The boy is already beginning to write his first pieces, but it

is the influence of the 'natural philosopher' that proves decisive:

'Now what is it you lack? Youth's no matter – it'll pass with the years. What you lack is a feeling for nature.'

He pointed with his stick, at a tree with a reddish trunk and low crown.

'What's that tree?'

I didn't know.

'What's growing on that bush?'

I didn't know this either. We walked together across the little square on the Alexandrovsky Prospect. The old man kept poking his stick at trees; he would seize me by the shoulder when a bird flew past, and he made me listen to the various kinds of singing.

'What bird is that singing?'

I knew none of the answers. The names of trees and birds, their division into species, where birds fly away to, on which side the sun rises, when the dew falls thickest – all these things were unknown to me.

'And you dare to write! A man who doesn't live in nature, as a stone does or an animal, will never in all his life write two worthwhile lines. Your landscapes are like descriptions of stage props. In heaven's name, what have your parents been thinking of for fourteen years?'

This initial preoccupation with nature as a practical matter about which information is to be sought, in order to 'live in nature, as a stone does or an animal' points to the practical orientation of storytellers towards life in general which is noted by Walter Benjamin. When Pavlichenko recalls that phase of his youth when 'life brought stripes to his shoulder straps' we learn not only of his martial background but also of his view of experience as a teacher. At the end of his story he produces the formulation which marks him out as a storyteller whose project is in parallel with that of his creator, as it is with the 'natural philosophy' of the proof-reader of the *Odessa News*. 'You see, I want to get to know what life really is, what life's like down our way.'

Pavlichenko the Man

If Babel can be identified with Pavlichenko the storyteller, his attitude to Pavlichenko the man is another matter. In the phrase used by Ndebele to describe the endings of Kemal's stories, Babel is another storyteller who 'leaves us thinking'. Each reader must bring a unique experience to bear in order to draw conclusions from Pavlichenko's life. A story which contains unqualified celebrations of life lived to the full also admits ironies such as that which attends the reading of 'Lenin's letter'. Yet the controlling principle of the work does not lie in a finely tuned moral judgement to which all aspects of the strong must be referred. It lies, rather, in the storyteller's recognition of the energy source in his material, and in his commitment to allowing that energy unimpeded expression, discovering in the process the fierce logic of Pavlichenko's life. 'Let me give you a story', storytellers often say. The gift, well and truly delivered by a master of the art, is to allow us to hear another 'voice of experience'. It is easy, after all, to pass judgements for or against the burning of bodies in blockaded, contested streets. What the storyteller can give us is the truth such judgements conceal: the truth that resides in 'what life's like down our way'.

Note

1. His essay, *The Storyteller*, was mentioned by Njabulo Ndebele in his introduction to Yashar Kemal. It is published in *Illuminations* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1970).

THE ASSASSINATION OF JENNY CURTIS

you win our hearts, you become our banner

— Samora Machel: *Josina, you are not dead*

It was a whisper, trying not to be heard
a shadow, trying not to be seen;
it was a day, when someone slipped away
a night, when the dark moved

it was war.

Jenny, NUSAS Vice-President:
runs NUSWEL
learns to drive
tells workers their rights.

sometimes, elsewhere
resistance appeared:
petrol dumps, pylons
dompas offices disappeared
& walls hung eyeless.

Jenny, IAS activist
drives herself hours beyond endurance
as I have never seen a human being
driven —

worker education by night
union leaflets before dawn
organisation through day

then: marriage (to Marius)
flight (to Botswana)
underground (for freedom)

so, in Pretoria
parcels address themselves
to the problems of the day:
Mnr Ongopotse Tiro, Gaborone
Mnr John Dube, Lusaka
Mev Ruth First, Maputo
Mev Jenny Schoon, Lubango

all will be delivered
all wrapped up
in brown paper, string
& correct stamps.

she was a comrade
become statistic
a ceremony
whom earth embraced
our anger
become resolve.

Keith Gottschalk

ter nagedagtenis aan Katryn en Jenny, maar ook vir Fritz en Marius.

julle sal blomme in kardoessakke
stuur,
julle sal blomme met briewe
stuur.

julle sal weet:
blomme is vry en verraderlik mooi;
julle sal weet:
bewonderaars is gesigloos;
julle sal weet:
blomme is verruklik en handgranaatrooi,

julle sal weet:
blomme is snellers;
julle sal weet:
blomme is vuurpeletons;
julle sal weet:
bewonderaars is gesigloos.

julle sal weet:
dié kus is beangs en desperaat.

28/6/84
Hein Willemse

THE MARTYR

For those who think I am dead,
I am alive.
For those who think I have a bullet hole,
it is true.

For those who think I was in jail
it is true.
And for those who say I talk too much
I speak the truth.

For God made man to speaketh His
good heart,
yet it is deceived.

He gave us hands to embrace and
love,
yet we touch blood.

The bullet in my lung I shall not
curse.
For it was from an attempt at freedom.

Evans Vusi Nkabinde

RECENTLY UNBANNED

AFRICA MY BEGINNING

Poetry

by Ingoapele Madingoane

The epic *Black Trial*, and 'the cry for Africa's exploited soul' in the title poem, are both included in the poet's first book, now unbanned after six years.

On Women's Day

You are the mother of songs who bore me
In the beginning.
I read in your black terrestrial
And magical hands
The immensity of giving your life
To kitchen floors and wash-days.

You are the mother of dances and happiness.
Your face
Is the silent
Biography of daily suffering.
You are the generous lover
The mother of rivers, trees and stones.

You are the mother of all earthly and
Heavenly things. The
Point of reference,
The origin of all man.
You are the worker, comrade and goddess.

You are the mother of grain,
The antelope
And other animals.
I've been with you in broken villages,
In dead forests
We gathered twigs for fire.

You are the mother of towns, aircraft and cities.
I squat with you
On street corners
To sell boiled eggs and mealies.
You are the source of fish, peanut-bread and meat.
I've been with you on the rough ride in the kwela-kwela.

You are the mother of songs, since the beginning you have
Borne all man.
In your black hands
I discern the choreography of mysterious stars.
At your call
The earth will rise
To restore you as the mother of all things.

Andries W. Oliphant

DOMESTIC MAID,
MY MOTHER

Sharp weapon, my words
who do I call you mama
how will I explain
to your grandchildren
you're their granny
when they called you girl
right in front of them

To me you'll always be mama
though daily you beam beam beam
to cheer the long haired woman
whom you dread
more than you fear God

Maybe you're right

to wipe the chagrin
from your face

When you die, remember
there will be no commemoration
no master and madam
to bury their good girl
just a cluster of fellow maids
and boys
and perhaps your relatives
from the country

Lancelot Maseko

OH SALLY MY DEAR

Your name is like a golden bell
hung in my heart.
When I remember it, I tremble.
Then it swings and rings: Sally . . .
Sally . . . Sally . . .
Oh! What a feeling.
Love me baby.

I can't believe that our love is gone.
How I miss you,
How I need you.
But I know, I know
That on of these goodays
You will remember me,
Need me too.

It has been short but fast.
But why, why not long and slow.
Oh! Sally, you were so kind to me,
I don't know what's wrong.

You are Moonlight,
Starlight, Sunlight,
All the lights my eyes need.
Let's hope that one day, one night,
We shall be at the same boat
Which is love.
And let's pray that Modimo knows about us.

David M Makgato

Walt oyiSipho ka Mtetwa

WHO ARE THEY?

Moving in the park
I saw a notice
nailed to the bench
'Europeans only'

Who are these Europeans
so fortunate to have seats
reserved for them
in Africa?

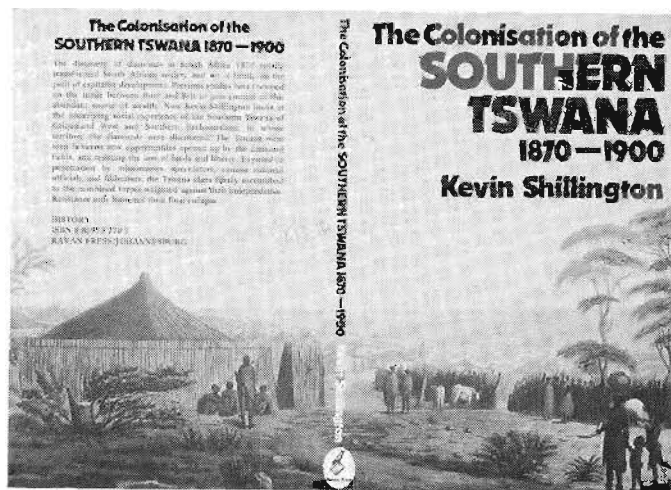
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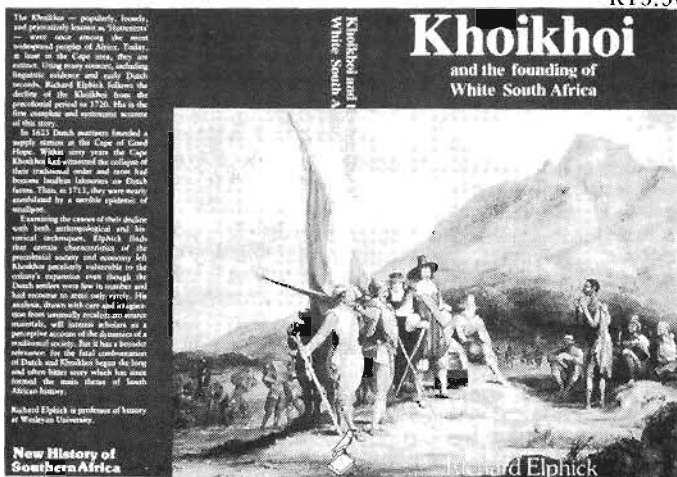
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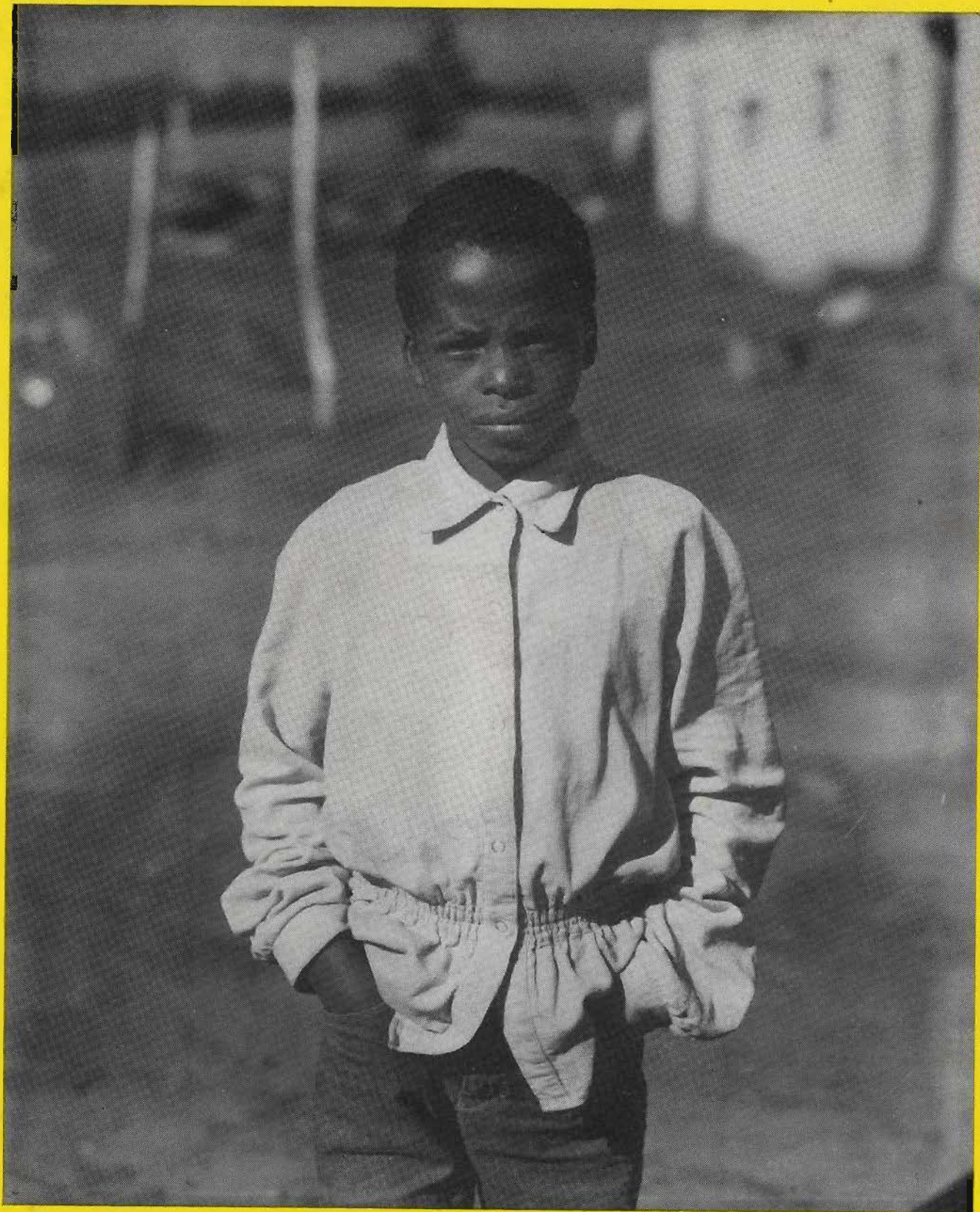
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