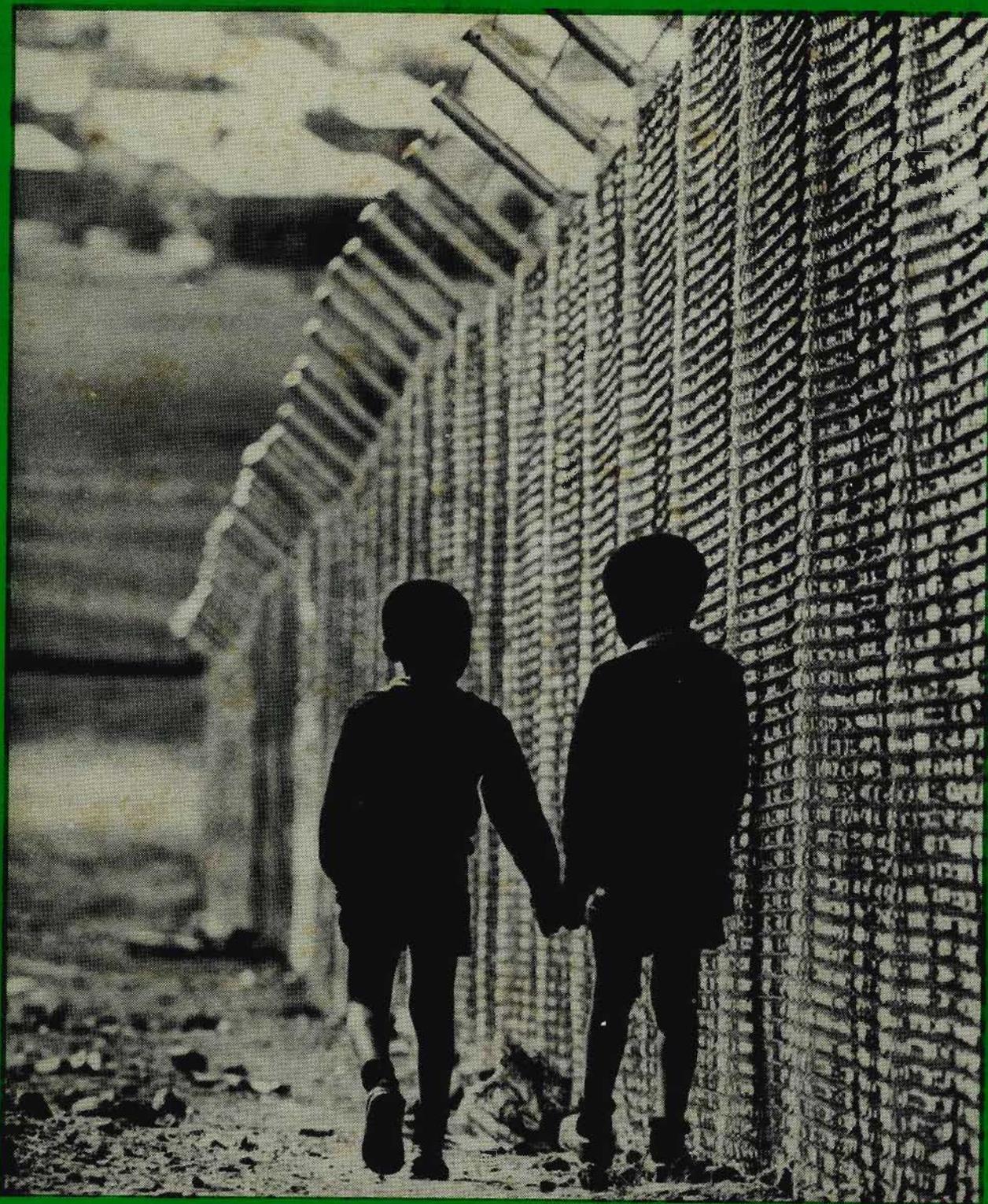


Staffrider

Vol. 1 No. 4 November/December 1978



POWERFUL NEW STORY BY MTUTUZELI MATSHOBA / MIRIAM TLALI'S 'NEW HORIZONS' IN THE U.S. / POEMS BY JAMES MATTHEWS / ZEKE MPHAHLELE'S WORKSHOP COLUMN / NOVELS IN PROGRESS BY NEIL ALWIN WILLIAMS AND LETSHABA THUBELA / POEMS FROM CYA, BAYAJULA, KWANZA, GUYO, & MPUMALANGA GROUPS / PHOTOGRAPHS / REVIEWS.

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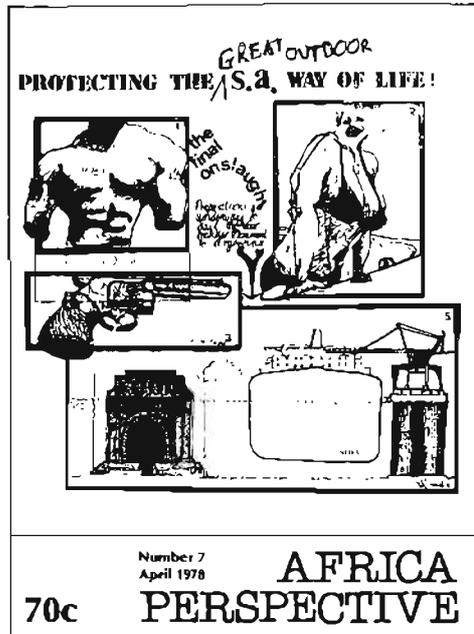
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Regular Soweto Speaking writer Miriam Tlali is in Iowa, USA, attending the International Writing Programme there for six months. Always one to share her experiences – and to help others to speak out through her interviews – it wasn't long before Miriam had this report winging back to us from Iowa City. If you want to write to her there, get her address from Staffrider.

Miriam Tlali / NEW HORIZONS

'It's fantastic, marvellous, wonderful!' Gumedi remarked softly in vernacular, looking at me and shaking his head. The young student who was on his way to Oregon University to study for a post-graduate degree in Education had apparently got tired of peering over the high seats and had come over and perched himself next to me. Together we shared the awe-inspiring experience of being first fliers aboard one of the finest achievements of the technology of man. We were cruising through space; in other words, we had joined the 'Jet Age'.

'And for such a ponderous, immense lump of metal to defy all laws of gravity, rise up into the air and stay there?' I said, echoing Gumede's words.

Minutes passed, and we sat looking through the windows at the passing dark clouds through which the plane kept piercing. Then it seemed that we had risen to even higher strata where there was no rain but masses upon masses of what looked like cotton-wool. There we were, gliding over them. We said nothing, our eyes fixed on the oval apertures, while the other passengers, who were obviously no novices in air travel, sat chatting unperturbed or conglomerated in groups, playing cards. Then gradually the soft fleecy mantle thinned away until it was gone.

We looked down at the extraordinary sight, wondering. It looked like hard crusty convolutions of granite rock criss-crossed all over by networks of valleys and dongas.

'What's that?' My companion asked.

'Desert,' someone in the front seat answered, looking at us and smiling.

He later introduced himself as a lecturer from Cape Town and was on his way to New York. He had read my stories in *Staffrider*, he said. Imagine my surprise!

'Oh, it must be the Namib,' I said, thanking the man and remembering the geography which our school-teacher at Madibane High School used to 'pump into us'. What a sight that was! Whole tracts of arid, grey expanses of uninhabited land; here and there, miles apart, were dots of isolated structures, joined together by roads which seemed like lines chiselled through the gritty surface.

I must say I felt immensely grateful when the Atlantic Ocean came into view, and the plane carried us from a desert into the endless blue waters stretching right across the horizon where the last rays of the sun seemed reluctantly to disappear. I sighed, sinking back, adjusted the ear-phones into my ear, pressed the button on the seat below my hand, and listened to music.

* * * * *

The illuminated letters above our heads began to flicker a warning, and a voice from concealed loudspeakers advised us to fasten our seat belts and prepare for the landing. The plane was now nearing Rio de Janeiro. As it descended, my ears started playing tricks on me and I looked around uneasily. I suppressed an urge to scream. I kept swallowing and swallowing until my tongue and my throat became dry in an attempt to relieve myself of the agony of auditory 'isolation'. I glanced round carefully, only to find that the chatting, apparently calm passengers all around were reduced to mere gesticulating, lip-moving, voiceless mutes. I tried desperately to agitate my eardrums with both my fore-fingers over the skin above them, but that too produced no positive results. I gave it up; just sat there and looked at the beautiful scintillating lights of the town. Rio de Janeiro – a sprawling city near the sea. I was in Brazil, South America, and I still could not

Michael Siluma / NALEDI TRAIN

How often Staffrider writers return to the theme of the journey. Remember Mango Tshabangu's Thoughts On A Train, for instance? Small wonder, really, when you think that black South Africa spends a good part of a lifetime 'on the move'. Now judge whether Michael Siluma gets things right in this depiction of a typical trip from Park Station into deep Soweto.

I show my ticket to the barrier-attendant and descend the flight of stairs leading onto the adjacent platforms one and two, Park Station.

There is a train at platform two. On asking I am told by this young man who sells apples that it is bound for Naledi, Soweto.

Once aboard the train I move deeper inside, further away from the door. I never like to be anywhere near the door – especially when travelling during the festive season.

All seats are occupied, so I resign myself to the fact that I shall have to remain standing for the better part of this long and exhausting ride between the Golden City and Naledi, in deep Soweto. A while later I am joined by a few other people who like myself have reached Park Station only to find all seats in this coach occupied.

An old man who must be well over fifty is among them. His deep-set eyes dart about hoping to locate an unoccupied seat. Realizing that there is none the old man sighs and calmly looks out onto the dimly lit platform. With a sudden jerk the train pulls out of the station. I begin to wonder how long this old guy will manage to remain standing.

Among the seated people are two youngsters, a boy and a girl, aged about ten. The old man is standing right there in front of them. Each gives him only one unconcerned glance and they continue licking their ice-creams.

The old man stands, blinking occasionally. Everybody ignores him. Then a young woman offers him her seat. The old man gratefully thanks the young woman and sits down. He removes his old brown hat from his head and holds it in his wrinkled hands, which are resting on his lap. His head is covered with grey curly hair. He blinks a few more times and soon he is dozing in his seat.

The train moves slowly, jerks as it gathers speed, then stops at Braamfontein Station. It is almost full as we leave this station. And with each stop it gets fuller, and the temperature rises. Mayfair... Grosvenor... Langlaagte, then Croesus Station.

The platform is filled with black faces as the train stops at Croesus. I stand looking in the direction of the door at my brothers and sisters entering. Every one of them is pushing vigorously, and they in turn are pushed by others on the platform.

After a brief but fierce struggle at the door a woman jostles her way past several other people until she is right beside me. She stands panting and sweating, all the time embracing a big paper bag containing her goods.

Also pushing, but with less vigour, is a man whose unruly locks merge with his long beard. The beard is like a forest, making his mouth appear much smaller. His brown lips have patches of pink which could only have been caused by alcohol.

One of the people he jostles as he forces his way through is a young woman. She pushes back so hard with her buttocks that her offender is thrust forward and has to hold on to the woman beside me. With droplets of sweat forming on her flat, black shiny nose the young woman who has just been pushed turns her head and gives the drunkard behind her a very angry look. Then she quickly looks away, realizing that that does not in any way affect the drunkard, who has in the meantime started singing:

*Ba nkobile ko kerekeng
Bare ke nwa jwala
Kante jwala base sebe
Jwala ke mabele*

believe it!

My friends back home had advised me to 'take something warm' with me as I was going to the Northern Hemisphere, and that I must not forget that it was just approaching winter there. Professor Mphahlele's kind letter, which I had in my handbag having received it just before I left, had wished me all the luck in my travels. It had also warned me of the imminent cold weather. I must say, although it was still warm in Johannesburg, I had shivered a little, remembering the pictures of snow-covered landscapes of some of the cities of America and Europe I had seen in books. I had accordingly 'armed' myself to the best of my financial ability.

But now I was still in the Southern Hemisphere and the heavy overcoat and thick scarves and shawls I was carrying had become redundant because the weather was warm and pleasant. My two companions helped me carry the bag with the 'ammunition'. According to my tickets, I would have to travel to Miami, then to Chicago and finally to Cedar Rapids. These (tickets) were in order, I was told, and I was happy because there was so much to learn and you were never certain that you were on the right track. Gumede, who was going North-west, would have to wait a little longer at Rio and then take a plane to California or Los Angeles. Our other companion from Cape Town and myself would board another Pan Am plane to Miami. He had hoped that he would travel directly to New York, and he fumed when he learnt that there was to be 'a change' in flights. His journey was to take longer than he had anticipated as he would first go to Miami, in the same plane as myself.

'Miami! Phshew . . . Who wants to go to Miami?' he shouted angrily. I, on the other hand, was delighted. Think of it — from Soweto to Miami! I could not wait to get into that plane to Miami and I rather sympathised with the man.

When the loudspeaker announced that all passengers travelling to Miami were to go on board, I smiled. It was to be farewell to the Oregon student. He sadly carried my bag and accompanied us to the entrance where we shook hands and my co-traveller relieved him of my other bag. We left him standing alone there, rather forlorn and looking at us.

* * * * *

Who wants to go to Miami indeed. I certainly *want* to go to Miami, I said to myself. I want to go anywhere and everywhere in this wide, beautiful world which God created and I want to see anything and everything in it. Who wants to be locked up in that Soweto anyway? And everyone in Soweto would like to do just that. We want to be free — free to walk, run, swim or fly; to break all illusory man-made fetters. We are all children of God and we shall remain that way. It is no sin to feel like this and I was happy and thankful for the opportunity.

'America, here I come!' I mumbled to myself as I stepped on to the tarmac followed by my not-so-happy companion. Minutes later, we had occupied our seats and adjusted our seat belts. All the courtesy which can be shown by human beings to others was literally 'poured' on us as we say in our language. My co-traveller cleared my way and carefully eased my bulky bag below the seat in front of me so that I might sit comfortably. I thanked him. We relaxed in the luxurious Pan Am aircraft as it soared and soared at incomprehensible speed into the open sky, opening new horizons to a Sowetan like myself. I sat next to the window and looked through it until my eyes became tired. I listened casually as my fellow-traveller chatted with the jovial, tall, robust man next to him. The 'new' man spoke about his many business ventures and interests; about his financial transactions, quoting staggering figures of hundreds of thousands of dollars. He smiled as he spoke of his children. They were being educated in the best universities and colleges in different parts of the world, but, he complained, they did not seem to know whether they were contented or happy with all that he provided. He went on and on as he willingly passed the trays of food from the stewardesses to us. 'Are you two travelling together?' he asked the man next to me, and without waiting for a reply, add-

(They drove me out of church . . . Because I drink . . . But drinking is not a sin . . . For beer is nothing but corn.)

We are now headed for New Canada Station between Soweto and Johannesburg. The heat has intensified. The voices of the people and the crying of a baby make the coach sound like a beehive. It is sweat, heat and noise as the train speeds towards New Canada.

As the train leaves New Canada we are still packed like sardines. The drunkard remains unaffected. He has now switched from singing to talking. He is using foul language as he talks. I look away from him, pretending I am not listening and wishing there was a way to shut him up.

The language he uses in his drunken drawl offends me, but no one is more offended than the woman beside me. Circumstances force her to stand facing him. Pressure from all sides renders her unable to turn, let alone move away from him. She turns her head in this or that direction in an effort to avoid the stench from the drunk's mouth as he talks.

At Mzimhlophe Station a few people alight. The train is still full as it leaves.

We have just left Phomolong Station when pandemonium suddenly erupts as, wide-eyed with fear, the people in the other compartment stampede like wild buck scenting a lion, towards our compartment.

Knowing clearly what this means I reach for the inside pocket of my jacket and remove my three ten rand notes which I manage to tuck away safely in one of my socks.

We are now packed as never before in this compartment. The sudden stampede has created a space near the door where movement had been impossible a short while earlier.

There a man is being searched at knife-point. Obviously terrified he turns his head away from the robber going through his pockets.

Apart from this movement he stands . . . motionless, as if he is not aware of what is happening to him. Tonight, Christmas Eve, these pickpockets are committing downright robbery.

The pressure around me has increased and something in the bag of the woman beside me is pressed so hard against my chest that I fear one of my ribs will snap.

There is a silence like that of the grave. Terror is written on everybody's face as the robbers go about their dirty work. But before they reach me the train pulls into Phefeni Station. Here they alight. As they do so one of them slaps a young man across the face.

Other people also alight, and the pressure around me is relieved. I sigh thankfully. The people in the compartment resume their talking immediately.

As the train approaches Dube Station a man produces a can of beer, and after taking a swig passes the can on to his friend who passes it to a third person. After three good gulps the can is empty. Another can is immediately produced and the drinking continues.

Deriving no pleasure from being a spectator, I look away from these men. We ride into Dube Station.

I look around for a vacant seat as the train gathers speed. The only one is immediately occupied by an African sister nearby. The soles of my feet feel as if I am standing on hot coals.

An empty beer-can is flung out of the window next to the drinking men. It hits a man standing on the platform on the back of the head. Conversation continues unabated and I wonder if I am the only person who has witnessed this.

Then a woman's voice pierces the noise:

'Ha e le batho ba batsho! O ila utlwa ba ntse ba re ba batla freedom, ba batla freedom, maar bona 'ntho tse ba di etsang. Ba nahana hore makgowa a ka refa freedom ba ntse ba etshwere so? (Africans! You hear them demanding freedom, but look at the things they do. Do they expect the white people to grant them freedom while they still behave like this?)'

Initially I am angry with her for saying this. But then the anger changes to pity. How misguided she is to believe that it is the white man who will decide whether and when to grant us freedom.

ed: 'Where are you going to?' 'I'm flying from Miami to New York. This lady here, is on her way to the University of Iowa. She'll fly from Miami to Chicago, and then from there to Cedar Rapids.' 'Oh, Cedar Rapids. There where 'he corn and everything grows so tall,' the man said, lifting his arms with the fork and knife in his hands, into the air. 'Everything grows so fast and so tall, you can almost see them grow!' He smiled and looked at us as we laughed. And those words sounded like music to me.

* * * * *

Except for the sound of the engines in the floor under our feet, everything seemed stationary. The full moon, the clouds, the enormous wing of the aircraft, all appeared to be at a complete stand-still. I closed my eyes and kept them that way. I just sat back, taking the whole scene into my mind and reflected . . .

It had all been so unbelievable. Things had happened so fast. I thought of the dream which had come to me in Baragwanath Hospital. I was lying in a semi-delirious state on Bed 22 in Ward 4. I saw smiling faces, familiar countenances which had brought me good tidings. I was just recovering from the anaesthetic following the operation. I had been 'travelling' in lands I had never seen before and these faces and their voices had, in my mind, merged and become one with the world I had been lingering in ever since the smiling nursing sister had approached me with a sparkling kidney-dish containing a hypodermic syringe, as if she was bringing me a delicious dessert. She had announced, still smiling, that they were 'only going to put me to sleep'. Little did I realise then, that *Ba beso, halimo ba Afrika, bane ba se ba laetsu. 'me isela e ne e se e betliloe eo ke neng ke tsoanela ho tsamaea ka eona* — My gods, the gods of Africa, had already pre-ordained. They had prepared the path on which I was to tread . . .

I woke up into a stunned world. The sensational shocking 'grapevine' of the unexpected violent deaths of Bubbles, the attractive Johannesburg black model and her middle-aged Afrikaner lover, Jannie Beetge, had rocked the city. In all the papers, bold headlines announced the tragic occurrence which brought their affair to an abrupt end and once more brought into focus the much-talked-about romance between the two since they appeared before the courts charged under the notorious so-called Immorality Act. The white man had apparently been jilted by Bubbles and had decided to end it all by pointing a gun at his 'mistress' and then at himself.

Everywhere in the ward, the topic was re-iterated with great enthusiasm. The nursing staff, cleaners, patients and the visitors who came rushing in in great numbers when the doors were opened during the visiting hour; everyone had something to say about it. Amidst all the turmoil, I took the *Time* magazine, which my husband had brought me, and which had been lying on the locker next to me and looked casually through it. My attention was attracted by the photo of an Iowa poet, Paul Engle, and his wife, Chinese novelist Hualing Nieh Engle who had recently returned from a trip to the People's Republic of China where Hualing was born. I read with great interest and admiration of the great work this indomitable couple had and were still doing in the field of international literature. How could I know then, that in just over a fortnight, I would be received by these very wonderful people into their 'family' of celebrated writers from all over the world? . . .

I looked through the window over the enormous wing of the magnificent Pam Am airline at the moon and the stars and the clear skies. I thought of my almost miraculous recuperation from a condition which had given concern to my surgeons and anaesthetists. I was lost in wonder at God's unfailing mercy. I closed my eyes and reflected, listening to the muted slightly tremulous 'movement' below my feet.

* * * * *

I opened my eyes again and the moon was still there; at apparently the same spot, radiating its glittering rays over the

I look closely at my poor misguided African sister and her appearance explains her utterance.

Instead of black plaited African hair she wears a long brown wig that looks like a white woman's hair. Instead of her God-given eyelashes I see long artificial ones, with purple painted eyelids. Her lips, smeared with lipstick, are a patch of blood red against her brown face. Her purple-painted nails are as long as an eagle's. On several of her fingers are jewel-studded rings of various kinds.

Ikwezi Station. The woman gets off followed by the two youngsters who had not offered their seats to the frail old man. The old man too alights.

The train is pulling out of Ikwezi Station when a middle-aged man who has been asleep in his seat suddenly gets up, grabs his parcels from the luggage rack and hurries to the door. He hesitates, then as he is about to jump out a tall hefty man seizes him by the collar and pulls him away from the door.

'Can't you see that you'll get injured?' the tall man asks him angrily. Shocked and baffled, the man does not answer.

'Don't you want to celebrate Christmas tomorrow, man?' someone asks the baffled man.

'*Hau! Ikhebla elingaka hlalala isitafu!*' an elderly man with slit ears and plaited hair says, and bursts out laughing. The whole compartment joins in the laughter.

The train is no longer full and as it leaves Inhlazane Station, I sit down.

After stopping at Merafe Station the train speeds towards Naledi. The iron wheels roll on: the iron rails offer no resistance. In a few minutes we ride into Naledi Station.

Everybody seems to be in a hurry, except the vendors, who are promoting their wares.

The queue at the bottle store today is unusually long. With every train that pulls into the station it becomes longer.

At one of the houses I pass on my way home a party is in full swing. The revellers overflow into the street, where young men are jiving to Margaret Singana's 'Hamba Bekele'.

In this house people usually drink the night away. And with the knives, the pangas and the tomahawks they carry, they stab and chop one another during their drunken brawls.

Today — Christmas Eve — they received bonuses from their employers in town. Their pockets are well-lined. That means more drinking, more drunken brawls and more stab-bings. And the next day — Christmas — more dead bodies covered with newspapers. Could they be sacrifices to the memory of the birth of Christ our Saviour?

Miriam Tlali / NEW HORIZONS

striated silver clouds and penetrating the darkness. Everybody was quiet or asleep in the plane and I sat there all agog viewing the magical scenery. It was dark, and I knew that somewhere down below, we were passing or had already passed over the Amazon River. What a pity! I thought. I would have liked to actually see it, and once more relive the thrill I used to feel when our geography master made us write essays on 'The River Amazon and its Fertile Basin'. After breakfast, our plane landed on the magnificent Miami Beach airport. I cannot describe it adequately. Let it suffice for me to say, no wonder the opulent come here from all over the world to 'get away from it all'.

I had been warned that at Miami we would have to go through customs again because the USA is 'very strict on Security'. We had to collect our luggage again. As I was preparing to fill in a form, a lady arrived with a card in her hand, read out my name loudly, smiling into the faces of the people waiting in queues. I responded, and so did a man from Botswana whom she also summoned. She explained to us that she was going to assist us through customs and see us safely off. After following the woman for a short while, I remembered that I had not even had time to bid my co-traveller goodbye. He had been so kind to me. How ungrateful of me. I should at least have thanked him. I felt a little guilty as I accompanied my guide through the corridors.

And Miami was hot! By the time I had carried the heavy

NEW HORIZONS

suitcase and bags from one place to another, I had *bad* it. I was sorry I had burdened myself with all the load. When they asked me what I was handing in to be freighted, I nearly gave them everything. The Botswana man was on his way to California University and his plane was to take off earlier than mine. I waited impatiently fanning myself, as the woman shook his hand at 'his' gate. She must have noticed my predicament because thereafter she came to me and said pitifully: 'Oh it's so hot; you should have dressed lightly!' I just looked at her, nodded and forced a smile. There would not be any point in trying to convince her that it was cold and raining cats and dogs when I left Soweto. I asked for the rest-room. She directed me and reminded me to be ready for my next flight which was due in an hour-and-a-half.

I emerged from the rest-room forty minutes later feeling refreshed and cool. I strolled slowly through the long elegant porch, walked into a dainty snack-bar along the way and bought an ice-cold fruit juice. At that moment, I was feeling like I had never felt in all my life. I was walking on air. After receiving clearance at Gate H.9, I was shown into the waiting-rooms with the big windows. I slipped into a padded reclining chair, placed my sling-bag next to me, saddled one leg of mine onto the other and slowly sipped the cool juice as I watched the many planes move around in the airport.

At exactly 8.45 a.m., following the announcement to go on board, I joined the many obviously wealthy passengers and we were amicably welcomed by the crew as we filed into the Delta Boeing 727 jet aircraft bound for Chicago.

Being the only black on board, it was not difficult for the captain to spot me when we landed at Chicago. 'Welcome to Chicago,' he said extending his hand to greet me. He later 'handed' me over to an escort, a black man who looked like so many of my own brothers in Soweto; he led me to Gate E.4, where I waited for my next flight.

I was now an established jet traveller, changing from one Boeing to another as we switch from one Naledi or Chiawelo train to another in Soweto. I boarded a United Aircraft plane to my final destination — Cedar Rapids.

From the air, in clear sunny weather, I looked breathlessly at the beautiful panorama of this vast land. Tracks and tracks of farmlands, carved almost mathematically like large green carpets of different shapes and sizes. I remembered what that rich American in the Pan Am airline from Rio said and smiled.

* * * * *

'Welcome to Iowa City, Miriam!' said the tall, vivacious, smiling Malinda Cox as she reached for my arms, hugging me. In her arms, I felt as if I was home at last. Together, we picked up my luggage and carried it into what she called the 'Program Car'. In seconds, we were off. As we descended into the dip overlooking the lovely green valley and the Iowa Park, Mayflower — the enormous multi-storied hotel — stood there, majestically embedded in a 'sea' of tall green trees, the like of which abound in this countryside.

'Ah, Miriam,' Malinda sighed, looking at the building, 'there we are, there's Mayflower. This is to be your home for the next four months.'

And I held my breath, spell-bound.

It is a long, long way from Soweto, and the contrast is immediately and inevitably striking. The fully-furnished, air-conditioned, carpeted apartment No. 626D was already waiting to receive me. It has a colour TV set, a telephone, a spacious bedroom and a quiet, comfortable nook as a study with a long desk and many drawers, a kitchen and bathroom, both fitted with the most modern fittings and gadgets.

On the kitchen table was set a meal of minced veal and a rather too generous helping of Chinese noodles, complete with chopsticks next to the plate. The attractive, well-known Chinese novelist from Hong Kong in the adjacent apartment had prepared it for me. Her name? — Chan Huen Man. Fame and success have not corrupted her, and she has 'a heart you can eat' as we say in our vernacular. Later Chan said: 'I'll keep my bedroom-door open so that you can walk in at any time of the day or night.' And with that, she opened not only her door, but also her whole being.

After enjoying the meal and having a warm bath, I crept into bed and dropped off like a log!

* * * * *

When I woke up this morning, the twilight of a new day was already showing through the beautiful white curtains of the window which stretches across the entire wall. I walked over, and from my sixth floor apartment, looked down, fascinated, into the Iowa River, a tributary of the great Mississippi. I watched the steady stream as it flows and winds its way in a smooth bend, disappearing at places behind the tall trees and lush green grass. I looked at the endless traffic of the sleek American cars as they pass through the two-way road, towards Des Moines the capital city of Iowa state to the West, and Cedar Rapids to the East.

I know now, that all this is not a dream. So beautiful a dream could never last so long. I am here in Iowa, the famous University town. The graceful rural countryside, the people of Iowa, the many highly-esteemed novelists, poets, playwrights from such far-off countries as Bulgaria, Palestine, Japan, Singapore, India, Taiwan, the Netherlands, Rumania, Poland, Peru, Thailand — the ones I have already been introduced to, and the many others I have still to meet. They all cuddle you with their warmth and tenderness, and you feel humbled, grateful and safe.

I do not believe that all these wonderful people, united here in a spirit of brotherhood, are merely part of a bad dream. That I will wake up and find them all gone. They are real. They signify the greatness of the Almighty who, in his unfathomable wisdom created them and made them a part of this universe.

If you ask me what it feels like to be part of this whole episode, all I can say is:

'It's . . . it's like winning a thousand-dollar jackpot! No. It is even better. It is just as Mothobi and Moeti so aptly summarised it on the 14th of September when they saw me off at Jan Smuts Airport with a great friend of mine — *It is a dream come true!*'

ROCKVILLE

FABIAN

I see their shadows grow taller
as they shout at fabian tactics
and spit the gall of bitterness
on the edge of education for all.

Take heed of those voices!
They flay the flaws of the law
rejecting the dictates of ideology
that tamper with the noble rules —
the pillars of mankind's learning.

Only liberty's means
will open their minds
enabling them to flag
the choice of virtues
they seek for their goals.

Some impatient hearts flew away
to education's summer far away;
to return with flowers, and all
that will bear good fruit for all.

Lo, their moments of desire —
raring to reach the top rung
of learning's golden ladder,
but frustration got them strung —
their echoes, so much a reminder.

Mandla Ndlazi

NINE POETS / James Matthews / Fezile Plam / Stephen Watson / Leonard Koza / Keith Adams / Keith Gottschalk / Allan Kolski Horwitz / Nkos'omzi Ncgukana / Roy Joseph Cotton

Two books of poetry by James Matthews have been banned in South Africa — Cry Rage and Pass Me a Meatball, Jones. He was recently invited to attend the International Writing Programme at the University of Iowa in the USA but was refused a passport — for the third time. Fezile Plam and Nkos'omzi Ncgukana are Guguletu 'soul-brothers'. Leonard Koza is working on a book of poetry and graphics with Livingstone Gocina. They are both participants in the Community Arts Project. Roy Joseph Cotton's 'Transkei Poems' are part of a longer sequence.

DEATH OF A NOMAD

Phakamile Mabija
 was a Nomad Man
 Rise Mabija
 rise for truth
 Down Mabija
 Down to the gallows
 down for truth

Take my hand dear brother
 Take my hand dear Nomad
 Take me to the grass
 Take me to the green pastures
 Where you want me to graze

Phakamile Mabija was No Madman!

Nkos'omzi Ncgukana

WHEN THE OWL HOOTS

When the owl Hoots
 Think of your Roots

When the drum beats
 Come and dance to the beat

When the horn blows
 remember, slavery is 300 rains

When oppression grows
 remember, to rise up from this ruin

Nkos'omzi Ncgukana

LET ME BE AN APPLE

Hanging like a ball of flame,
 the beautiful red apple glows
 between the cool shade of the
 curly green leaves.
 Nursed like a baby and duly wet,
 the apple grows from beauty to
 export maturity.
 Freely she hangs until ripeness sheds her from her mother's womb.
 Neatly wrapped and packed,
 freely she leaves the sunny
 shores of Africa for Europe
 without the fears and frustrations
 of an exit permit.
 In banquets and at royal tables she becomes the
 apple of everybody's eye.
 So rather let me be an apple than a slave on an apple farm.

Leonard Koza

IN THE WOMB

Fed by veins through which starved blood
 circulates to warm the flesh,
 Fed by veins in which blood clots in hatred,
 For months I was protected from hunger and thirst,
 For months I squatted in her womb till she could
 bear the weight no more.
 In her womb I rested, while she slaved in Madame's kitchen.
 I was unaware of the tears meandering
 down her cheeks in the Pass Office.
 The womb became too small and
 into a wider world I arrived —
 A world in which there's no room even
 for the Son of the Creator of the world.
 'I shall arise,'
 but can't go to my father's house
 as he is a squatter.
 How warm was I in the womb,
 A squatter within a squatter,
 Safe from the biting winter breeze,
 Safe from the scorching summer heat.
 Whenever a mother carries a squatter in her womb,
 God! Why is it that what goes up must come down,
 But what comes out can't go back into the womb?

Leonard Koza

I SEE THEM

I see them in my dreams.
 I hear them whispering words of inspiration
 to their sorrowing black brothers.
 Tears roll as they pass my drifting and aching thoughts.
 But strength brims my veins as I see them again,
 Strolling bravely after the struggle,
 Mapetla Mohapi and Imam Haroun.

Leonard Koza

BUNDUSTAN

I can laugh again
 love and soothe
 I'm back in Bundustan.
 I can jump around
 and roam about
 I can feel it; I'm back again
 back in Bundustan.

I love the people; they are free
 I love the grasses all so green
 I love the cattle when they bellow
 I love the poultry and all I've seen
 I love the singing of the birds
 The clapping of the children
 the chatting of the women
 All in Bundustan.

Fezile Plam



Livingstone Gocina | Community Arts Project

I

At the first offer
of judas-pay
his loyalty leaked
like yolk from an egg
leaving a scummy white
and our awareness alerted
by the cockroaching
of his eyes
as they met ours
his whisperings became
available to our ears
as another name was
added to the list
his masters compiled
he eluded our grasp
as he cowered in
the protective glare
or prison guards
waiting out his time
for an early release
while we remain
behind iron bars

James Matthews

II

The voices of
my brothers sustained
me in the dark
of my days
as we shared
confinement in the
solitariness of cells
the songs sung
were freedom songs
from which were
forged mail-vests
covering us from
their base assault
our songs reached
other brothers confined
in other parts
of the keep
freedom songs became
a raging storm
and our voices
waves rushing forth
to drown those
who dared confine
men whose freedom
cannot be denied

James Matthews

III

I delighted
in the fear
cringing in their eyes
as they placed me behind
that iron door in a cell
they conceived will turn into my grave

My silence
silenced the shrill
accusations of their voices
demanding my voice remain mute
to the demands of the rights
rightful for an oppressed man to make

The firming
of my heart
was nurtured by their
fears as their hands trembled
ringing iron shackles around my wrist
to drain the power in my arms

Is freedom
only theirs to
have, i softly asked?
is it not for every man
to share and spread the need
of brotherhood's common creed in our land?

My mocking
laughter was louder
than their footsteps as
they fled from my cell
to bury the truth in their
hearts which their faces could not hide

James Matthews

IV

The day i was taken from my office was as
inauspicious as any other day except being
the end of the month and a little hotter
than usual

The morning newspapers read that three more people
had been detained — two women and a man. Perhaps
women's lib has asserted itself in the struggle
for liberation

New of the arrest didn't startle me. It has been
happening with regular monotony. Our oppressor-doctors
trying to cure our political fever with doses of detention;
failures consigned to the disposal ward

Francis, our office typist, fright-filled face, said that two
men wanted to speak to me at the reception desk. Her face
told me that it was my turn. My fever must've reached a
critical stage

I would've known them even if they hadn't identified themselves.
Their odour wrinkled my nostrils. The oppressed can distinguish
his oppressor even if he sends his hounds and the hounds have
the same colour as the oppressed

Their voices droned as i was informed that i had to come along.
I was to be detained under Code 100 of the Eternal Safety
Measure to safeguard the fatherland from communists and
agitating thoughts

My period of detention started from then and was to end six months
later. I was to be held because the oppressor-doctors had
decided that my symptoms were alarming and i would infect others
if i remained outside

Health lecture completed, i was escorted by the hounds. An almost
new car was parked at the kerb. I sat in the back. They didn't
bother to lock the doors. A writer seems to have status among
the hounds

Booked, listed and particulars taken, i was deposited in a cell
twice the size of my township toilet. The smell of prison
cells has become familiar and i concentrated on six months
in solitary confinement with an occasional visit from an
oppressor-doctor

James Matthews

SOCIETY'S AMBITIONS

I deny the womb
that opened the door to life,
a life of mental frustration
a life of physical castration
Yes! I hate you my mother
for giving me the inheritance of the weak
I deny you penis.

I deny you sister
for the hurried and unsatisfying copulation,
you drove me into the arms of lust
a mistress of wealth
 of power
 of death
I loathe you love.

I deny you brother
your badge of poverty
pays your fare into puking hell,
a world where I *own*
not *am owned*
I scorn you happiness.

I deny you people
I want what you cannot give,
your children are born to serve
mine must be served
 must receive
 must abuse
I avoid you justice.

Keith Adams

MORALITY ACTS

We don't need people bloated by power
 hypocritical concern for the wretched
 honour being bought for a price
 business as usual.

We don't need peanut revolutionaries
 fat cats discussing the 'situation'
 smelling of twenty cent cigars
 indignation in voices
 abstention in hearts.

We don't need people with penis fever
 eager to cast the first stone
 hiding behind their guilt
 smearing our women with words
 their seed an improvisation.

We don't need Jekyll and Hydes
 transformed by cheap wines
 haunted by dreamless sleep
 agonising to view
 their escape an excuse for their
 inadequacy.

We don't need people ashamed of their beauty
 enriching cosmetic firms
 where features are measured
 like articles in a store.

We don't need loveless sex
 meaningless relationships
 rushing to spread your legs
 'baby it's the in thing'.

We don't need ripoffs
 where life is cheaper
 than the clothes you wear.

We don't need pseudo intellectuals
 blinded by arrogance
 fooling no-one in their ignorance

We need . . .

Keith Adams

DREAM OF ATONEMENT

In my night,
night of all others, unimaginable others,
imagining me as no more than the others,
or gone by now to whatever;
in my night interred with the night,
lengthening a shadow over the land
till these hands can hold no name —
I was finally tired as I finally am,
never wanting division, not wanting its dirt;
not this dark in whose faceless waters,
rivering in I and in others,
all men are all emptiness —
into which a dream pours:
of forgiveness for their unanswerable going,
and for my soul gone so cold unanswering
that forgiveness is a dream for its corpse.

Stephen Watson

LETTER TO A WIDOW

For Foszia

the loss
the pain
the mosque, mourning
the 100 days of grief

it is over.

the cause
the sweat
the hunger
the detention cells

this endures.

our struggle
our tears
our lives
our triumph

these await.

Keith Gottschalk

KONSTABULARY

In forlorn junction dorps
with white-washed hill names
where caffies have deep-fried burgers
and the road-signs are scratched with hiker names
and the stones are rough and ready
and cracked and split and patched

what does the konstabel do at eight
or ten on a velvet dry night
with stars like blue pick-ups
in the moan dronkie baas retch
of the louse grey blanket
sies cell

fiddling keys on a government ring
reports on hotnot iniquity
running his fingers through location-razed hair
seizing the calendar meisie starring in Jo'burg

what does he think
in those helgat donder dorpies
with their verandered hotels of flagrant mimosa
and Castle Beer mats
with Prinsloo or Peter proprietors
and ladies' bar pink

what does he think
the konstabel and his bulging brief
of tribal woes and ready revolver
lying sick and silly
in his government holster
with ciphers and codes.

Allan Kolski Horwitz

SULINKAMA, TRANSKEI

No princesses walk here.
No wheelbarrows carry silk
crowns or nightgowns of
lavender to decorate the
poverty. O undying beast
of eveningsorrow, do you
not care for your children
who roam the fields and
are hungry? O sky, vast
winding sheet that entombs
the hunger, how can you
be indifferent to the funerals
weeping like barren women?

Roy Joseph Cotton

TSOLO, TRANSKEI

A ditch within a ditch,
illuminated by the frost,
throttled by the sun.
Twigs scratch the dust road.
The single gas station
whimpers like a puppy.
Everything obtrudes
and the mustiness matches
perfectly the idleness:
loafers in tackies
prepare to overwhelm
the emptiness.

Roy Joseph Cotton

**LAUGHING XHOSA PATIENTS GATHERED
AROUND A WHITE BABY**

Their laughter is as flagrant
as an apple slit by the sun.
Lightdaggers penetrate the
pram that looms like a
cherrymountain overlooking
the mirth. The baby does not
whimper at the cloudless sky.
Why should he? No misery brushes
the brow of the fields whence
these patients come. There
are no luxuries, only laughter,
to assuage the sickness of the
veld. The laughing figs are dry.

Roy Joseph Cotton

WHY MAMA?

You have suddenly run
right into the room
suddenly you have taken
little 'Baby' into your hands.
you are clinging to him
and you are trembling alone
why mama?

That man at the door there
who is he?
Is he our new daddy?
If not, why make eyes at you?
why does he swear at you?
— why mama?

You tremble; you fear;
not a word you say;
why mama?
'No pass, No permit, No right, 'mntanam.'

Fezile Plam

A GLIMPSE OF SLAVERY / a new story by Mtutuzeli Matshoba

... For the suffering of injustice is not the part of a man,
but of a slave, who indeed had better die than live;
since when he is wronged and trampled upon,
he is unable to help himself, or any other about whom he cares.

Callicles' words from Plato's *Gorgias*.

Magistrate: Have you anything to say for yourself before sentence is passed?

Myself: I've nothing to say, your honour. All I wanted to say has been said. The evidence I gave before the court was the pure truth. I'm only surprised now when you promise to sentence me. It is clear to everybody in this court that I was merely defending myself. The only thing I want to add is that your honour must pass sentence knowing that you, a man well versed in the principles of justice, are about to violate the same principles that you swore never to undermine.

Magistrate: Is that all?

Myself: Yes, your honour.

Magistrate: I am not moved by your last words from my findings, which I have already explained to you. The court sentences you to twelve months imprisonment of which nine months is conditionally suspended for three years...

The condition was that I should not be found guilty of assault during those three years. I turned and grinned at my people in the gallery. They smiled back at me triumphantly. Although I had deserved a discharge, we all welcomed the three months. Assaulting a white man is sacrilege in South Africa. Even the courtroom constable was pleased that I had got away with a vacation on some farm. The complainant derived a different satisfaction. He had been the villain all the way, and a 'smiling, damned, villain' in the courtroom. In the first place he had tried to steal from the firm where we worked, sending us to deliver an order that was less than what was listed on the invoice. Secondly, he had insulted us first. And thirdly, he had struck me first, about three blows before I retaliated. Because of all this I was going to jail for three months and, sure as I was being fingerprinted at that very moment, I had lost my job too.

'Hey boys, come here, come here. The goods you have just delivered do not correspond with the invoice. They are short by seven; two lampshades, two electric irons and three kettles. What's wrong?' Our firm dealt in home electric appliances and there were four van 'boys' to every medium-sized van. Our group consisted of two other youths of

about my age then, twenty, and the fifty-five-year-old 'boy', Alfred (otherwise Ntate Ali to us), our driver and group leader — he signed everything and we just loaded and off-loaded the van. Ntate Ali was a goodhearted old man, his only shortcoming being that he did not allow any 'bread' to come out in his van with his knowledge, perhaps afraid to be made an accomplice, although he did not go out of his way to ensure that there was nothing extra in his van.

Ntate Ali turned to hear what the white man was talking about. He wanted us out of earshot because we always teased him about his religious fear of whites. We followed him close.

'Where are the other things?' asked the baldheaded manager type. 'Look... Can you read and count?'

'Yes, baa-, sorry, sir', Ntate Ali answered nervously, correcting himself when he saw us out of the corner of his eye nudging each other.

'Here, add these articles and come inside with me to check them.'

Ntate Ali went with the white man into the building. Presently he reappeared muttering to himself and folding a debit note, which he put between the pages of the signature book that he carried with him on our rounds.

'What is it Ali?' Sello asked. That one was on first name terms with everybody at the firm, including some of the easy-going whites.

'That man gave us the wrong order,' replied the old man.

'No, Ali, always trying to shield your baas. That guy stole the other stuff. He was taking a chance on the stuff not being checked before we left the place. If the mistake had been spotted later the firm would be notified and the order rectified just like any other mistake. That's how Jan operates if you don't know, Ali,' said Sello. 'The man uses you to steal and you pretend you don't see. One day you'll go to jail for him.'

'Awu, shaddup Sello. You think everybody's a thief like you. Either this is a wrong order or he made a mistake counting,' insisted Ntate Ali.

'Oho. Go ahead and remain sleeping. You'll see. He's going to tear that debit note and tell you to deliver the things.'

We pushed the matter to the back of

our minds and continued our rounds. If I had known where it would lead me, perhaps I would have given it a little more thought.

Manyathela — he was flatfooted and knock-kneed and waddled like a duck when he walked, so we called him that — stormed at us as we went in through the wide, sliding glass door. At first we hardly took notice of him waddling towards us. He was an aggressive type and you never knew whether he was really angry or not until he was upon you. Most 'boys' at our firm had tasted his wrath, which he was inclined to unleash physically. Until that day he had stepped clear of me, maybe sensing that I was not the kind that is easy to push around. However sometimes his guard slipped, and in such moments I had caught him looking at me with a doubtful eye, as if he wanted to try me and see if I could stand up against him. I tried my utmost not to give him a chance to carry out his experiment, in spite of his relentless goading, which even extended to pulling me up for minor mistakes in my work.

'Hey you stupids! Why did you tell those people to phone the firm for the undelivered things? Since when have you done that?' he screamed at us.

'Er... Mr Du Toit. It was a, a mistake...' Ntate Ali stammered.

'What?' A mistake? Whose mistake? Your bloody mistake of course!' He advanced threateningly at the old man.

The next thing I saw myself between him and Ntate Ali. He raised his balled fists but hesitated to strike.

'Either your own mistake or nobody's mistake. You know that this old man has nothing to do with stealing. He just drives his van where you send him, that's all,' I heard myself saying in a nice even voice. I had the disturbing feeling of welcoming the confrontation. Maybe it was because I had long been coiled up inside and the person who had done the coiling up was standing in front of me, giving me a chance to unwind.

The white man was beyond himself with anger. He sucked in a deep breath through his slitlike nostrils and clenched his teeth, grimacing as if he was in pain.

'Who told that manager to phone here? Why didn't you tell him to phone dispatch?'

'There's only one phone number here,' I said. 'Or do you have your own?'

'Then why didn't you say you did not know why you were short?'

'Why?' Aggression contaminates. The anger was welling up inside me.

'Because kaffers don't know anything! And what's more don't you stand here asking me questions — hear?'

I did not reply to this. We were going on like a pair of schoolgirls. If he was not going to do to me what he had started out to do to the old man, then I might as well proceed to the changing room. The knock-off buzzer had gone and the rest of the firm was packing up for the day. Those who had finished came to form a sort of ring around us, a sprinkling of whites and Indians included. They stood there silently and expectantly, with their arms folded, some of them holding their chins, the whites more towards Manyathela's side, forming part of the arc behind him, the Indian guys on the sides, except for good old Moosa, whom I could not locate and guessed was behind me.

I started turning. By so doing I gave Jan the chance he was waiting for. His vicious right caught me above the temple. I staggered a good two metres and just managed to stay on my feet. He had snatched the advantage, the cowardly bully, and he hung on to it, but only for the two more blows he landed on my jaw and chest, both not hard enough to stun me or knock the breath out of me, because I was moving away from him as he waded in on flat, awkward feet. I hadn't grown up in the rough streets of Soweto without learning to defend myself. Everything I did next was purely instinctive. You live in a brutal environment, you develop an instinct for violence. As simple as that. I went for Manyathela like a rabid dog. I came to when I had him on all fours before me and was working my legs on him like pistons. It was not a white man I was belting, don't mistake me. It was a bully who needed some straightening out. I was doing to him what he would have done to me if he had had the makings of a good fighter. In our own dialect he had 'come to the stop station'.

Someone was pulling me off him. My half circle was cheering madly, and it was this noise that brought the manager from the first floor. When he appeared on the staircase, all went suddenly mum. I think nobody wanted to be caught cheering.

'What's going on here?' the manager demanded to know.

The first to answer was Manyathela's friend, who called himself 'Vrystaar' when he was in a happy mood. Miss

Malan the receptionist, and the only woman on the ground floor was quick to pick up the phone. Maybe if there had only been men on the ground floor the matter would have been settled in a manly way. Everybody had been treated to a good, though unbalanced duel. All men enjoy watching a man-to-man tussle, that is why boxing is such a prosperous sport. The worst I might have come by was to lose my job. The lady and 'Vrystaar' were the star witnesses at the trial. Nrate Ali was bound by the fact that the fracas had started over him to stand by me. The others I left out of the matter so as not to jeopardise their positions at the firm. Nrate Ali was terror-stricken through the whole circus in which the main bone of contention was why I had taken the law into my hands, not who had been the aggressor and why.

Koos de Wet, the man I was later to learn had once been heavyweight wrestling champion of the Transvaal, had a torso that was not much smaller than that of the oxen his servants, or rather slaves told me he had trained with. He was barrel-shaped and suntanned to a brick red. This hulk was covered with a short thick khaki suit, cut Safari style, and on his head, the facial portion of which had reminded me of the nose of an old type aeroplane with its propeller represented by his grey brush of moustache, was perched a scout's hat with a leopard-skin band. The wide brim of the hat was pinned to the dome on one side.

Farmers had come to choose their labour since morning, when we were herded into the square yard. They stood on the other side of the wire fence and pointed. Others had only stated the number they needed and taken their men away. The other three sides of the square were bounded by walls. I assessed each bidder and pushed the other prisoners ahead or hid behind them. But now it was about twelve and there were few of us, about twenty, left in the yard, which had grown in size as the occupants diminished, and there was no way you could hide. Up to now no bidder had taken my fancy and I had stuck around hoping that a more Christian looking person would turn up. I did not like Koos de Wet at all. He was taking in my physique with the practised eye of a livestock buyer.

'Ek soek vyf gesond jonges. Daardie, daardie, daardie, daai en daai (*I want five healthy youngsters. That one, that one, that one, that and that*).' Koos picked his men, starting with me. I regretted waiting all morning only to be picked out by the most unsettling human being

I had seen for a long time. I had heard tell of fearsomeness in people, but Koos took the cup by a wide margin.

He was filling his pipe as we filed out of the small gate. When I passed him I felt my scalp shrinking. My whole body had a sensation of expecting a blow. The others detoured, to leave a safe distance, when they passed him. I guessed that we were all feeling the same. Our behaviour tickled the ogre for, as he signed the papers at reception, he kept eyeing us with dead grey marbles and what I thought must have been a smile twitched at the corners of his mouth. He had bought us (we did not know how the actual transaction, payments and all took place) and we belonged to him. He could do whatever he liked with us, far-away in the wilderness where nobody would know. He could kill us, bury us on his farm, and report that we had escaped. We would have to do all we could to slip out of that slave-master's hands alive.

A battered misshapen pile of green metal sheets that might have been a van once waited for us outside the Modderbee prison grounds. We were still in our own clothes and I thought how easy it would be to run. But where would one run in that open sea of brown waving highveld grass? These thoughts were wiped from my mind when we came to the van. The slave-driver opened the cab of the vehicle and leant inside. When he came erect there was a rifle in his right paw. I don't know anything about arms, so I don't know what model it was. It was a rifle right enough.

He raised the gun and shook it at us. 'Climb in,' he growled in Afrikaans, 'I'd like to see if this old 'roer' can still spit fire. I ask you to give me a chance to try it, kaffers.'

We sprang to obey the order. I was afraid that the contraption we valued ourselves onto would fall apart under the strain of our weight. To my surprise it remained intact. It protested loudly when Koos de Wet got into the cabin. Then it shook on its wheels as if there was an earthquake, whined, purred, and at the third try roared to life. With a screech of gears that set my teeth on edge we were moving. The petrol fumes smothered us but soon cleared when we picked up speed on the infinite tarred road to the shimmering distances of the Transvaal. By way of speed that battered tin could do wonders. The world came at us from where we were going and swept past us in one great blur. The few vehicles we passed on the road appeared to have been hurled from somewhere ahead of us by some monstrous force.

After what appeared to be an eternity — there was no way we could estimate the distance we had travelled on the never turning road — we felt a reduction of speed.

We turned into a dirt road that branched off at a right angle to the north (all along we had been driving eastward). By the look of it, it was not very frequently used. Grass grew in the middle, making the dirt road look like two parallel footpaths. The dust mushroomed behind us like a nuclear explosion cloud. None of us spoke. Trying to do so would have been futile with the racket that our conveyance to the unknown raised. On that meandering dirt road our main concern became trying to hold on to the sides of the carrier as best we could in order not to be thrown off. The violent bumping and twisting prevented us from placing landmarks which might have helped us know our bearings. However I did my best to note the general direction of the main road and changing landscape. We were ascending some hilly and craggy land; the roar of the engine and the fact that I could see the road way down below us where the dust had thinned, told me that.

The farm lay in the second, shallow valley, a rich saucer-like country bounded by three low hills. Did you ever travel on land that has been left undisturbed since it was made by the Creator, and when you were beginning to think you would never arrive anywhere, suddenly come upon a place to which people once somehow found their way? The symmetrical human touch seemed to be a wry joke in the face of nature. What Koos de Wet had done was to choose a fertile dale for himself, place a city homestead on one hillside and below this, plan his farm, totally neglecting artistic considerations. He had arrested what must have been a beautiful twinkling stream in the middle of the valley, flattened acres of the downstream land, divided this with criss-crossing fences, planted maize, potatoes, onions and green pumpkins on four fields, and let perforated asbestos pipes distribute the water from the dam formed by a wall running across the valley. The pipes, some of which were not perforated, opened into a kind of trough from which the stream continued on its way. The usual farm buildings dominated by a large hay-shed, were scattered over the farm. The hay was the feed for his innumerable livestock grazing upstream on the other side of the dam. That was the place where I would learn the extent to which cruelty and hatred can turn man into something less than a wild beast.

We passed the servants' shacks. They were low, crooked mud walls on which were placed rusted corrugated iron sheets, kept there with boulders the size of a man's head. From one end to the other the shanty was a hundred yards. Dark holes which served as doors gaped in the walls. The foreground was nauseatingly filthy. It had either rained or they threw their waste water there, and the sour smell of rotting trash was similar to that of a pigsty, which I would have mistaken the clumsy constructions to be, but for the two ragged women, one heavily pregnant and the other lean and old, who came out of two of the gloomy holes followed by a swarm of dirty children with soiled noses and tear-marked faces, all of them not much more than babies. Some of the children were stark naked and those who had something on looked no better. The ones who might be girls wore straight dresses made of cotton flour bags and the boys wore old shirts that came to their ankles. The biggest boy was sucking his thumb. They greeted our advent passively.

Turning left, Koos drove down between two lucerne fields. Figures were crouched in rows two hundred metres away, cutting the lucerne with sickles. With ear-splitting squeaks and squeals, and one final loud roar, the van came to a stop beside a big, square brick building. Koos got out from the front and grunted, 'Klim af.'

We jumped down and stretched ourselves.

'At least it's better than being locked up in jail — neh?' said Thabo, with whom I had paired three days previously, on a Friday when we reached Modderbee.

'Still too early to decide. If the people who live on his farm are like those we passed, what do you think we'll be like by the time we leave here? I don't trust that gorilla at all, my friend,' I answered, more convinced that Koos was a psychopath the more I saw of him.

The baas-boy appeared around the corner of the building. I concluded that he was one from the way he was dressed in heavy khakis and boots that were still in reasonably good condition. Sick people tend to be drawn together by their common plight. 'Bobbejaan' suffered from the same mental sickness as Koos and for that reason was exempt from his master's sadism. In fact he was Koos's main hand on the farm. It was obvious how he had earned the position of farm overseer. A few days after our arrival one of the farm labourers told me that Bobby, as he preferred to be called rather than his baas's full 'Bobbe-

jaan', was born on the farm, had never been further than Benoni, the nearest town, where he accompanied Koos to the market to sell the produce, and never left the farm because he knew no relatives other than those few who lived there. He was, perhaps, also afraid that he might come across some of the people who had been through his hands on the farm. Another reason might be that Bobby knew no other way of life than farm life, and was by nature neither adventurous nor imaginative. He had been brought up with hard farm labour and as such expected everybody to be able to work like an ox. It might have been for these reasons, and the sadism in common, that he was favoured by Koos de Wet.

Bobby was about thirty-five years of age, medium height, stone-hard muscle and extremely cruel. His leathery face told you that as soon as you saw him. He examined us with the contempt rural people have for city people (an attitude city people hold, in reverse, for country people). He apparently considered us in terms of work, as labour units instead of other human beings he was meeting for the first time. After sizing us up he turned his attention to Koos.

'Basie. Baas Van Tonder was here. He had come to see the cattle you discussed with him. He'll come again tomorrow evening,' he said in perfect Afrikaans, like a little boy telling his father how he had spent the day while the father was away at work.

'Ja, dankie, Bobbejaan. How's the work proceeding?' asked Koos as if soliloquizing, and took out his pipe.

'Baie goed, baas.'

Koos grunted his satisfaction like a pig. 'Here's five more hands from Modderbee. See that they learn the work fast, but first I want that tree stump removed from the side of the granary. I want work to begin on the extension by the week after next. Dress them and make them start now, I'm still going to see the Missus at the house.'

Bobby stared at us with baleful eyes for some seconds before speaking. 'Maddoda (men),' he said in a voice that might have chilled a milksop, 'you must know that here on baas Koos's farm no one is begged to work, more especially prisoners. If you're afraid of work, we soon make you like it. This is not the city where you come from, but a farm. Come and change.'

We followed him to the entrance of the brick building next to which the van had stopped. He took a key out of his pocket and unlocked the heavy padlock that held a horizontal iron rail across two wooden doors that were covered

with tin sheet. The doors had three right angled iron hooks each, about halfway up. The iron rail rested in the nooks of these hooks and held the doors fast. It was only when he pushed the doors open that I noticed that the room had no windows. From the sunbeam that flooded in I saw that there were piles of sacks on the floor.

'Take the sacks in the nearest right hand corner, remove your clothes and put the sacks on. They have three holes for your head and arms at the base,' Bobby said as if he was giving a most ordinary order. When they had spoken of 'change' and 'dress' it had never occurred to me that they might mean we were going to replace our clothes with sacks.

The five of us looked at each other in shocked surprise. We stood where we were without making any move to go inside or take off our clothes.

'Can't we work in our clothes, mister? Why the sacks?' I asked.

'So that you may run away all the easier? On the other hand we are saving your city clothes for you, because when baas Koos returns you to the prison you must be dressed as you came here,' Bobby explained curtly.

'Well, tell your baas that I'm not dressing like a slave,' one of us whose name I did not know replied.

'So, you're not prepared to work? You forget quickly that you are a prisoner. I'll call baas Koos and we'll remind you what you are.'

Seeing that all five of us stood motionless in spite of the mention of Koos de Wet's name, Bobby made a move to attack the man who had spoken.

'You touch him and we all take you apart limb by limb before that ape arrives here,' Thabo threatened. 'You just try, and you'll see.'

Without any more words Bobby spun around and ran as fast as he could after his master.

'We're in for it now, majita (*guys*),' I said. 'But they're mad to think that we can put on these sacks.'

I should have said we were mad to think that we could refuse to obey anything that Koos told us to do as long as we were on his farm. When the pair of sadists returned, the one time heavy-weight wrestler had a long braided thong whip in his left hand, and in his eyes the glint of a tamer of wild animals. Bobby stood aside and smiled — in fact sneered — like a dirty-minded person about to watch a filthy play. Koos asked no questions but started flogging us with brutish enthusiasm. I covered my face and felt the lashes cutting my skin and setting it on fire. Two or three of us were

crying out aloud. In the background I heard Bobby laughing gleefully. Whip! Whip! Whip! the burning leather swished in the air. After a storm of fire and brimstone that lasted close to forever there was a welcomed pause.

'Trek uit!' Koos spat out. His eyes shone like a snake's. They hypnotized us into complete submission, reduced us to whimpering bags of pain. The little nerve we had had against Bobby had been flogged out by the whip that lay coiled like a thin black snake near Koos de Wet's left boot. 'Trek uit, jong!' he spat again, and in a flash we were out of our clothes, as naked as we were born and trying to hide behind one another, both out of shame at our nakedness and because of the whip. I felt dehumanized as I stood there hiding my loins with my hands. The two in front of me had lacerations all over their backs down to their buttocks.

'Give them the sacks, Bobbejaan.' The latter went inside the building and came out with five of the said sacks. He threw them at us. I caught one and examined it before putting it on. It had been converted into a simple dress by cutting holes at the corners and the centre of the base as Bobby had told us. I slipped it on. It hung heavy and coarse on my shoulders. Where it touched the whip cuts it felt as if pepper had been sprinkled.

I looked at my companions. Their appearance made me feel like laughing, but I could not bring myself to do so. I had all along thought that such scenes existed only in the pages of history books or in films. My standard three teacher had taught me that slavery was abolished way back in eighteen thirty-three in South Africa. He was lying, and those who had told him that had fed him a lot of bunkum too.

'Bobbejaan is going to give you five picks and you're going to dig out a tree stump. You give him anymore trouble and you'll see that the dance we just had was only the first rehearsal of the real party. Nou, spring!' We were not going to argue after our initiation.

Bobby led us to a tool-shed. 'You see now that this is not the city where you're begged to work? You'll leave Traanfontein with some experience worth relating to your grandchildren. This is where baas Koos's great-grandfather was killed by Ndebele savages and lies buried. Later, when the Ndebele thieves were conquered his sons claimed this land and called it Traanfontein because their tears flowed here. They vowed never to leave the land and my people came to work for the De Wets before baas Koos

was even born.' He gave us a brief history of the farm, very proud that he too was part of it. So Koos de Wet was visiting the 'sins' of the fathers upon the second and third generation.

The tool-shed was big and full of all types of farm implements. This gave me the impression that, although his was a prosperous farm which could afford to keep pace with modern technology, De Wet was a conservative farmer. He must have preferred manual labour for two reasons — its cheapness, and the vengeance sworn by the family against black people. Each of us took a pick. Bobby showed us the stump of gumtree, five feet in diameter, about a metre from the wall of what must have been the granary. He did not leave us but sat on a rock and rolled a zoll of Magaliesburg tobacco. We spaced ourselves around the stump and started digging. In spite of the sack I still felt naked and, in addition to the painful lacerations on my body, my skin itched intolerably.

At the first few swings the picks sank deep into the soil.

'This is (*dig*), better (*dig*) than I thought (*dig*). The ground (*dig*) is soft,' remarked the man who had started the whip dance.

We dug about two feet down, tearing through the topmost roots easily. Then we came to the thick roots and trouble. Our picks stuck in the roots and it became difficult to pull them out, or they just glanced off the hard wet underground wood, twisted in our grips and blistered our hands. The blisters soon burst and we were holding the shafts with raw palms.

'Damn it!' I cursed. 'We won't get anywhere digging like this. Tell that swine to give us spades.'

Thabo stood erect, held his waist behind and grimaced. 'Shoo,' he said, 'My spine feels as if it's going to break.'

'Mine too. You're right about the spades,' another man said and stopped digging.

We all stopped digging and leaned on the shafts of our picks. Bobby jumped from where he had been sitting as if he had suddenly discovered that the rock was red hot, and came running at us. His eyes were shooting fire. 'What are you resting for, you bloody prisoners? You don't rest until the fucken stump is out!' he shouted. 'Come on, get on with . . .'

'Hell, maan. Don't blow your top over nothing. Give us some spades. How do you think we can dig without shovelling out the soil?' Thabo answered.

'Then say so if you want spades. You've got mouths to speak. Don't just stop working, or I'll call baas Koos.'

'You sure regard that ape as a god —

neh? Go on, give us the spades,' I said.

Before Bobby went to fetch the spades he defended his baas. 'Of course he is one. He feeds me and gives me place to live with my family on his farm. What can you do for me?'

'I can kill you and save you from your stupidity. It's people like you who spoil these whites.' And I had meant the first part of what I said.

Bobby ignored this and continued, wagging a finger like a piece of bark at me. 'Moreover, you keep calling my "mlungu" names, I'll tell him and you'll regret being yourself.'

When we had the two spades we removed the loose soil. That was as far as they were of any use to us, for they were too light and thick-edged to cut through the thick entangled roots. What was needed was an axe to chop them with. Then we'd have to bend them out of the way, loosen the soil underneath with the picks and scrape it out with our bare hands until more roots were exposed for hacking. Bobby gave us a big sharp one. The roots were still wet and it was by no means easy to cut through them as the axe just bounced off most of the time. However we made better progress that way. We strained on until sweat was running down our bodies as if we had been in a rain shower. The sacks were very uncomfortable but we tried as hard as we could to concentrate on what we were doing. The soil struck between our nails and fingers as we scraped. The skin of our hands was literally peeling and the blisters were covered with soil. Once we asked for water and Bobby told us to go to hell.

Three hours later — estimating by the sun, we had started working at about two in the afternoon — Koos came to inspect our work. We heard by the crack of the whip when he was still out of sight that he was coming and we increased our diligence. By then we were past the thickest horizontal roots, standing almost waist high in the hole. Only the tap-root still held fast in the ground. That would be easy.

He came to stand a few feet from us, and said, 'Ja, jong. You must work until you drop dead. When you finish this Bobbejaan is going to give you ropes to haul out the stump so that you can refill the hole.' He cracked the whip once more and left us, commanding his baas-boy to follow him. After half an hour we tilted the stump and started chopping the tap-root. Bobby returned with a tractor, towing a two-wheeled carriage, and told us that we were to load the stump on it. The ropes we were to use to haul it out of the hole and onto the tow-cart were fetched by Thabo from

the tool-shed. While Thabo was gone we had a chance to take a short breather.

I looked up at Bobby sitting behind the steering wheel of the tractor. He glared back hatefully. I was very interested in this minion who allowed himself to be called 'Bobbejaan'. 'Say, Bobbejaan, is that your real name?'

'Yes. Baas Koos gave it to me when I was small, but no one else calls me that on Traanfontein unless they want trouble. You want to talk to me, say "Bobby",' he said and twisted on the seat to see if Thabo was on his way back.

'You like seeing other people suffering — neh, Bobby? Why?'

'I don't care. What can a black person like me do for me? I've got a job to see to it that everybody works as hard as they can on this farm so that we may always have a good harvest and I do that job as best as I can because it is my living. I don't care about another black man who's poor like me'. Bobby seemed convinced that that was the wisest thing to do to survive.

'But you could try that elsewhere than on a farm the whole of your life. What makes you prefer to stay here helping Koos to make life unbearable for other people like you? Is it because you are afraid of life outside your small realm of Traanfontein? Are you afraid that if you leave the cruel patron who keeps your stomach full of crumbs to try to stand on your own feet and be counted with the real men of the world who face their suffering without turning judas, you'll be a loser? You're a bigger loser now Bobby, because you've lost your confidence in yourself, if you ever had it. You're as good to Koos as any of his cattle, and . . .' I still wanted to spill out my disgust at people like Bobby, but the nonplussed face told me that I might have been talking to a cow.

'You see, I don't know what you're trying to say, prisoner. If you want to find out about Bobby, bide your time and you'll soon discover me, or ask the others. They'll tell you. They know me.' I took the latter advice. They told me that Bobby was selfish, cruel and as bone-headed as they come.

Thabo was back with the two twenty-foot lengths of rope. We secured them around the stump, wound them around our hands, grouped together, dug our heels into the ground as in a tug of war and heaved. Not even a centimetre of movement from the stump. We tried again and again but we couldn't budge it. Bobby jumped down from the tractor to give us a hand. 'City weaklings,' he muttered as he joined us. His additional pull was negligible.

'Bind the ropes to the tractor and pull it out that way,' one of the two men who had not spoken since we left Modderbee suggested.

The tractor pulled the stump out easily. I forgot to tell you that the tree had been cut at chest level while it stood. The stump was still wet and heavy. As I looked at it I saw that it would be impossible to lift it onto the cart. There was nowhere to grip it and six of us were too few to lift it with the ropes. Bobby realized this and, to my surprise, he chose to drag the stump to wherever he was going to dump it, with the tractor. I had expected him to force us to lift it, if only for the sake of seeing us straining against its dead-weight.

We filled the gaping ground. Bobby returned on foot and said, 'Good, tomorrow you start demolishing the wall. Go wash your hands now.' He pointed to the tap. 'We're going to the dairy now.'

'I've never milked a cow in my life,' Thabo said to me.

Bobby overheard and answered:

'You're going to learn now, come on.'

The sun stood at an acute angle as we followed Bobby from where we had been working. What struck me as odd was the way all five of us seemed to accept our lot. The sack scratched my skin. It was no use thinking about it. None of us said anything about the situation in which we found ourselves. The rules were simple: shut your mouth and follow the bass-boy, prisoner!

No, not prisoner, slave. Because at Traanfontein we were flayed of even our prison status, which was, at least, still human. In prison we were accorded a human enough status in that we were dressed in proper clothes and corporal punishment was at any rate not prescribed, although the warders had behaved in such a way as to make one suspect that they were tacitly allowed to use their discretion in the abuse of prisoners; we were entitled to two meals — if what prisoners were fed could be called meals — per day if we did not fall foul of prison regulations or incur the disfavour of a warder; we were also certain of sleeping with blankets, even if these were vermin infested, under a roof and on inch-thick felt mats. Considering that there were so-called free people in the locations and elsewhere in the world who could not even afford to live like prisoners, prison was to us only a limitation of one's movement. Really desperate people would opt for prison rather than accept a 'window-shopping' role in life.

We were still going to see about the food and the 'slaap-plek' which Traanfontein would offer.

The milk cows, a herd of about one hundred Frieslands, a breath-taking spectacle of brown and white, black and white fur in the crimson hue of the setting sun, moo-ed their satiation and slavered a green mucus, eager to have the pressure in their swollen mammary glands relieved by milking. They were brought in by four tattered little boys. We waited at the dairy gate while the herd was driven into a mucky enclosure with hay troughs, made out of large drums cut longitudinally in halves, along the fence and scattered here and there in the kraal. The smell of moist straw, wet ground, fresh cow-dung and the milk dripping from the teats of the cows combined to make the air rich and pleasant to inhale. When the animals were all in, one of the dirty boys pulled the wide wooden gate shut. He wore an old jacket that he must have inherited from his father, its sleeves rolled up, the hem coming to his ankles, and nothing else underneath to cover his emaciated, ebony nakedness. He carried a little whip in one hand. The boy did not show any surprise at seeing us in sacks, maybe because he had grown up with it from childhood. To me he looked quite striking with his thin, flimsy, brownish hair, parched little face and bulging almost transparent stomach. Such a figure in the midst of such abundance appeared strikingly out of context to me.

Farm hands were leading some of the cows into stalls where they would be milked. Bobby ordered five men to show us how to bind the hind-legs of a cow and milk it. I remember I filled eight large buckets, and I remember it because as the warm, rich milk jetted into the buckets and foamed invitingly, there was a little hope in me that when we finished, one little mug would not be regarded as a loss. When I was busy with the eighth cow, the man who had instructed me came to stand over me.

'How's it going, mfowethu (*my brother*)?' he asked in a friendly voice, but I did not pay him any attention because I thought he might be mocking.

'See? I told you it's easy. Takes no time to learn,' he continued and this time I stopped milking to tell him to leave me alone. Although the sun had already sunk beyond the hill, there was still enough daylight for me to see him clearly. He wore gumboots and an old denim overall. His face was round and his smiling brown eyes changed my mind and made me respond amicably.

'Ya, it's easy. First time I milk a cow. I'm going to write home about it soon

as I get pen and paper.' I continued milking. 'You work here for money?'

'Yes. And, if my wishes counted I would have gone long ago. Only I don't know where I would go. Life on this farm is too tough for a man with a family. I can't stand watching my children starving with so much food around. Only that evil-hearted spy of the Boer, Bobby, can say life is good here. He and his family get everything they want. Other labourers' children are not supposed to taste even a drop of milk . . .'

I felt my heart sinking.

There's no school for our children. They are made to wake up at five every morning to work in the fields. The younger ones go out with cattle every day for the whole day, taking only cooked samp with them. The samp is part of our payment — we receive a bag as big as this one you're wearing plus ten rands every month-end and, well, we live on the farm. Formerly they used to milk the cows in the pastures and eat the samp with the stolen milk, but one day baas De Wet's biggest watchdog discovered this. And boy, were the little imps tanned! They have many sjambok and whip scars over their little bodies ut those from that day stand out. If I did not leave that day, after killing that Bobby, I'll never leave.'

'What made you stay? In fact what makes you go on staying, if you see it's that bad?'

'Heer! You don't know how bad life can get for a black man in this godforsaken land, my friend. I have come a long way to find myself here. You see, I grew up on a farm in Northern Natal. All my youth I worked for our landlord, a much better white man than this one but also suffering from the same sickness of selfishness they all have of thinking that black people exist only for their benefit. For, while I worked hard on his farm to make him a comfortable income, his daughters and his sons went to the best schools and became lawyers and doctors, I think. Then he sold the farm and left for somewhere overseas. All of us who had given our youth to him were left destitute and homeless, with only the farming experience we had gained on the farm but had not the slightest hope of ever using for our own advantage. So then I spent my life travelling from farm to farm looking for work. Somewhere on the way I picked up a wife — made a dairymaid pregnant and had to marry her. She has had four children since, the first-born is the naked one you saw closing the gate. She is now pregnant again, and I have no use for her because I know that she keeps bringing forth children who are fated to

work all their lives for whites. I regard myself as a father of slaves. It's better with you, because you did not come here of your own free will. You've been forced because you're a prisoner, you have no choice. I have the choice, but it happens to be no more than switching farms. I would give it all up and head for the cities. But do you think my forefathers wouldn't forsake me if I left my blood at Traanfontein?' He ended his simple biography with this question.

'They surely would, my friend.' I assured him that he was doing the most virtuous thing by not deserting his family. He had told me his life story with the simple resigned manner in which our people tell about their misfortunes. I felt a touch of compassion for the friendly farmhand. The reasons for his staying on the farm were beyond his control.

The milk would not come out anymore. I removed the bucket, unbound the cow and let it jump out of the stall. There were no more to be milked. I wanted to know where we were going to put up. 'Say man, where do we sleep?'

'Who? You who arrived today? In the storehouse where you got the sacks. You eat first and baas Koos locks you in there.'

I did not have to be told that the sacks served as bedding. 'What do we eat?'

'Samp or porridge and the water that remains after the cream has been separated from the milk to make butter and cheese.'

'Does all this milk go to making butter and cheese?'

'No. Only very little is processed here. The rest of the milk goes to the corporation.'

'What's that?'

'It's a sort of organization whereby farmers sell their produce together for the sake of price control,' he explained briefly. 'Ya, samp, porridge, and the milk water is all you get, breakfast, lunch and supper. It's better during harvest time. The vegetables that are not good for the market are sold here on the farm to the labourers at cut-price, and you prisoners are given vegetable soup, the cost of which is deducted from the twenty-five cents a day that you're working for. What is not sold is dug back into the ground as manure . . .'

He paused and looked in the direction of the gate. 'Go now, friend. We'll talk some other time when we have a chance. Baas Koos should already be around to inspect the evening work. After that he locks you up and the day's work is over.'

(Continued on p. 40)

POEMS by Maano Dzeani Tuwani, Nthambeleni Phalanndwa, Avhapfani Tshitimbi

Maano Tuwani is the founder of Guyo Book Club, a group which aims at promoting the reading and writing of African literature in the Nzhelele/Sibasa region. Nthambeleni Phalanndwa's long poem 'In This World, My Sister' appeared in Staffrider No. 3 and was widely acclaimed.

Both Tuwani and Phalanndwa attended the PEN writer's workshop run by Prof. Zeke Mphahlele in Johannesburg at the end of October.

THE SWEETNESS OF LAUGHTER

They wade through Park Station
Suitcases breaking their necks,
Cattle herded into a dip tank –
We laugh and shout 'Amagoduka!'
Eyes tightly closed,
Teeth bared,
Doing a small dance to the tune.

The farmer chases a small boy wailing
Till he falls over the furrow –
We laugh till our eyes
Stream with tears.

A primary-teacher training school:
A lean youth stands before the class;
He stammers and swallows loudly;
She eyes him with a face contorted –
'Jy stink!'
To be drowned by a thunderous laughter.

Let us look for a mirror
And place it before our eyes,
Then savour if we can
The sweetness of our laughter.

Maano Dzeani Puwani

LEARN TO READ AND WRITE ONLY

(For Osofo Ramaano, who will one day
study African Literature)

Go to school little sister
Why, follow her, little brother
Go in there under a shack or tree
(Never dream of benches and desks)
Sit on the floor
The Afro-Asian way
And learn to read and write.

Attend well to physical education,
It is good for the body;
When they start with homelands
Or bath you in calvinism,
Lower your eyes
And with your forefinger
Draw lines on the floor –
A path to granny's hut,
Mother struggling with a hoe in the sun.

Do not avert your eyes
When they come
Stick in hand
Shouting a question at you:
Look them straight in the eye
And mumble something like
Mathalauga-the-boy, Lukasi, Gatsha, Ab Daliwonga!

The day will be nearing its end
The heat less intense,
Soon you will be arriving home
With Mama around
To attend to the big gash on your head
And tell you stories into the night.

One day you will dance on stage with Wole Soyinka
Stand up with Dipoko, Serote and Taban lo Liyong
Sit down with Achebe, Armah and Ngugi wa Thiong'o:
Then you will write a book
With a title experience will teach you.

Maano Dzeani Tuwani

VOICE FROM THE THROAT OF A DEAD MAN

(For W in Johannesburg)

I

Let me blow the horn
Let me whisper in the air
Let me sing a song:
Where you are now
You may hear it and recall
The past days of our youth,
You and I at the desk.

Remember those Sundays when I went to church,
You remained at home;
I can almost see you sitting on that stoep,
Sometimes waiting for a girl
Who did not come;
You complained about it to me;
I just eyed you and smiled,
And by your sullen smile
I knew you did not like it.

Do you still remember my dream,
That dream about your late mother?
You insulted me for being so silly
When I told you
That I saw her:
I saw her eating grass like a cow,
She walked on her knees,
She looked at you and cried –
You, so haggard,
Lean like a reed
On the banks of a dry river.

She wanted you to sing a song,
But you could not produce a note:
You sat there,
Looked at her
Wanting to talk,
But could not utter a word.

II

In a vision one day
You saw in tattered clothes
Your grandmother ablaze;
She jumped into the lake
But the fire would not die.

The grass started to burn,
Trees fell,
Mountains moved,
Rivers ebbed,
There was a thunderstorm:
She shivered with cold
And stood just there
Speaking to her ancestors.

I saw them
Streaming out of the donga
With broken ribs and jaws;

Others ran for their dear lives
And stood on the hills
Witnessing the policeman
Misusing the butt of his gun;

A girl ran around
Her dress pulled up
To stop the oozing gash on her forehead,
Her white panties soiled and torn,
Tears and blood blinding her eyes.

Heads swung like pendulums
Between the gigantic fists
And batons firmly gripped
To ensure a gaping, bleeding gash.

Like a chick
Trampled on by bulls on the stampede
They kicked him;
Yes, they kicked him,
Pulled him up from a pool of blood
His jaw broken,
Bible still in hand!

III

How do people explain their experiences in hell?
I remember this in trauma:
There is fire burning all day,
Fire burning all night,
You hear people gnash their teeth
While on your back you sleep
Facing the concrete ceiling above,
Nobody to talk to
And nothing to read,

The only music that of keys
That jingle even at midnight,
While women of the land
Are herded out one by one
To be used
Like the mat you are resting on.

Oh! my kingdom
Come back, my kingdom;
The kingdom that exists
And yet does not seem to exist:
Those days in my mother's belly,
Knowing neither reality nor oblivion
I love those days.

Yes, I have heard people bellow
Instead of cry,
I have heard people bark
Instead of talk,
Ask me when we meet:
I will tell you why.

Nthambeleni Phalanndwa

TAX

God created us tax free
To find that we are living unfree
A child is double taxed the day it is born
And finds that the little we get is always gone
When (God knows) will it end?

Avhaphani Tshitimbi

AGONY

All over the world they pity us
Comparing their lives with ours
Looking at us without considering our colours
And imagining themselves in our boots
Wondering: how do we endure this agony?

Avhaphani Tshitimbi

LEARNING TO DRIVE

They sit in groups
Under the shade of Misuma trees,
Old men and young men
Sixty or more,
Talking,
The truck roaring and groaning unceasingly
While each unmindful takes his turn.

They are not talking of bantustan politics,
Nor of women like migrant workers,
They are talking of driving —
Of rude traffic cops,
Of those that conduct
Oral tests for a learner's licence.

Come Thursday
It's off to the testing ground
And the dusty streets of Sibasa:
Half of them will go through for sure
(A green note can take care of that)
But . . . what will they drive?

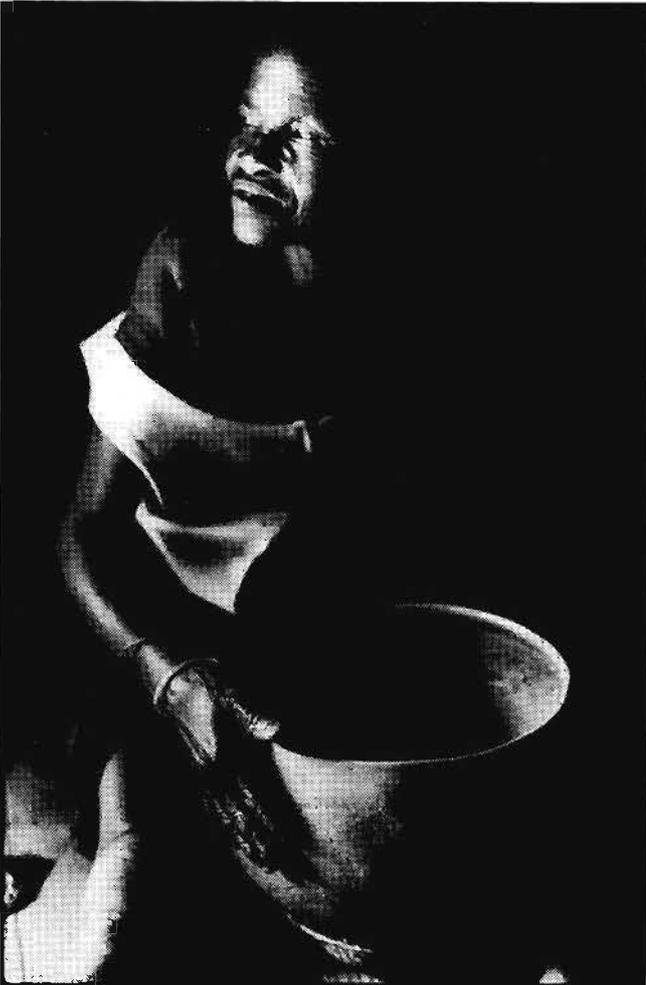
Maano Dzeani Tuwani



Omar Badsha



Robert Magwaza



Helen Aron



Mark Lavender | CYA in action

JOHANNESBURG

Neil Alwin Williams / JUST A LITTLE STRETCH OF ROAD / a novel in progress

I was young then.

Supple, eager young, like the first rising of dawn slowly being winched across the earth.

The youth I was not aware of. The dawn was the beginning of day; the day was life. Not lifeless like the night. I did not know then that there was freedom in the night. That freedom came with the night, when longings became reality in the shadows. I plead innocence.

I was young.

There were no wants beyond the half brick I played with in the streets, building highways in the sand, not weeping when the rain washed them away. I had time to rebuild bigger, better highways when life came in the blade of light that sliced slowly into the cracked windows propped with paper. Like seeds put into the hard winter ground by hands that swept graves of children born into death my dreams would burst through the soil and I would build my highways taking me forever back to the beginning, yet I did not know the circle would never end.

There was no time for blues, and to laugh was a natural thing.

To ease the pain I suppose mamma felt she too laughed, and I could not see it was not a natural thing, for the sound that floated up, up above the ash-brick shanty, across the sagging fence, away from the captivity which did not continue, meant that all was well. The walls of my world were held up by those sturdy arms and legs I would cling to when life did not come — Winter.

The sky seemed endless, stretching into the smog-snow rippled concrete, a blanket covering the scabbed body of the earth lying vulnerable in the morning cold. Feet trampled the grass rushing for early morning trains taking lifeless bodies to buildings reflecting muddled stares, vacant faces.

There were no silent chains then that clanked as wheels ground incessantly masking the screamed thoughts of voices held captive by lips that wept gently into the rising sun dying . . .

It was these days that the sand highways stretched down the street and we would thunder along them on our half-bricks, bare black asses riding roughshod over the stones.

Past the lamp-posts, round the fences, into the yards, always moving. Hands pushing the brick buses, like those we saw flashing past the houses on the corner where the road was tarred; but that was dangerous country to be explored only on Saturdays and Sundays when the arms of my mother were all there was to protect me from the bewildering, unfamiliar faces and gaits that swept past us on our way to the shop or the church.

Church was fun but the shop was even better because the chinaman gave me *bonsela*, when mamma bought a fat

pile of supplies which meant we would have enough to eat for the whole week.

Those were the expeditions with promises of sweets for me, but sometimes Mamma had only enough to pay the tick and buy the necessaries, like flour and mealie meal, and jam with butter, sometimes margarine. Mamma always bought potatoes and onions, although I could not understand why, until I discovered they were the lumps floating around in my soup and that my soup was not soup but a strange thing called gravy.

These shopping trips left me holding a broken cream cracker from the chinaman, his bony hand dipping into a brown cardboard box while my eyes greedily tracked its flight waiting for the splash-down and the reward. There was no choice in the type of biscuit, you just took the offering allowing your eyes to traverse hungrily the rows and rows of stacked items on the shelf behind the chinaman.

I was always a bit scared of the chinaman. He was unknown, I was young. He had slanty eyes and a thin face, with high cheekbones and semi-sunken cheeks.

Somehow, somehow he looked strange. There were no slanty-eyed people on our street, except Ous Susie's daughter, but mamma said she was mad, for she was being punished for her sins. I did not know why or what her sins were, but when she looked at me I looked the other way in case I was punished too. Who wanted slanty cross eyes and to hear the children call out in fear when you came round the bend?

But Ous Susie's daughter was not white like the chinaman. He was not yellow like the Japs we saw in the movies, lurking behind trees and shooting the American soldiers, who always won, and whom we always cheered. He was white like them, he even had a moustache along his upper lip like some of them — officers I think they were called. Only the China's lips were thinner.

The chinaman was always thin, whereas Ous Susie's daughter was fat then, although she's thinner now, and had a deep laugh which was funny because she had a high-pitched voice.

The Japs in the movies only laughed when they thought they had the Americans in a sure enough ambush; but Ah, the Americans were clever, they could shoot their way out of it, chucking grenades and firing into the jungle while we cheered and clapped wildly. Ah, Clark Gable!

The chinaman never laughed, at least I never saw him laugh. When I went into the world every Saturday with mamma, he was always banging on the counter and shouting: 'Next!'

Sometimes he would tell the older kids to get off the rail at the base of the

glass-fronted counter containing the polony and butter, the milk and sour milk which the people bought to eat with their porridge.

On occasions the kids would remain there and ignore the chinaman to infuriate him, knowing he would scream at them then go for the *sjambok* which was on the rack that held the *bonsela* box . . .

'You fucking black swines, your mothers never loved you!' while the *sjambok* whished through the air, cutting a swath through the magazines hanging on a string above, a little way behind his head. More often than not the *sjambi* would land on the counter's pane with a terrifying noise while the kids all stood in the doorway, waiting for unexpected developments, but the china would not chase them as they had so often wished; once the counter had been cleared he hung the *sjambok* up again, smoothed his hair back over his high forehead and shouted: 'Next!'

Life goes on.

The crowd would come back to the counter and soon the grubby notes and shiny silver coins would trade hands for parcels wrapped in newspaper or brown paper packets, all the while the noise of the street and the kids teasing each other with bursts of raucous laughter would continue.

But it was the noise that attracted me.

The noise of the street was confusing but persistent; pleasant in a way for it made up for the guttural sounds I imagined as I pushed the halfbrick round the lanes of my sandy highway. The noise gave essence to the reality. It was like a blanket really, fading into the background with contemptuous familiarity, the pulse of the people I saw once a week: founding, fragmenting, resurrecting.

That was life, the day, for with the faint stirrings of day came the noise, like the birth of a child in a sterile hospital ward; whimpering signs of life waiting for the slap on the backside before, from the tender larynx, the scream came.

The night always scared me, for there was just the occasional cough and the distant hiss of tires on the ribbon road threading through the township, like a moth-eaten coat on the back of a beggar. Everything became so quiet to my ears, everything: with a gradually increasing finality.

The finality — the way in which everything simply ceased, the disturbing whimper grazing the flesh of the dark as it slipped from the twin-lipped prison reminding me that there was life — that was the real terror.

Mamma was not there to comfort me as the wailing in my lungs reached its crescendo. There was only the darkness

and the limp body of my sister as we lay on the bed next to the rough surfaced wall — two sticks on the pyre.

Even the sleep was not what it was supposed to be: no gentle falling away into dreams, no pleasant goodnight pat from my father or watching my naked body as it stood in a tin bathtub, glistening water running down the valley between my legs.

Nothing.

Just the abrupt end to the noise and then the vacuum where all time ceased. And then the clocks would tick again as the wick lamps were turned up, and the splash of water into a pot, crashing in fury as it boiled on the stove my father had stoked before the first light.

Even then — with the uniformed disjointed impressions of the concrete and sand universe I trod: the fear pregnant women-children had as they walked down daylight streets on knobby knees; the fear, the endless screams darkness brought; the fear of the hope daylight carried like a stillborn infant in its bony thin arms, emaciated by the silent dying of a man holding his guts seeping from his stomach, his life festooned in them, his eyes watching the ever enveloping silence, his ears not hearing the cries of his child — there were no body counts.

I waited for Saturdays.

The world was out there, pulsating, alive. Saturdays were the days when the thought of sleeping was not terrifying for there was Sunday and other fields to explore. But Saturdays were the days I went to the butcher shop and saw all the blood and gore, heard the incessant wailing of saws and mince machines and watched the cleaver thud into lifeless meat.

There were always flies in the butchery, buzzing the samples hanging on the steel hooks, settling on scraps lying in the sawdust and irritating the customers. The flies did not matter really because the meat was always washed before being put into the pot. I know. I watched my sister balance precariously on a bench with her hands in a yellow enamel basin washing the main ingredient of the family dinner.

I wondered why we bothered to wash it though, because the books I saw later on in junior school showed pictures of people called cavemen, without a fire, in a cave, eating the stuff raw. Why there were no more cave people also fascinated me, but the teacher always told me not to ask impossible questions. She said the cavemen died out as a result of the ice age; of the cold and wars and animals and the cavemen themselves.

Yet they always seemed so terrifying, covered in animal skins with their bare feet and long hair covering the craggy faces they all seemed to have, hunting long-toothed tigers or elephants in the jungle, but the jungle paths were safe for they did not have mines in them then and the waterholes, like robots at the junctions of the earth's highways, had no gunboats at anchor, waiting for

the thud of bombs from aeroplanes to die away before setting out to search and destroy. The trees had leaves on and napalm did not burn the backs of their children.

The war had not begun, only the ice and the fire were there; retreat before the ice, comfort before the fire as it spread its glow through the caveman taking his woman in the flowing shadows. Brutal men in a world just forming — men in the process of becoming, eating their meat raw — lurked in the pages of library books and in the imagination, relegated to the back seat because others were fighting and dying, while the sand highways leading down the street remained unthreatened, forgotten in the rustle of paper entombing the flesh of a cow before it had nuzzled calves.

The butcher shop was whitewashed once, a long time ago, but the man behind the counter, Mr Singh, seemed not to notice the need.

The fan high above our heads had capitulated, allowing the flies to rule unchecked. The flies were always there in the butcher shop on the street. The flies and the heat.

Perpetual.

They seemed an integral part of Saturdays; of life, like the highways I built each day.

The shopping expeditions were lengthy, for although we did not stay far away from the centre of this drab exciting universe, mamma would stop to greet old friends and talk, make plans and smile pleasantries, while I would hang onto her hand and watch the people at the bus stop climbing into taxis or arriving to queue silently for the journey into town. The queues always looked like a patchwork of ribbon colours.

Young, old, all stood together for the bus: kids, their faces scrubbed clean, shiny with too much vaseline, clutching their mother's arms, in their best trousers and shoes. Teenagers acted tough and mean, waiting to go to the concrete playground without swings for an enactment of dreams pouring from their eyes as they stared hungrily at the shoes models wore in the shop windows. The girls with their skirts or pants had their hair slick with hair straightener applied the night before preparing for the morning's ritual; acted coyly tough, conscious of the open stares of the boys and the disdain in the eyes of the older people.

Hunger was naked, deep, generating the fantasy of heat.

A fire without smoke, burning, within the eyes . . .

Queues, splashes of colour on the noisy canvas of grey smoke drifting from a thousand and one chimneys; queues in the sunlight blending in with the everyday vision, coiled — to spring if the tempo of noise changed, watching like a sentinel, waiting with pain.

Town was a special place to all of us,



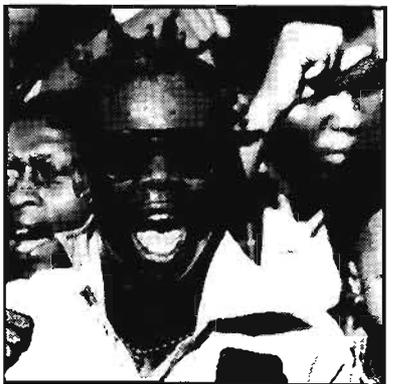
Jimi Matthews



Jimi Matthews



Robert Magwaza



Ralph Ndawo

JOHANNESBURG

like an outing.

The bus shelter was of corrugated iron. A simple arrangement designed to act as a temporary waiting room for faceless people. It had advertisements on the inside to brighten up the interior. Smiling black faces staring out into space advertising Timex watches for life-long pleasure, not mentioning that watches were fair game for the outlaws marauding the owners like latter day huns. Exhortations to drink the 'true beer', not saying that a wino had died in the gutter during the night from too much true beer and too little food, or that at home my father beat my mother up every Friday night from watching his money disappear into Ous Susie's pocket and friendships form around Bols brandy.

Somebody, now forgotten, had pasted a notice for a dance on the back of one shelter. The original print had faded, covered with the dirt of oily hands and the remnants of a forgotten night's vomit.

Graffiti covered the side walls, both inside and out, and the rubbish, old sweet packets, coke cans exhorting people to keep the country clean in small print at the base, chip packets and cigarette boxes lay all around so that the bus shelter looked like a swamp house on stilts in a carpet of garbage.

The taxi drivers parked their cars behind the shelter waiting for those who could afford the prices to town or those who wished to fulfil a dream of having cash to spend after a week in a rickety bus on bone-jarring trips to work, or on a train like a man hemmed in.

Here they sat watching for the customers who sat four at the back and three up front on the journey into eGoli, drawn there like unwilling lovers to a demanding mistress.

Strange men, the taxi drivers, for they were part of the élite of the township. They knew the score, heard the street noises, were the telegraph wires on which the messages hummed. Apart and yet a part of the people, they were unmolested by the outlaws, for if one of their kind was hurt by the pain letting, the lashing out of bottled up hate, they would act, and street justice was without mercy, an eye for an eye, never mind the blood, kick the shit out of the bastard. So they were left alone to ply their trade.

I became friendly with one who often came to our house with my father, bringing him home from his skirmishes, and sitting in the kitchen with my mamma, over a cup of tea. He was a tall man with a gleaming, cleanshaven head, atop which an Ayers & Smith cap was always precariously perched. His face was open without being soft, an indication of the man. Although he laughed and smiled he was not easily misled by the various stories he heard daily, and he had an easy-hearted generosity.

'How did it go today my son?'

The question would inevitably spark

off a conversation which he would begin in a noncommittal way and end with a bitter denunciation of life in general and the township in particular. His hands would rest quietly on the table and his lips, in between sips of tea, would move with increasing agitation as his diatribe became more and more heated. Spittle would form at the corner of his mouth and his eyes would flicker from his cup to mamma's face.

Interspersed with the monologue would be occasional grunts from my father as his dreams galloped through the alcohol haze and gentle admonitions from my mother to be calm and not to worry.

But worry he did. He worried about his car which was the vehicle of his livelihood, and about his wife. He had been married for five years and his wife never recovered fully after the birth of their first son. At times she became so ill that mamma cooked for her — that was before she died.

'You should not work so hard.'

'Ag mamma, what can a man do?'

'True my son . . .'

'Mamma, each time I rest I die a bit, there is no time.'

And there was no time for him, no time at all. It had passed like a childhood that was not really there; for there was no time to enjoy the sunshine, the rain clouds gathered while the horizon darkened the roofs stretching into the distance, a sea of parched corrugated iron with masts flying pendants of dissipating smoke.

The taxi driver would take his leave after the tea, declining another cup, for the time lost would mean money lost — in the harsh logic he applied to his existence.

Mamma would lock the door and blow out the lamps before settling down beside the man I supposed she loved on the rickety bed in which my sister was created.

Then the silence and the birth of Sunday.

We always wore the best clothes to church which was in a side alley near our house. A sturdy building, with no holes in the roof, which echoed with the sound of voices lifted up in praise to the Creator. People shuffled forward to receive communion, dropping cents into collection plates and the priest trying to bring some life into the crucifixion. Seeing faces uplifted in the half-light of the church, the voices reaching out to clutch some limb that anchored them to their faith. Often a lingering high note solo would emerge from the harmony of voices, rushing upward, outward as the congregation was on their knees, praying, asking, always hoping, the lilting voice with belief etched into every line, the tilt of their faces showing the memory of rotten meat, bad vegetables, the kicks their drunken husbands gave them, the hate their children felt whenever the pain of birth became unbearable. The organ would rise with the aged

voice singing 'Abide with me, fast falls the eventide', there was no time to avoid the flood of life escaping from a punctured lung on a Friday night.

It was there — the faith to bail sons out of jail and bury aborted daughters with hands that wept gently while sweeping graves.

These outings were short for the service was only an hour long. My father was never at the service as he had long lost his faith in God, but we were press-ganged into going.

These expeditions too did not go unrewarded. Normally friends of my parents would press cent pieces into our sweaty palms, but we were careful not to show mamma the money because she would hit our bums black and blue for accepting what to her was charity. Besides the fiscal gain Sundays were important for another reason: Lunch.

Lunch was the social event in our family. It was probably the only meal where we all sat down as a family to eat whatever mamma had prepared.

Some Sundays it was chicken, other days it was just meat. The chicken Sundays were happy Sundays. Pappa would smile, not ashamed by the fact that he had drunk too much. He would play with us, punching me in the ribs and gently tickling my sister on her stomach. Mamma would take the best plates out of the kitchen dresser and set the table with pride, dishing the food into bowls before putting it onto the table. I was not allowed to dish for myself, so pappa dished for me. Those were the days my plate was piled with rice and other goodies. Pappa would laugh a lot then, rubbing his hands together as mamma set his plate down in front of him, his face lighting up.

We were all glad, because we never saw much of my father who, although he drank a lot, worked hard during the week, long gone when we awoke. So Sunday lunch was when I was with my dad.

He was tall and rather thin, with a pleasant if not handsome face. Along the left side of his jaw there was an oddly wrinkled patch of skin. It was always smooth, lifeless, not like the rest of his jaw which was ticklish with the stubble of his beard.

The patch was where he had burnt himself on ous Susie's open fire smouldering in the early hours of the morning. The taxi driver had brought him home on that occasion too. The pain, I remember, caused my father to wail throughout the night, while mamma bathed the wound and applied an ointment. He had steadfastly refused to go to the local hospital, calling it a butcher shop. Too many people he knew had died there. The odour of burnt flesh hung heavily over the house and my mother's silent weeping pervaded our lives, a metronome for our unuttered sorrow.

I watched his mouth move, eating slowly, dishing the salad from the bowl

and occasionally smiling at my mother and telling us to eat all our food.

Later the Sunday meals reminded us all of my mother's absence, but we never spoke about her in front of my father.

'The dead are dead,' he said, and all the weeping we did was behind the locked doors of our souls in the darkness of our rooms.

After Sunday lunch my father would sit on the stoep without its awning and watch the world go by while I helped pack away the dishes, careful not to chip the treasures mamma so lovingly dried.

The washing up complete my mother would lie down on the bed in the dining room beneath the cheap porcelain plaque with the inscription that told me home sweet home.

That was the sum total of their lives. They were happy with longings they knew would never be fulfilled – yet had the courage to dream. The ashbrick cave was home and the cavemen washed their meat now, while their children played bare-assed in the sand where the jungle once stood; the memories of trees forgotten.

The perimeter of their lives bristled with barb wire to protect the shell of happy laughter that echoed: tomorrow will have a better dawn. There was fire too in the cave but the ice was still creeping slowly forward as the skies greyed and the sun grew tired in a strategic hamlet too wide to patrol as the cold harried and hounded the last defiant rays into the sanctuary of night where the flickering lamps were the last vestiges of a tattered retreat.

Night was not their enemy; life – when the longings barboured in the sheltered inlets of their tears would fly into the heart, dying as the wail of another police van swept the cobwebs away from the fear, leaving them to bury the remains of the childhood they wanted but never had – that was their enemy.

They never spoke about the need or sang their sorrows to themselves: they merely shelved hopes, allowing them to collect dust on the bench of their memories. They were proud in their own world, one which battered them without ceasing. Too many tiled floors in another woman's kitchen. Too many years riding the same lift up and down like a daily yo-yo, the rising sun trapped in the automatic whine of a machine straining upwards; a glass fronted lift with flickering digits marking floor levels to remind you of the freedom with which you cannot fly.

The first echoes of the shots whining into the air, steel hitting flesh, the coming of the mechanical ice age, matched the wail of my birth.

Ushered into the world from the floating void of my mother's womb when the campaign for manhood was in its reluctant birth throes of death. Passes were being burnt and men were being

jailed for being men, and I was born on the same rickety bed my mother had in her ashbrick bedroom with faded photographs of her wedding day and her parents decorating the wall. Treasured umbilical cord links with the past. A constant reminder of another life.

My father and the neighbour's wife delivered me, for the doctor took a long time to arrive, into the world where constant drumming of rain on the fragile tin roof was a reminder of the water gushing out before my arrival.

Besides the banshee wail there was nothing that notified the world of my existence. It was washed away in the remnants of afterbirth and all that sustained me was the continuous sucking of my mother's breast.

She was working as a domestic servant then, scrubbing floors and serving dinner five nights out of a seven day week. Her employers allowed her to stay away for two weeks. Thereafter I was carted across downtown at five a.m., a gurgling infant drowning in the perpetual rattle of the buses.

My parents lavished attention and love, seeing that I was baptised as an insurance policy for the pitfalls of the hereafter and registered in accordance with the law, to carry my slave number with me into the tin shanty labour depot called home.

My mother never really complained about her life. It was a duty as a mother and a parent to rear her children to the best of her ability. So she worked in the kitchen with her gnarled hands that sang unuttered lullabys to me while washing the pots in a shiny kitchen sink. She was allowed to take the food in the pot after her masters had eaten. So we ate well. The faceless voiceless people she served faithfully gave her some old baby clothes for me to wear. I was always warm.

With her thrift and the gifts of food and clothes I survived the death trap of birth and early childhood.

We all did.

Survived when the rain clattered out of the sky washing the streets and the arid garden wasteland encapsulated by the sagging fence. The roof leaked then and the constant dripping of the water into pots was like the ticking of a clock worn out by time.

Survived when the sand blew across the minedumps in the autumn and no leaves fell from the trees or turned golden brown in the rigor mortis of dead sunlight.

Survived in the plastic bags mamma wrapped around me to keep me dry. Her garments, torn in some places where the material had given up, clung to her body like tendrils to the framework of her warmth.

And when my father spent the money on booze we survived on credit; living on the instalment plan that cheated me out of a packet of sweets, and left me holding a broken biscuit.

Often the hunger shrivelled all our bellies in the small hours when the night

was quiet and the trains did not run. It must have hurt my parents even more, for mamma would not eat until we had all eaten; then she would sit down at the scarred table and eat what there was off the plates, and drink from the chipped cups or my father's enamel mug in the flickering light of the oil lamp painting shadows onto the walls that only she could read.

My father was usually in the bedroom then, unable to see the depths of the sorrowed joy she celebrated in her life. The bed springs would creak and groan as he climbed in and soon his snoring would be the only sound punctuating the cups jiving on soap sudded waves in an ocean surrounded by enamel shores.

Sometimes she would sing in the semi-darkness, with the intermittent sound of her feet shuffling on the floor covered with linoleum, the holes unnoticed in the reverie, her voice soft, low yet reaching high, back into the young shelves her hands plucked at, whirling through the time of her eyes as visions conducted them through her days. Above the hunger pain she would sing, throwing the water out into the yard and blowing out the lamp as she locked the back door, shutting out the remnant of sometimes as her docketed head disappeared into the bedroom.

When my father was awake, at these moments he too would sit in the kitchen sipping tea from the big mug he had and when my mother began singing he would hum slowly in his deep bass, harmonizing until she had completed her chores. We would lock the door then and blow out the lamps, leaving the dishes to dry in the basin standing on the table.

This was what my mother's singing was like: camel tracks in the sand, across the emptiness to an oasis dry beneath the fronds of a steel date palm with smoke blossoms which made love in doorways in which the last smouldering of a fire were being rekindled.

After a while I remember that mamma received a pram from the woman she worked for. A pram with big shiny wheels. It was not new, but she pushed me around in that thing until I learnt how to walk and then my sister was born and she was wheeled around in it. We had the pram for a long time before the taximan's wife had a baby and mamma gave it to them to use.

I was about three years old when the world stopped its whirl of colours and sounds. I was then promoted to the bed in the front room at night, alone; cringing at times against the wall, I waited for my parents to come and chase the devils away, but they never did.

The images began to form slowly, like the cautious croak of frogs as the twilight fell over the vlei or the hesitant knocking on our door when the neighbour's child came to borrow a cup of sugar.

Disjointed, like my first steps, the

world began to take on its shape.

The lavatory stood in the back yard near a tap which was like a lone stalk in a swamp. The washing either flapped lazily in the wind or hung limply in the afternoon heat. At first the view was limited by the top of the split level kitchen door and I would stand gazing out at the fence separating our house from the people at the back. Their house looked just like ours, but it was the yard that fascinated me.

Watching the shadows across it when I came home with mamma: after perching on her lap during the busride or riding piggy back through the town streets past the shop windows and the robots where crowds waited to stream across at the change of the light, threading past hawkers and policemen with men sitting chained to each other on the pavement, their eyes downcast.

These piggy back excursions to the bus stop suddenly brought the swirling images again, the cloak of colours and sounds on the city's frame; the whirling movement of its body and the people streaming in all directions like perspiration flicked off the brow of a ditch digger resting on his spade at the side of the road watching the dotted white line disappear beyond his view.

There were too many people and buildings to take in at a glance. There was no time to stop, to look, to inspect the mechanics of the place simply called town, with the result that it remained for a long time like some of the books in the library I later encountered at school. I did not understand the sound and sense of the words, so I looked at the pictures, building collages of what the explanations were from the experiences my eyes saw: a series of blurred flashes through the grime-covered rattling window of a bus taking us home.

As we travelled the pace changed in the bus. The initial gay mood; people greeting, talking, smoking, listening to the drunk on the back seat, the warm blanket of faces as I peered over mamma's shoulder; the dream-like scenario which disappeared as the first crazily tilted chimneys came into view with the bus snorting and wheezing as it thundered into its familiar hunting ground.

Flashes became series of pictures coming alive, but still incomprehensible beyond the narrow confines of our street.

As I grew older mamma left me with the neighbours who had a teenage daughter looking after her baby. This was the time of halfbrick buses and the longing for the sunshine, left to play in the sand, content to look at the cars and people going about picking up the continuously snapped thread of their lives.

The jagged edges of youth had begun to distil in brewing cans of backyard shebeens, as yet unseen, and the longings had begun to ache like the tedious waiting of the dried-out mudflats fanned by the encroaching wind for the first rains.

My parents decided, in their infinite wisdom, that what I needed to stop me from exploring with fascination the dirtbin of our yard, or running into the street with snot pouring down my upper lip, was education.

That would prevent me from building dams, with the newspaper and potato peels from the bin quarry, in the middle of the dripping river from the tap mouth source.

I was enrolled at the beginning of the first term. A brand new me that had been reserved for Sundays. Smart and shiny I clung to mamma's hand as the process of my registration was completed. I was now in the strange world of school beginners: I had left the temporary playground of streets to enter the fenced-off world where children chanted their knowledge with the sing-song cadence of gramophone records slightly warped from over-use and too much sunlight.

Some of the windows in my class were broken and there were a few holes in the fence through which the peanut vendors would trade, thrusting packets of baked nuts into our hands while extolling the virtues of their own particular brand. They were eased out of business by the Indian lady who later sold samoosas to us a cent a time.

The toilets were clean at the beginning of each day, but looked as if an elephant had had a bath in the cracked handbasin by the end of the first break. Later we went to toilet under supervision, excreting by time-table. Like everything else in the school the toilet was whitewashed: palm imprints spoke of the last gulp of water as the bell rang summoning us to classes with hard benches and the cane, dangling at the edge of the blackboard.

Our grade one teacher was a lady. We called her madam; standing up each morning as she entered the class after assembly we chanted: 'Good morning, Madam', then lapsed into silence.

'Good morning, class.'

We would then sit down, waiting for the beginning of the most exciting journey in our lives; the writing of our names, the great mystery of the alphabet. Our voices would chant loudly as the teacher flashed a series of cards at us while traffic went by, past the windows obscured by the hedge.

The teacher taught well, never doubting herself and giving the overall impression of knowing. But we were young and she had already seen the naked children running down village lanes as high explosives incinerated their lives.

She had seen the whips of the horsemen as slaves were driven off three tier holds onto the docks in chains, working wine farms in exile from the promised land. She had seen.

She had cried and bled and died and taught us how to live and cry and bleed and die as we laboriously read the story about the dog called Rover and the little

red ball he so playfully mauled in the comfort of his yard. So we learnt to write and read, entering the eye of the hurricane.

Time had overtaken us.

The daylight had lost its freedom.

Winter was agony in that class. The wind came through the broken panes, whipping us in our jerseys and short pants. The teacher used the coal stove and we all huddled around it in a circle as she read to us from the bible in our daily divinity lesson. We all paid attention to the reading because the cold was forgotten as she read, the faith in her voice giving her warmth and courage. She had seen the crucifixion.

We also paid attention because she questioned us at the end of the reading and if we could not answer we were kept in. She rarely beat us, and no one wanted to stay in the old classroom with the flickering globe when at home there was the warmth of the kitchen lighting the back of the cave, its primeval semi-darkness, as the slanting rain crowded out the day.

Trees bare, gaunt, burnt, stood in the playground, lonely, constantly bending as the wind drove them and the rain burrowed around their roots clutching feebly at the ground. Papers, sad and miserable on the muddy ground washed away leaving the dirtbins stolid captives, in their wet gleaming shine.

The winter had come early that year.

Summer had gone and autumn had passed unnoticed. Now grey clouds accumulated in the sky — driving the dawn away — high like citadels without soldiers, stretching across the veld of flat-roofed zinc shanties, across the open spaces decorated with the hulks of cars and burning abandoned tyres keeping hoboes warm at night.

I was not aware of the departed light, nor did I cry for it; rising earlier with more things to do had overwhelmed the need to play in the streets. I had to get to school on time. There was the morning wash and the emptying of bedpans into the bucket toilet, in turn emptied daily by the bucket brigade. The exceptions were weekends when the toilet stank to high heaven.

We loved taunting the 'buckets', as they were called, when they ran down the street in their shit-encrusted overalls, kicking the dogs out of the way to be in time for the truck crawling down the street, or they would have to carry their burden right down to the next one to empty the contents. They were always running, chanting a rhythmical

'That was how we met, running like hell across the veld with one of the drunks tearing after us . . .'

song we did not understand, hanging onto the truck to gain a brief respite before entering another toilet in another yard.

One day one of the bucket brigade ran out of our neighbour's yard covered in human waste, the dog barking frantically at this spectacle while a gang of boys laughed hysterically at their prank. They had been waiting for the man as he entered the toilet, then threw packets of faeces at him. He was covered in it, running into the gate before escaping into the street to face further ridicule. There was no place for him to wash so he went about his day in the film of excreta; humping buckets to the tune of the laughter ringing in his ears.

For days afterwards the buckets next door were not collected as the van crawled past and the toilet overflowed while the gang responsible urinated against the side wall. In the end the people had to dig a hole in the yard to bury their effluence. A month later one of the kids was found dead in the sloop running into the vlei. He had been suffocated in a plastic bag filled with waste . . .

Crossing the veld to get to school I always ran. The drunks huddling in their tattered clothes, shivering in the cold, their fire extinguished by the rain, were desperate for their morning pick-me-up so they often beat school kids, taking away their lunch and money. So I ran. I needed my lunch to swop with at school during break and the money I was given went into the Indian lady's sari while her samoosas popped into my mouth.

So I ran, my legs pumping, across the grass. White condensed puffs of breath like the beads of a stringless rosary dissipated into the air, my life flowing from my open mouth as my lips suppressed a scream of terror germinating in my lungs.

Threading through the puddles of water like an eel threshing through lakes, its eyes darting, I ran. They did not bother to chase you too far but if they had caught you before the methylated spirits overwhelmed them you would be brutally kicked and beaten; and besides, the school clothes I wore were the only ones I had, and mamma pregnant with my sister at this time stressed that she could not buy any more clothes.

She had bought the shoes and socks and the smart green blazer that doubled up as a jacket for Sunday church and the occasional visits to friends; but the grey pants and two white shirts she received from her employer. They were new, not second-hand like the baby clothes, and mamma made me utter my undying gratitude by forcing me to write a note painstakingly in coloured chalk to the lady, when I would rather have been outside playing the last round of kenneki, hitting the stick high into the air, watching it arch and land in the mud of the street becoming, as the evening fell, exhausted.

I hated the rain: I loved the rain.

I loved the rain as it fell onto the flat

toilet roof, taking away the smell, leaving the earth fresh and clean as the red mud of seasonal menstruation flowed down into the potholes and gutters flooding the heart of the storm water drain; I loved the rain as it gave the rainbow colours. I wanted to climb the rainbow to look for the pot of gold my teacher told us of.

I hated the rain as it dripped through our roof into the pots and basins, dripping, dripping, dripping.

I hated the cold as it pranced around me, moving closer to the smoky coal stove in the centre of the classroom with its broken window panes, the water sluicing downwards outside and the teacher reading her bible, her faith like specked dust floating in the womb of a sunray poking through the rain as the rainbow collapsed with the weight of the raindrops riding its back. Cold crept through a hole in her shoe, up into her toes, petrifying the bones of her legs and arms, penetrated her voice, arched into the cave walls of our minds – while the sun collapsed into night's arms as summer died, and winter was pasted onto our brick classroom walls.

Silhouetted against the terrifying expanse of the blackboard like a fresco on the face of a Kalahari dune as it shifted, images of childhood regrouped defensively, and we saw the winter through into the summer of the next year.

But the light was painful, the night had overtaken our advance columns to mine the paddies of muddy water we once played in and the jungle had no leaves on the trees any more.

I met Lennie in my second grade. Taller than me in his short pants with the patched behind and stronger than me in his white shirt with a frayed collar, he sat next to me in class.

I caught him after school one day, peeping, through the broken window, at our teacher's legs. He did that quite often, explaining to me how much he knew about our teacher's legs, as we walked home. He knew more than what I did. He told me so.

His legs however were thin and skinny, but when it came to running, he could run like hell. In fact that was how we met, running like hell across the veld with one of the drunks tearing after us, screaming in a maniacal, thin, reedy voice, the sound wafting into the echo of our thumping feet.

As I ran I glanced at Len. He held two beer quart bottles close to his chest and his case bumped against his thigh. Now I knew the reason for the drunk's nger. The two bottles represented ten cents at the chinaman who sold them back to the bottle store for ten cents each. The drunk had probably salvaged them from somebody's dustbin and the money was for the drunk's bottle of meths. Lennie had stolen them to buy samoosas.

By midday the drunk would be rolling in the grass as the blue flame monkey

on his back climbed into his mind, into all the muscles of his body; his piss would run down the threads of his torn trousers to pool at his feet; the cracks in his heels would wallow in the mud he made as the darkness of day shut out all thought.

We bought a dozen samoosas that day, munching happily, savouring the taste of hot curry in our mouths. With our backs to the fence, we sat on the raw earth. The crunch as our teeth bit into the samoosas, the sound of haggling, of hurried excursions after goens for the game of hopscotch before the bell rang . . .

After the first taut agreement, Lennie and I became firm friends, collecting bottles after school for movie fare on Saturdays, for I was allowed to go out now, to go beyond our street. The buses were no longer in dangerous country.

The township became our playground: the grid of tarred ribbon main streets and potholed side streets foaling murky side alleys, where the gambling schools flourished and tears were shed as the bones rolled.

Saturdays were no longer expeditions to the chinaman, but excursions to the movies, Lennie hustling for money for peanuts and ice-cream. We sat on tomato boxes in the front row, cheering the gladiators as their swords rang, and weeping when the clean-scrubbed cowboy got shot in the arse by Apaches who melted into the rock as their arrows whistled through the air. The usher would hit a couple of us when the noise became unbearable, but usually no one complained. In the hushed silence the strained faces peered up to the screen, hands pitched halfway between the crisp packet and gaping, munching mouths.

The glimpses had integrated into a whole; the smoke in the auditorium swirled about the puckered faces, bare nerve ends jangling as the suspense built to a climax and a collective sigh of relief flooded the mouths of the audience; the end came.

It was always a let-down to come out into the open air with dusk settling and lights flickering into life, the cavern of the auditorium empty, the images on the silk wall erased by the swish of the curtain.

The cinema expelled us to enact our dreams with wire machine guns and stick swords, miming around the pavement stage as we walked home. The newly installed anti-crime lights came on at about six thirty and the whole township was bathed in an ethereal glow. They were atop tall pylons, a cluster of yellow-coloured searchlights too high to be extinguished by a stone or brick, as most conventional streetlights were. They made it easier for the cops to spot groups of guys hanging about after the unofficial curfews which were in force over the weekend.

The streets were always full towards dusk. Hucksters going to a nightclub or

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a shebeen, or walking their girlfriends home, children buzzing between home and the shops and movies and home, people calling out to each other, vibrantly living in the moment.

Many homes had their battery-operated phonograms on, with Ella singing love songs/laments/wails as the Sunday chores were being done, or parents sat and relaxed on the stoep or front doorstep. Sometimes the Zionists would march down the street with their khaki uniforms and the white, tyre-soled boots they wore, singing without accompaniment, the deep voices setting the rhythm

and the solo singer sailing high before the crash of feet signalled the harmonizing. It was beautiful watching them walk down the streets, just singing, taking no notice of the rag-tag army of children running alongside and behind them. Sometimes people would send their children after them with some food or money but that was a long time ago.

I remember the corner waiters crooning, working hard to get the right number of 'ooh wahs' together with the heavy bass part; looking sharp in their highly boned shoes and well cut slacks,

working all week for their moment of glory on the corner as all the sound filtered from their voices when the glowing end of a weed pipe built their huts before the monsoon swept away the village of their lives.

The fah-fee runner would be out and the jungle drums would thud the numbers for the evening draw. Some would win, some lose, but they would all play tomorrow again, asking the inevitable question:

'What did the chinaman pull?'

Their lives, mine included, revolved around a lucky number.

POEMS / Lionel Abrahams, Patrick Cullinan

THE RELATIONSHIP

What joins us may be blood
but not our forbears, features, names,
nor mutual love, a common faith,
any sibling resemblance
in our contrast lives.
Fixed at a see-saw distance
we're bound, being counterweighed –
your fall or rise against
my rise or fall.
So we are brothers because –
because I am related to my shadow
and because as I breathe you exhale.
I am your brother as shape
is shaped by negative shape
and as whatever is taken
determines what is left.
What I have of you is what I am
yet makes you more yourself
and what I pay to ease your fatefulness
only confirms how each of us
is still the thing he is.
We two can't trade
for peace and freedom from this,
the curse of causing each other.
To be cured and rid of you
I must become yourself.
But how do I begin,
my brother?

Lionel Abrahams

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The winter gone in hate.
The summer.
Invisible in sunlight,
Tongues of flame
Crawl the street.

Maddening, the city swelters,
The suburbs deep in roses,
Jacarandas.
The hovels and high-rises steam,
Squat,
As old as ovens, bread,
As old
As smoke and ashes,
Sweat.

And somewhere in the city
You are waiting:
Your eyes are grey, they see

The smoke and ashes.
You madden in the heat.
I write of you.
I touch you in the city.

Dogs shamble in the yard,
Fly blatant at what passes.
This is rage.
So; falling back, sequestered,
They crouch among the flowers.

The stink of blossom. Wind,
Sour,
Comes breathing into lives.
Pours off.
It pours across the maps
And these are streets.

I touch you in my life, the city.

Giving and taking, nothing and glut,
It is older than itself.

Fattening, it squats upon itself
In flames that burn
Invisible in sunlight; streets
On fire where a child's hand,
Black, a fist is raised against the flowers,
Dog-nosed, the blatant
Glut and sweat.

I touch you in the heat.

Doors opening and closing.
Contracts, bread.
The jacarandas squat and flower.
The wasted petals, purple
On the street,
Explode and stink.
The wind is hot. An oven.

Giving and taking, all was here,
Here in the coming.
It was human. It was bread.
They crouch among the roses.

I touch my sweat. A concentration.
I live within the city in my love.
I touch you now:
The wind is in your eyes, the flame
That crawls the street,
The blossom.

The city is my life and you are in it.

Patrick Cullinan

ZULU POEMS / MPUMALANGA ARTS GROUP / Griffiths Thamsanqa Nxumalo, Derrick Mngadi, C. Ngcobo, Nomusa Cynthia Phungula, Mandlenkosi Martin Thusini, Maureen Mhlongo, Ernest Jabulani Mnyayiza, Nicholas Mkhize, Nkathazo Ka-Mnyayiza.

SITHANDWA NONHLABATHI

Wabuthisa umhlaba ngawe, Sithandwa,
Wadumisa ngenhlokomo ngawe, Sithandwa,
Wabonga wabusiseka ngawe, Sithandwa,
Waphila waphilisa ngempilo yakho, Sithandwa.

Ngimile ngimangele ekhalweni lenjabulo,
Kwawhaqabala isibhakabhaka sagcina ngokukhala,
Zawa ubuqathaqatha izinyenbezi waphuza uNonhlabathi
Wazimumatha eqhakazile ngokumamatheka;
Wagcina ngokuzikhwifa isinyenyela esaziwa nguye.

Ngesimanga esingandile kwakheka imvunulo
Yakwanokusho imvunulo yesimanga sohlaza,
Yagquma izinkalo nezimfunda
Yagqum'amagquma nezintaba;
Uyothi wabonani ngaphandle kobuhle
Bohlaza luvezelela luphululwa ngumoyana?
Kuze kuthatheke unwabu luguquguquke imibala.

Ngokwenama uhlaza luxoshisane lujubele uLanga,
Aluhleke usul'uLanga agcine ngokulupha impilo
Aluphe umbala nesizotha esiphic'abadwebi;
Ubonge uMthombothi uxhawulisane noMthombe,
Ubonge uGamthilini uxhawulisane noWatela,
Ikhophokhophoze ingongon'idedela ukudepha kobobe;
Yayinhle imvunulo yakho Sithandwa Nonhlabathi.

Ngisamile ngimangele okhalweni lwentokozo.
Imvunulo kaNonhlabathi yaqhwebaqhweba,
Izilwane zasendle zashaya esentwala
Zabonga zenama zatshakadula kwanjeya;
Kwandiza izimvemvan'ezimibalabala
Kwandiza izinyoni ezimibalabala zaqubula ingoma,
Zinanela isimanga semvunulo kaNonhlabathi.

Wavunula ntokazi ngohlaza, saphila isintu,
Wavunula ntokazi ngommbila, saphila isintu,
Wahloba ngemithi sakhosela saphepha isintu,
Wahloba ngamahlathi kwababaza imifula ngemvunge,
Ishaqekile ngesimanga sokuhlaba okungandile.

Sithandwa, mathe omphefumulo wami, ngikubonge ngani?
Sithandwa, ntandose, olwami nawe olwasemafini
Ngokuphephisa imvunulo yakho ngokuzidel'amathambo
Ezichwensini zezinswelaboya eziyidovadova,
Ziyiklebhu ngolunya kuze kububule uMthombothi.

Ume njalo mvunulo kaNonhlabathi!
Uyichemba lempilo yabaphilayo,
Uwuthando lwempilo yabaphilayo,
Uyisimanga sokubusisa kweZulu,
Uyisimanga sokumamatheka komkhathi!

Griffiths Thamsanqa Nxumalo

KUNGANI NA NOLIZWE?

Mama wethu sonke
Thina sonke senganyelwe nguwe.
Izimpambuko zethu zaziwa nguwe.
Kungani ungasikhuzanga
Lapho siduka?
Kungani na NoLizwe?

Sibize usiqoqele ndawonye
Ngazwi linye.
Njengomama wethu sonke
Sozwa wena.
Akuyokubakhona ukuzwayana
Ngoba singabantwana bakho sonke NoLizwe.

Masincele sonke ngambele munye.
Kungebe njalo na NoLizwe?
Kungani na NoLizwe?

Derrick Mngadi

HAMBA

Wangiyenga ngalutheka.
Ngasikhohlisa ngancqholo
Ngithi uyangithanda,
Kanti ungibhula ngesidwaba ngibhekile.

Yeka ngizikhohlisa ngethemba.
Sengizibona ngishibashibeka
Kwawakwenu amagceke,
Kanti lutho kakusenakwenzeka.

Hamba, hamba!
Hamb'ushone.

C. Ngcobo

XOLA

Sengiyayizwa iminjunju owayizwayo
Mhla ngikufulathela ngithi kalusalingani.
Ngenz'iphutha ngingazi
Ngilibele ngukuwulwa ngabangane.
Namuhla sengiyazisola ngoba lwalungaphelile.
Sengicel'uxole uphinde ungamukele.

Nomusa Cynthia Phungula

AFRIKA! AFRIKA!

Afrika! Afrika!
Lizwe lawokhokho!
Ububi bokwenziwa sebenze wafiphala.
Nobuhle bakho bembozwa ngesikhumba sengwenya.
Ubuwena baphenduka ize leze.

Afrika! Afrika!
Izinkedama zakho seziyakwesaba
Sengathi waqalekiswa ngokuthunjwa emazweni omhlaba.
Pho, Afrika ungeyizwe imithandazo yethu?
Siyalila, siyabalisa ngukulahlakelwa nguwe.

Afrika! Afrika!
Lizwe lawokhokho!
Letha ukwethaba emiphefumulweni yethu.
Letha ithemba lenkululeko ngomuso
Khona impilo yethu kusoba ngeyokwenama.

Mandlenkosi Martin Thusini

BAZALI BAMI

Kungaba liphuth'impela
Ukub'pkusenhliziyweni ngingakukhiphi;
Ngikugqibe ngaphansi okwesangcobe
Kanti kumnandi kuding'ukudliwa.
Sengithi mangisho kusemanje ngingakalibali.
Hleze ngithutheleke ngiye kwelencombo
Ngingasawubonganga owenu umsebenzi,
Enawenza nizikhandla 'ze ngibe nje.
Sengithi-ke bazali bami,
Ningadinwa nangomuso.

Ernest Jabulani Mnyayiza.

SINGUMHLOBISO

Njengezimbali ezithaliweyo
Nathi singumhlobiso
Kulesisivande esingumhlaba.

Njengezimbali ezikhulileyo
Siyakhanga, siyakhanga siykhanga
Kulesisivande esingumhlaba.

Njengezimbali ezindala
Siyokhiwa, siphuke sibune
Kulesisivande esingumhlaba.

Njengezimbali kulomhlaba
Ziyohluma ezinye naphakade
Kulesisivande esingumhlaba.

Maureen Mhlongo

UMVUZO WOKUNGALALELI

Kuthe lapho esebonile
Ukungcola nokungahloniphi
Komhlaba uMvelinqangi,
Wathumela kithi inceku yakhe uNowa.
Pho lokhu kasizwa,
Sanduluzo sahleka lapho esitshela
Ngembubhiso uJehova azoyenza.
Nebala wafika uzamcolo
Nesiphoph' esikhule saphephula konke.
Saqubuk' isililo sabheka phezulu
Sibangwa ngukungahloniphi iZwi loMdali.

Maureen Mhlongo

KAZI NA?

Dlozi lam' ukuphi
Sihlobo sam' ukuphi
Themba lam' ukuphi
Gugu lam' ukuphi?

Nkumbulo yam' ukuphi?
Kade wemuka
Wangishiya ngedwa
Kwamhlaba uyahlaba,
Kade wayangaphi?

Ungasavalelisanga wemuka
Ungasashongo nokuthi uzohamba
Sikwenzel' umphake wendlela,
Ingani yena wabikezela,
Kazi kodwa wayangaphi?

Gazi lam' ukuphi?
Selokhu wemuka
Awusathumeli nasigijimi
Sizobika ngohambo lwakho
Kaz'ukuphi na?

Selokhu wemuka
Ngisahleli kulo lolobici
Owangishiya kulo
Sengifuz' umadludlede,
Kazi wen' uphumule na?

Selonkhu wemuka
Umphefumulo wam' usosizini,
Inhliziyo yam' iyopha
Ngob' angikwazi laph' ukhona,
Kazi wenzenjani?

Ngicabanga ngingaqedi
Kodwa ngingakholwa
Ngob' uSomandla ukhona
Usithanda sonke,
Ithemba lami limi njalo.

Nokho sewuke wafika
Nakuba uza nomoy' olusizana
Uzocel' isiyembezo;
Kaz' usuphumule na
Kulolohambo lwakho?

Kodwa ungifikela kabi
Ngob' ufika ngesiwombe
Ngiyisigqila sakwabuthongo,
Ungab' usangixoxela lutho
Ngohambo lwakho olungaziwa.

Nokho-ke sengihlalel' ekwethembeni
Ukuthi sewuphumule sihlobo sami.
Sewufumen' umvuzo waphakade
Olungiselw' izimvu zesiBaya
SoMalusi woqobo.

Nicholas Mkhize.

UKUKHULA

Ngikhule kukuhle kumnandi kudelile
Usizi nezihlupheko ngingakwazi ndawo.
Nginabangane nginezihlobo kukuhle kudelile.
Isizungu nomzwangedwa ngingakwazi ndawo
Engikuthandayo ngikunikwa futhi ngikuthola njalo,
Kepha namuhla kakusenzalo.
Engikuphiweyo ngiyemuncwa njalo
Nengikukhalelayo kanginikwa ndawo.
Sekufanele ngibhukule ngisebenze njalo
Koze kufike lona usuku lokufa.

Nkathazo Ka-Mnyayiza

IZIFISO

Ngifisa ukubona ukuphuma kwekhwezi entathakusa,
Lintweza lidweba lehla ngesibhakabhaka.
Ngifisa ukubona ukuphuma kwelanga eMpumalanga,
Linyombuluka phansi emathunjini omhlaba.
Ngifisa ukubona nokuzwa ukugeleza kwamazi emadwaleni,
Ngifisa nokuzwa amazwi abantwana besikole behlabelela.
Ngifisa ukuzwa umculo oculwa zinyoni zamahlanze,
Ngifisa nokubona ukuhlukana kobusika nehlobo.
Ngifisa ukunyathela amazolo aphezu koshani ekuseni,
Ngifisa nokuhamba izinkalo ngizule ngiye kude.
Ngifisa ukumemeza ngezwi lentokozo kudume amawa,
Ngifisa nje ukuba njengabantu bonke;
Ngibone, ngizwe, ngihambe njengabo.

Nkathazo Ka-Mnyayiza

MADLOZI

Uma isizukulwane senu semuncwe amandla;
Salila izithantala zezinyembezi ezingenalusizo,
Nithule nithini? Nithi masife sindandele?

Nkathazo Ka-Mnyayiza



Danny Makhubele at the microphone during a workshop session of Kwanza Creative Society. On penny whistle is Nape a' Motana, Kwanza chairman, whose poems have appeared in Staffrider 1 and 3, and who has recently completed a play. This photo was taken by Risimati j'Mathonsi, secretary of Kwanza, whose poems appear below. Kwanza has held a number of readings in the Pretoria area and can be contacted at P.O. Box 41, Pretoria, 0001.

A HI NTSANDZA-VATIMI

I ntsako nkaha-va-nga-heti,
Nsansanho wa swipalapala ni byongo,
Ntlhambuko wa marhumbu ni mungo
Ku hada ndzalama yerhu ya ndzhaka.

A hi ntsandza-vatimi!

Hi swintlenwana swa nhlikanhi
Hi ntsetela vuxungu ka mintlango
Hi khirana hi mivango
Ku phyandlasa rixaka

A hi ntsandza-vatimi!

A hi hiseni mikhupula na timbyembye, ase!
A hi lahleni swifezani ni madevechi, ase!
A hi thunyeni makanja ni tidivadiva, ase!
A hi thyeni vajimu, vajoni, vajeke, ase!

A hi ntsandza-vatimi!

Ahanti ku namarhela dansi
Hi jaiva na Nwayingwani hi ba hansi
Ahanti disko swisuti khindlakhindla,
Hi tsanwa hi monya macucubanga ni ximvhate,

A hi ntsandza-vatimi!

Hi ta nyupela xinyamini endzopeni
Ya swigwenamatope mfungwe mhakweni
Ase, hi va swirhengele swa mintsendzele
Hi rukaniwa hi xutsendzele
Ase A hi ntsandza-vatimi.

Risimati j'Mathonsi

KHA MULINGWA (W.M.R.)

Dzichoho dza vhandalala thavhani
Ndevhe dza hweruluwa kathihi,
Ngoma- luvhai i tshi gekha thandani.
Pfumo-musevhe la tanza luthihi
Musi ni tshi namedzwa phele.

A ro ngo thuthuba mato
Aiwa, tshikona tsha xaxarisa mirumba,
A ro ngo vha khumbuloni sa Ndwayamato.
Tsiko-tshiphiri ya mwemwela kha muya na mitumba
Musi ni tshi namedzwa phele.

Matamba a thathaba, pha!
Vhusiku ha midza naledzi, kwiti!
Luvuvhu lwa tanza zwigwenamatope, oox!
Zwa zwiwa ngei Mangondi- Matongoni, mvee!
Phele ya la mutate ya ni tanza!

Vhakhada-phele khau, vha tshenuwa
Vha mbwandamela dindini la mbumbo
Ndevhe na mato zwa valea vha vhenywa
Vha kundwa u kanda dambuwoni la tsiko
Vho namela nga khani phele.

Mulingwa Sigwaubulimu, a Venda poet who wrote TSIKO-TSHIPHIRI (Van Schaik), was recently released from detention.

Risimati j'Mathonsi

BAYAJULA GROUP / KWA THEMA

Bayajula Group / POEMS / Zakhel'Amandla Mtsweni / Setsepe Sedibe / Meshack Mabogoane

Poems by Zakhel'Amandla Mtsweni and Setsepe Sedibe, and a story by Meshack Mabogoane appeared in Staffrider No. 2. Work by the artists of the Bayajula Group appeared in No. 2 and No. 3. Bayajula gave everyone an occasion to remember when they invited CYA and other P.E.N. members to a one-day mini-festival in Kwa Thema recently. A photograph of CYA in action on that day appears on p. 19.

... as if it would not end

Slept like a log yesternight.
The piercing cold
Penetrating the makeshift Alexandra tent.

Slept not to think of
'Then what' tomorrow
Little rest, no peace,
A jerk back to reality
At little Zakh'i's teething
Into the dangling nipple.

Slept and thought of him (my husband)
Coaxed down into City Deep Hostel
Cause : Alex has crumbled.
Section 10(1) of Act 25/1945
is implemented.

It's said he's single;
Yet,
I the wife,
This the child.

Zakhel'Amandla Mtsweni

ENDEAVOURS IN OBLIVION

The wishing well has dried:
Seeing no rain beyond the sky,
No water for us.

So long Mama:
I leave you in drought,
To feed on your sweat.

This departure knows no love.
Intimidated,
I conspire against your affection,
An action with no content.

So long fellowman:
You never suffered drought;
I failed to cultivate your identity.

Like fruit when over-ripe
I had to fall,
Like the donga when over-dry
I cracked.

I did it,
I did the talking
the planning
and doing,
But hush!
No one liked it a bit.

Zakhel'Amandla Mtsweni

EARTH'S CHILD

Cold and hungry,
Sitting dejectedly in front of the door
Seeking comfort
From the approaching darkness,
Where is your mum?
Said she would be back soon, did she not?
When that strange car picked her up.

Taking courage in front of their wedding portrait,
Thinking daddy will be home one of these days –
One whole month, he's been gone:
He has taken a new family
Where he is valued,
Where another lady cares for him;
He is called daddy and he is not coming back.

Ten years old,
Hardly able to look after yourself,
Taking on the great responsibility
Of facing the harsh realities of Life;
Stand tall and weather the blows,
Take it in your stride,
You never brought this on yourself.
Sorrow will make you despair:
Let courage be your friend.
Success will be yours:
Do not question Fate with tears.
If old people can laugh at their shattered lives
So can you – you are Earth's child too.

Setsepe Sedibe

BLACK MAGIC LADY

Black and attractive
Body beautifully proportioned,
Tantalizingly perfumed,
Exuding an aura of animal sensuality,
Casting love spells on young men like me,
Implanting strange ideas in older men:
Red hot mamma
I want you!

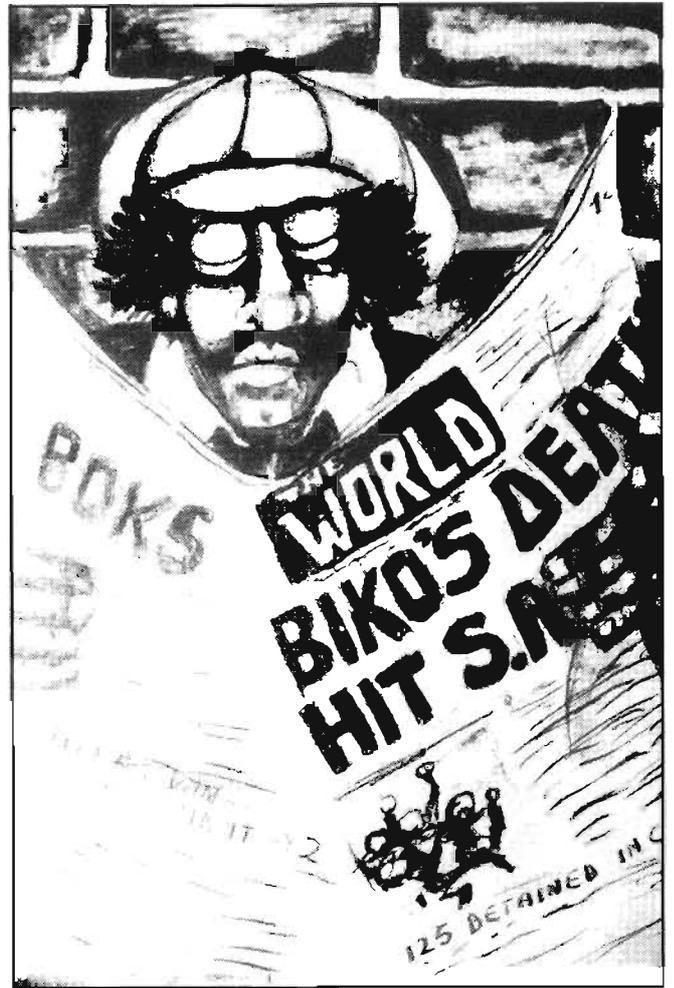
Psychedelic dimmed lights,
Erotic music in the background,
Exotic food we share
While I hold you close.

You turn me on
While turning yourself off
You laugh in my face
Relishing my agony of wanting you.
Like a worthless rag
You push me away –
Township femme fatale
Colder than a fish:
I hate you!

Setsepe Sedibe



Jeff Mabaso / *Untitled* / Bayajula Group



Oupa Montso / *Untitled* / Bayajula Group



Nhlanhla Xaba / *Just My Imagination* / Bayajula Group



Sam Nhlengethwa / *The Miners* / Bayajula Group

ODE TO BIRD

The Bird of Parker came down in flight
 Riding on horned notes that seemed to pierce
 Ears made pedestrian and now given a fright
 As they were stretched to receive so fierce
 A sound rolling from the soul of Parker
 To ring in a deeper truth about black life
 Strewn with years of neglect and made to despair
 Till the likes of Bird come in to add to the strife:
 For all to awaken from within and then be
 The witnesses of the strength in sound beauty.

Yeah Bird, you blow through so cool a mind
 That in our jive awareness we shake and spring
 Away in perplexity and become so unkind
 In tributes we shower at your outpouring:
 But you know Bird, it's such a dizzy treat
 That shows the message of genius is taken,
 That spells how amazed we are at the beat
 Bringing victory to those who have been beaten,
 That blows to lift us from our lowly drop
 As you did through the weapon of bop.

Meshack Mabogoane.

STAFFRIDER

Ah, *Staffrider*, you are 'a skelm of sorts',
 That's how one muse set you in print,
 There to be a harbinger of feelings and thoughts,
 A vehicle to convey riches from the scribes' mint.

But who are you to be so named
 And issue from this world so rough!
 That turns off oldies, makes you ill-famed
 As they see you danger ride? You are tough

I must admit, your feet nimble and crafty
 Dangling on vehicles moving with speeds like light,
 You dart on and off in a manner so jaunty
 It sends a chill – and yet, oh what a sight!

That muse has given you an honour
 In a deed that has artistry as intent
 Translating your dextrous touch and valour
 To works that give vision essential content.

In this your new-found platform,
 That has gained you goodly notice
 From those whose minds you must form
 And whose hearts fill with creative justice,

Continue: if you change an iota of human granite
 Into the soil that sprouts liberty's food
 You'll have more value than all the dynamite
 That blast rocks for the financier's good.

Meshack Mabogoane

KUYAQHASHWA

News spread like wildfire.
 Nobody didn't know about it.
 Every 'plural' was talking about it.
 At every street corner
 It was a sweet story to tell.
 Every 'idle Bantu' gave it a thought.

Seven o'clock struck together
 With us gathered at the gate.
 Unemployed Blacks of different sorts.
 Except who?
 The extremely privileged in everything.
 Everything's just easy for them.

They come per appointment,
 Unlike us at random.
 They enter at the glass doors
 And sit on cushion chairs, drinking tea.
 Why us outside the iron gates?
 Pitied are the poor pavements, old tins and
 Car bumpers.
 Our thick lips dry, cracked, tasteless.

People stood in groups.
 Everyone whooping plights.
 'One year unemployed'
 'Owing at Winna, Wanda, Ellis'
 'Wife expecting seventh child'
 'School fees, rent, long in arrear'

There came a Personnel Officer towards us.
 White shirt and compromising tie:
 It's job importance.
 Fancy 'mazawat' on:
 It's personal importance.

Proudly he called out:
 'One Bantu Male Standard Ten' –
 One Tsakanian responded, but rejected.
 Reason, 'Job for Springs Bantu only'.
 'One Bantu Female Press Operator' –
 One 'Bantu' female responded, but rejected.
 Reason, 'She's a factory trekker'.

Back the Personnel something went.
 Behind the bars the unemployed remained.
 Dejection, hatred, rejection, discrimination cloud
 Spread over us all
 The unemployed.

Khehla ka Maseko

'MY MOTHER'S KITCHEN . . .'

The kitchen where
 in the morning
 I sip soup –
 and munch lunch
 in the day,
 The kitchen where
 in the night
 I bathe
 or dine,
 Where I study –
 or lounge
 with friends,
 My mother's kitchen
 beneath whose
 tables I cradle
 dreams –
 And under whose
 chairs I kiss
 juicy lips:
 Or make love
 to pretty chicks . . .

Philo ka Masango
Kwa Thema

SONG FOR STEVE

(ignorance of this song is no excuse)

Your wisdom:
 When the froth of waves
 Sprays windward-turned faces,
 Washes down the ridges, hollows,
 Contours of our countenances,
 Races to shoulder ledges and
 Eddies in the sockets. The maze's
 Mysticism or confinement: then
 The being that trod the rainbow
 Sampling as he went, remaining dissatisfied,
 Unable to find his core until
 At the zenith he reversed the prison
 Beaming what was before life was

BLACKNESS

That gave light all it is –
 The yellows the browns the greens
 And the whites –
 The froth slips through the fissures,
 tumbles,
 tumbles,
 tumbles

Over the caverns of torsos,
 Floods the thickets. And,
 at
 the
 feet,
 ebbing away,
 The debris of our multi-hued ignorance.

ThamSANQA
Kwa Thema

WITH MUCH MORE KEENING

I often wonder how I would write
 Not in backward time or in the space age
 In this place. I only get engulfed
 In a rage that leaves me colder each time here.
 My sentiments those of a distant summer
 To a migratory bird, crippled by a frozen lagoon.
 Of the girl who weaves necklaces
 With beady eyes of dumb fate

Who, when she is wearied by her lovelorn labours
 Casts them all into the cardinal winds
 That one bead might smite her heart's desire
 For who knows, as of now, with much more keening
 The frost may yet thaw, as winters
 Have been known to migrate too.

ThamSANQA
Kwa Thema

WHOOPIING THE FACETS OF KNOWLEDGE

Who are you, solitary dumb voice
 so interminably hoarse like the
 grass wafting on pink-cheeked graves?
 Who are you, my dear comrade?

Who are you, barefooted 'mtwana
 demed the nipples of Africa's breast,
 cradled in the sunshine
 of an alien intellectualism?

Who are you, my ebony-eyed inamorata
 shading your sweet-breath into the
 scented airs of spurious civilisations?
 Beautiful lass, give me primal sanities.

Who are you, divinest brother of all,
 warbling echoes of the spirits,
 blending yourself with the clouds
 that perplex the want of my soul?

Who are you, sponging snail-politician
 asking for what you own and
 embargoing your brother's songs
 sung in the pain of wounded throats?

Who are you, mysterious brother
 eating and drinking brotherhood with me,
 a mouthspears that excretes information?
 Are you so cunning a chameleon?

Who are you, universal-famous humanity
 so like me, so like him, yet so snobbishly
 so inventively cosmetic, so blue
 in the colour of your veins, O humanity!

Jackie wa Seroke
Tembisa

HOW WAS I BORN?

(for *Mma's last born, Mapule*)

Was I born
a dearest object
of binding affection?
Or for a story and song
in an ill-harmonized and unmelodious land?
Or as a brother of Man
in the human family?
Or from my mother's womb
to a mute agony of despair
until I am entombed?
Maybe I was born
to live, and just be
me, myself.

Jackie wa Seroke

Tembisa

THE HORSE TALKS

Early in the morning
I'm inspanned:
the cart heavy-loaded
with coal.

Sunrise to sunset,
up and down
the roads I run.
Starvation and tiredness
decrease my speed:
then the whip on my back.

Sympathy, humanity
and dignity
I don't enjoy:
But brutality
and inferiority
these I've suffered.

No sweet lucerne:
what I get is beer waste
Whilst he, the master,
swallows everything.

In many years of
strenuous running,
I've achieved the leftovers
and he in turn acquired
the profit of the genuine.

Sanza wa Melaong

Tembisa

THE IGNORAMUS

I live in the world of fantasy
My world consists of the little that I see around me
I accept everything without question
I am satisfied with everything for I know nothing better
I am ignorant.

I am happy I am living
I don't worry about anything for I know nothing
My major needs are food and sleep
I accept everything without reason
I take what I get for I know not what I ought to get.

I feel fortunate
Swimming in the abysmal sea of ignorance
I can read and write
Yet I am ignorant
I worry not about inflation and politics
My prime concern is where to get my next meal.

However ignorant I may be
I know *Mandela* is on *Robben Island*
But I know not why
I know there is *power* in *Soweto*
For all I know it has something to do with schools.

Oh! My people, help me before it is too late
Emancipate me from the chains of ignorance
Feed me with the knowledge of truth
If I know truth, truth will liberate me
And *Azania* shall be freed indeed!

Tshilidzi Shonisani Ramovha

Tshimbupfe

BLACK SEPTEMBER IN PARYS

Staring at the morning sun
Thinking of the disaster that had befallen me
Everybody agreed, *He was an honourable man*.
Vampires had silenced him.
Everybody knew he stood for *Truth and justice*.

Brothers with tears pouring down their cheeks
Intended to pay him their last homage
Keening all the way to Kingwilliamstown
Orders were given *Ry terug Sibasa toe!*

'But we are only going to a funeral,' we said
Administrators have no time to argue with *Non-whites*
No freedom of movement for *Bantus*
Told by the honourable *Sersant Majoor Baas*
U-turn was the only way to avoid lead in the stomach.

Steve! Our brother
Bantu! Father of the people
Biko! Leader of the people
Thou should'st be living at this hour
Azania still needs thee.

We all agree you were on the right course
We swear a vow of alliance to your voice
Forsaking it will be a betrayal of *Azania*
In thy course *Azania* and its people
Shall be freed.
Power! to the people
Power! to the nation
One *Azania* one Nation.

Tshilidzi Shonisani Ramovha

Tshimbupfe

They call this place the Casbah nowadays. That's what my son-in-law's youngest brother, he is a teacher like you, tells me. I don't know why but they call it the Casbah. Fancy names these days. Whack, bam, whack — this bloody flies man from inside butcher shop. This low sill I'm sitting on cold in my arse, from the butcher's freeze maybe. Don't worry about my cap thumbi I tell you about it later. Now this Jailani tea-room next door. Long time I come here Warwick Avenue but many things change and since you ask my story I'll tell it to you.

We was living there by the College on the hill that side, Stella Hill. Father was clever man. He cut the mangoes from his yard and sometimes, other people yard, and load the cart. Me I sit by his side and we bring cart town market place. Sometimes father give me reins but the horse was strong than me. Pull this side that side. Me strong too. Only now me like this. Two week 'go, if that fella don't put me in trouble me look much young and strong too — there by the Lancers bar. I tell you later about it. Big trouble man for nothing. Don't tell my son-in-law's brother, that fella give money for the wone now then. Now by that place Stella Hill. Beautiful place man — everything green — this side that side. That side nice valley, nice river — two river, First River, Second River. Hill, valley — plenty vegetables, plenty mango plenty ocada pear. In the valley peas, monkey nut and mealies grow so nice. All the people got garden own house. Not many big big house like now but small wood iron then later round brick and stone and thing like that. But everybody happy. Afternoon and Sunday we all visit them. They visit us. Prayer time we all go Second River Temple. Lot white people come see our people pressing fire.

No noise that place. See this Casbah now so much noise. There no noise. Father had cow and goat and horse. Me go from market place cut grass for cow horse by the river side. Now that place different. They tooked everything away from us. When father die he saw to me, don't sell anybody. Must keep family name. They tooked it away. Don't ask who man, they. Me: no education. My son got him education, but they bluff him too; not only we but all that people; they tooked it away from all them people. Now if you go there, you see big big ground lot European house — nice nice road. Some still got lift but living Boosman and Native there. You small fella-man but you ask your father. Cator Manor, Manor Gardens, Mayville they tooked it away. We and all ours people using hoe till the soil. Now White man use big big machine push the soil and build house, school, college, football ground.

Whack! Bam! Whack! Nuisance this flies man. But I go closing time then this fella Cassim gove me anything he got. Sometime liver sometime tripe. I take my grand children Unit 3. My son not working, figures caught machine working place. Other fella him tooked his life by the mango tree, when they tooked it away from us. Bog fella put money here, there, everything go bandrup. Now he go Unit 3. Pack-pack by the house man. Full up. Full up. My great grandson's boy one fella he sleep by me passage way. Him kick fart all night. No good stomach children now day. When we was small father take big spoon Sunday morning. All day we running shit house.

Now you asking again. My son-in-law's brother — he tell me about this Act that Act. You know that Act. You ask me my wife story. Why you fellas-all only talking wife — wedding — wife — wedding. No work you got. Awright I tell you. This girl now my mothers brothers daughter from Cambel Koteri. She staying with us working White mans house ironing cloth. Now long time we going by riverside cutting barber grass for cow. One day I cut my hand sickle. She get worried tie the hand. She look me in the eye look too. That night I tell my mother she good girl. Next thing man two we go to Cambel Koteri they come our place. Two days three days wedding, that time. My fourth child him daughter too. No look like me at all. White. My mother she look me like that — my father him getting worried much — me feel someting wrong. My wife she coming late. Too much cloth she pressing she saying. One night she not coming home. My father and me tooked the torch and go by the Bartle road where she work. The torch show this white him pressing, my wife him pressing. Two two my father tooked her to father's house in Cambel Koteri. Nearly hit her father there. From that time we not visit them they not visit us. They tooked it white man's child. My father very strick.

This place now getting busy Casbah. Lot trouble this place. First trouble 1949. You baby that time. One Indian fella he hit small native boy some potato-trouble. You say African not native. You just like my son-in-law's brother...

Awright, African. Now all them Africans fighting with all the Indians. This side that side people running — guns, knives, stones. Fire this place. Fire that place. Soldiers. By our place too big trouble. That fella-Adam he got garage by the graveyard. Him got gun. Some people go by him. Other people on the hill go by Balram's house. Him got gun too. Trouble carrying on. The popice say too much for them. Then the navy come and they shoot the fellas down.

Then no more trouble. Many people died: my brother too. But this time different kind trouble in Casbah. You see the lady there. She stupid. Opening handbag for money. Jus now her handbag gone. The fella caught nother fella — the dog jump on him but that fella he poke the dog. Don't know what heppen dog. Last week one day three young fellas and one girl go inside lavatory by the Wills Road. Next thing one fella dead inside the others they ran away. you ask me silly questions. The popice they busy man. Lot work they got. They bring van catch all that people selling tomato and fruit by the bridge. Put inside like sardine. The other police they walk by the fence they and kick the boxes and baskets which the native — African selling meat and thing. The other police one fella walking by the bay side nice wind there and the nother fella he seeing what the Indian man doing in the ceiling in the white man's house in the Woodlands — only mussus at house that time. Thumbi come with me I go lavatory behind Jailani. Getting late and bad now. Can't piss in the bus. Shit everywhere, man you wait outside.

Filthy stinking stench, oily rag rotting, nauseating piss of old, nose-spitting, gullet wrenching rancid smell of rotting cabbage in warehouse, stomach squeezing, throat throbbing eerie din from whorehouse as 'thumbi' waited for his old friend in the Casbah.

What is this thing my son-in-law's brother telling about J.N. and Mayville coming back, man? You think the J.N.-fella and his friends can re-bring Mayville Cator Manor. I don't think. Now that man Monty — great man that — he failed. What this small fellars can do. They only talk talk. That place Red Square no more. Big garage building there now. We also stay all night pray by that Gale-place, near Umbilo. Action that time. No talk talk. Action. Men women everybody they took away Monty and many others that time. Which way you going thumbi? Awright thank you. Better man. You not far from Unit 3. Moberi Heights got good big houses — big shots live there. You teacher big shot too? The buses long queues this time evening. We go your motor car. Thank you Cassim. This tripe good for Saturday Sunday. My young friend take me home motor car. Thank you. Go carefully Ramadu. See you Friday.

Now you not forgetting I see. Well I was standing by the Lancers man. This young Indian fella he running fast he hold my hand and say just now. Gone inside bar. The police they come search me inside outside. The white policeman he smell my mouth he start coughing. The African policeman in his hand he got brown paper parcel — got thin green strings, small tiny green gold seeds.

DURBAN

Sergeant Moonsamy – I know him – smell my mouth. Beetle nut he says. The white man says runner. I no run I said. Am waiting son-in-law's brother. Inside, said the white man. Van. Bad place that other inside. Fleas bugs smell. Man sleeping man. The case come and the police say possession. Cassim come with lawyer and papers from this man that man. Good character me say magi-

strate. Discharge. Him use by tsotsi say magistrate.

Which way we going thumbi. Stop by the Umbilo bar. You got two bob? Have two small wines I sleep nice. That small-fella he farting kicking all night. Why you ask me about a cap! That cap present by Bobby Locke by the Country Club – me caddie – long time now – my son he keep safe for me – give me

present again by birthday last week.

You ask me too much questions. I know this. I know that. Well my son-in-law's brother he come Saturday – read papers, listen radio, take me Plice Pelicans for wine tell me this that. I listen nice he buys me another wine. Thank you thumbi. I be there by Casbah next Friday, same time.

4 DURBAN POETS / Douglas Livingstone / Peter Strauss / Ruth Keech / John Eppel

Douglas Livingstone's *'Giovanni Jacopo'* poems have signposted the way to the middle period of his poetic development. His new book, *The Anvil's Undertone*, was published by Ad. Donker. Peter Strauss's first book, *Photographs Of Bushmen (Bateleur)* is available from Ravan Press. Work by Ruth Keech (*No 1*) and John Eppel (*No 3*) has appeared in earlier issues of *Staffrider*.

DYING

The Nursing Home phoned, someone told me. I found him sitting upright, watchful, courteous still, hoarding his last strength to greet me. But a broad bib of blood maroon overflow, outlandish, showed me his life could do nothing but ebb. 'Now, don't let me see you upset him,' said the nurse who never made a joke.

TO THE HOSPITAL

An ambulance carried us away together. It was our last outing. We did not speak and I was happy. There seemed no difference between us. Lost in the life he had given me I spared no thought for any future, 'They take their time about getting there.' Unlike me he foresaw an end.

OUT-PATIENTS

'What do they think I can do with this when everything's wrong?' It was unfair to the young Intern. He had a right to be angry. Here was an insult to his intelligence. He had learnt so much but never how to lament. 'Where are you?' my father asked me, then I moved forward. Still he could not see.

IN THE WARD

Scarlet, the beautiful blood ran down from the bottle. His body rested. He could breathe and his heart responded. My heart lifted and I pressed his hand. Nothing happened. What future failure could tell me more? On the high bed I watched his last hours made rosy Until the dawn broke and he was dead.

Ruth Keech

HALLOWEEN

I hear the ball-less voices of girls tinkling, part the curtain – fog twirls and untwirls talcum out of witch hair – stealthily part the curtain – and stare. Three bladdery girls crushing the cold between their knees, rubbing charms, unfold secrets of the night: porcelain cat, collapsible broom, inflatable vat. When shall we three meet again? In thunder, lightning, or the football train. I draw the curtain and the tinkling dies gradually away. Vapours rise, leaves fall. Rise and fall, rise and fall: three girls breathing for a curtain call.

John Eppel

A FLOWER POEM

Your brother Khaki Weed has given you a bad name: Black Jack they call him; the hiker's curse; as ubiquitous as the devil, without his charm. Drives prospectors to blistered socklessness; invades, like pricking desire, knickers; clings to the ears of cocker spaniels; stains trouser bottoms; makes fingers stink; lodges in the corners of cows' eyes; starts skin rashes which sometimes fester like lilies in old wreaths. You stink too, Marigold. You give off a pungent khaki odour of crushed beetles, soil, old men, hat linings, ointment and dung. And yet I love your smell – your odour – better than a million Krugerrands carpeted around a city hall; better than your fancy Latin name *Tagetes*; better than your native Mexico in Aztec times; better than your cousin, that reliable annual the *Calendula*. Yes, better even than your glorious crinkly, flaky-golden head-pieces which adorned my mother's garden like moultings from the noonday summer sun.

DURBAN

It's really your brother that I love.
 Your odour reminds me of Black Jack
 and Black Jack, ou Khaki Bos, reminds
 me of Colleen Bawn where we flourished.
 I remember one school holiday
 when a bunch of us hiked to Jessie
 Hotel, drank a coke at the petrol
 pump, and hiked back. Sixteen miles for what?
 A coke and tackies full of black jacks.
 I remember going prospecting
 with my father, following his wide
 back through parched mopani veld, across
 vleis where lilies grew, down dry dongas
 looking for quartz reefs; occasionally
 stopping to drink from my father's world
 war two bottle, and to pluck black jacks
 from our stockings. And I remember
 a girl with shiny brown hair — the things
 we did on the golf course by the glow
 of a genial moon.

I believe
 the moon still visits there. But Puza
 the Simpson's old spaniel is dead now,
 and Fred is in Cape Town, and Gillie
 is wed, and Taz was killed on call-up,
 and Bob's gone religious, and the old
 cow down at the dam is Fray Bentos,
 and I am overseas, looking out
 for marigolds to finger and sniff.

John Eppel

GIOVANNI JACOPO MEDITATES *(on the Rape of the Planet)*

Of course the Meek
 Shall inherit the Earth:
 What's left of it,
 For what it's Worth.

GIOVANNI JACOPO MEDITATES *(on Alienation)*

Mrs No. 23 Larkham Crescent
 Smells faintly of Gin & Playing-Cards.
 She dreams of Robert Bedford
 & complains about the Servant.

Mr No. 23 Larkham Crescent
 & also of Smith & Sons, Imports,
 Smells faintly of Whisky & Cigars.
 He dreams of Raquel Squelch.

Further to the North, the prominent
 Belly of the Zambezi grooves & grooves
 In its slack-sliding Nightwear
 An unresponsive Continent.

GIOVANNI JACOPO MEDITATES *(on a Species of Don)*

His smouldering Exordiums
 Pound an Audience restively bored.
 There's growled Perulance, a few staled Maxims,
 Two Syllables when he's floored.

There s cross-eyed Dialectic,
 Speech stumbled, angry, drunk:
 The Halls of a Higher Eclectic
 Have spawned this Species of Punk.

While lusty for Public Drama,
 He feels Student-Groupies the best.
 While his Heart is in Havana,
 His Codpiece holds the Rest.

In his obligatory Denim,
 With his oddly linear Thought,
 This failed and static Pilgrim,
 In Triumph, arrives at Nought.

Bull-dust, is his final Ponderance,
Bull-dust, is his Clincher for All,
 The Whole of his cerebral Ordnance,
 His consummate Mating-Call.

PHOTOGRAPH OF A COMMUNIST

And even while the mouth is smiling
 At her elder child, eruptive
 At the edge of the table, gurgling
 With flirtatious pleasure — the eyes sift
 The same smile to the watchfulness
 Of a moment's unsheltered thinking.

Trapped out of the way near a town
 Of the drained marshes where the people
 Won't speak to her kind, can't; where the isolation
 Of marsh islands left its tale
 Of inturned villagers; her fine philosophic mind finds shift
 To calm frustration in a lived interim.

Her husband sits, tries to understand England, get the pattern right;
 His brown hands whittle toys;
 His intricate intelligence renews the start
 Of its long circulation through minute particularities
 Of its own day-shift, night-shift; computes
 Always to the same total that counts him out.

She hears the voices: 'You chose it.'
 Yet knows: this life is decent, cleanly:
 The factory shifts, the scythe, the goats,
 Each other, the wild child and the meditative one.
 No more collaboration than is necessary.
 Here no battle was lost.

But there are worse voices: the time ahead is slow;
 She watches it approach like a long tunnel, her cage
 Of everywhere exile. She has also heard the voice that says: Not
too long ago

It was decided. There will be no more change:
 The world will always belong
 To those it belongs to now.

Peter Strauss

Creative Youth Association / POEMS / Mabuse Lethage / Rakau Elias Mphulo / Darkie Tebogo Moteane / Makhulu wa Ledwabe / Tlelima Makhetha / Masilo Rabothata

Mabuse Lethage and Makhulu wa Ledwaba appear in *Staffrider* for the first time. Masilo Rabothata, Tlelima Makhetha, Rakau Mphulo and Darkie Moteane have all contributed to previous issues. A photograph of CYA in action at the Bayajula group's mini-festival appears on p. 19.

AFRICA WILL LAUGH

I feel the grip loosening
The fog in my mind lifting:
My hands are freed
To push away the uncleanness
And cut forever the heavy rusty chains.

I see the hands retreating
Disappearing into red fire
The fire swallowing them; I hear
The clang of chains accompanied by weeping
As freedom melts dark cold oppression.

I hear the desperate voice
Attempting to command yet pleading
I am one with you
Pleading for a brotherhood that could never be.

I laugh and laugh till I am tearful
Triumph ringing in my brain
My heart filled with joy
. . . As Africa crushes her enemy
Showing no mercy for the merciless.

The deserving culprits deny it
Their knees red with kneeling
. . . A momentary silence
As the rusty chains seek their throats
Divorcing them from their lusty bodies.

Africa can only laugh
As they talk of mercy
As they talk of brotherhood —
A partnership that could never be . . .

Mabuse Lethage

LEAVE ME

You destroy my mind
You eat my soul
Leave me to my Creator
And my heart shall be content!

Mabuse Lethage

DETENTION

The jails of our country are pestered by disease
corroding the nerves of our brothers to death.
There are no doctors to prevent this disease.
How I yearn for my brothers to be with us,
To be immune from this fatal disease.
Our happiness will be like continuous rains
after a long drought.

Rakau Elias Mphulo

MY BELOVED ONES

Sadly conveyed
From their motherland
Across the sea
To cultivate crops,
Pushed and pulled
In the large sea-going vessel
Like prehistoric animals

They screamed
They cried
They shouted
(for their God-given treasure lost)
They were destined for labour
And fear dominated their thoughts.

Darkie Tebogo Moteane

TREE

(Dedicated to the Evicted Families)

Here I stand
I am the recreational centre of birds
My body is covered by leaves
My roots lie peacefully
Deep-down in the peace-loving soil.

The wind came blowing strongly
from the East, I nodded my head westwards:
Blow over me savage winds.
Furiously it came from the west,
I nodded my head towards the east:
Blow me apart western winds.

My leaves deserted me
With a tearful eye I watched
My evergreen leaves rushing down
For comfort that was never there:
Cover, Mother soil, my courageous leaves.

Tears rolled down my naked body:
I could not wipe them.
I felt a warmth
From the fallen warriors
Who made a blanket up to my knees.

The sun intensified its heat
My blanket turned many colours
Judgement is passed over, you honest leaves.

Black clouds gathered over my head
Lightning struck
Thunder roared
Showers of praises came from heaven
To penetrate the chilly whirlwinds
And drizzle down my dusty body
Baptising the naked son in the name of the Lord.
My thirsty roots absorbed the delicious gift.
Terminal and lateral buds
Emerged to substitute my fallen cares.

Makhulu wa Ledwaba

THE DAWN CRUCIFIX

These men are expatriates
In the land of their inheritance
Of valleys once nurtured
By blood of hero ancestors
They shuffle at dusk
Erasing prints of glory left
By the feet of warriors.

Heads filled with hemlock
Eyes glazed as red diamonds
They move unconsciously
As they head
For the death row
Disguised as the red-bricked mine compound
Next to the yellow mine dump
Next to their crucifix.
There they huddle in corners
In groups as they wait
Not for tomorrow, not for eternity
But for the executioner's bell.

By the grey dawn you hear
The victory chant of the executioner
As they move with the cocopan
That will nail them
Onto the crucifix
At their Golgotha,

The crucifix that stands shamelessly
Imposing its shadows
On the corpses of the living
As they are lowered
Into the bowels of the eternal soil.

History stands silent and gapes
At this crucifixion at dawn.

Tlelima Makhetha

HOW FAR?

I am a fragment of time
I'm made of ash and African soil
I move to the front row
Confronting my recurring disappointments
With the bravery I inherited
From the nooks of Shaka's grave

I shiver with painted poverty
My burden is this heavy bag I carry
It contains all my imposed misery and pain
I am forced to fight the painful
Harassment but, how far?

Masilo Rabothata

EXHORTING MINORITY / Shafa'ath Ahmed Khan

here's where we'll sustain
repute
'neath the star-peppered
african heaven
in chatsworth
lenasia
rylands
in times of fortune adverse
thrust into our faces
with impetus
abnormally precipitous
in times of gales flourishing
we'll cease to live each
in our turn

we'll contend
over want of equity
with words spoken africa's
ears wax-haunted that
will still to sound make
impervious

our first love
genuineness
to her we'll let be seen
from our koran
bagvad gita illustrious
unshrinking
gloriously flaying brutality
here's where with offspring
black

white
with minds of prejudice
divested
ours will frisk
laboriously plod
like africa's most loyal
sons of the soil
mindful
of saluting
sawobona now
goeie more
good morning then

'tis here neither coons nor boere
nor vets nor bruins
their recognition in-
cuitive will apprehend
just africans
azanians
(by whatever other reputation
renewed)
skylarks sky-born
singing daily
nkosi sikelela i-afrika

africa will have been
preserved
from damnation
in the white world
plunged

our kaftan
sari-clad damsels
deft
fluty
our loin-girded youth
stirred up
from carelessness
she'll have been
to salute
salaam now
namasthe then
Ladysmith

ODE FOR THE UNBORN CHILD / Mdungazi Maroleni

My child don't cry
For the tongues are wagging
My child don't cry
For the world is changing
My child don't weep
For your space will be reserved
My child don't weep
For no more will you be displaced
My child don't wail
For you will graze in better pastures
My child don't wail
For you will own treasures.
Alexandra

When the door was closed the store-room, which was empty except for the sacks, was as dark as Hades. I could not see my hand when I held it in front of my face. However the three others we had met when we had our supper of semi-cooked and unsalted mealie-meal mixed with the water from the milk, said they had a piece of candle which we would light when Koos had gone back to his house. He did not want any fire near the sacks.

'Where did you get the candle?' Thabo asked in the darkness.

'The man who was wearing gumboots and an overall, the one in charge of the dairy section,' (he meant the friendly farmhand who had talked to me) 'he gave us the candle.'

'He is a good guy that one - neh?'

'Ya, he's alright. When King Kong and the sell-out are away we get a chance to breathe a little. He sometimes hides vegetables - carrots, cabbage, beet, turnips and tomatoes under the sacks for us. All the stuff is uncooked of course. But it's sweet and better than nothing.'

'How long have you three been here?'

'About a month. There were eight of us from Modderbee. The others ran away, first two and then the other three last week. You've come to replace them.'

'Why did you stay behind?'

'Man, I'm tired of running away from farms, getting nabbed again for the same failing to produce my pass, which I haven't got, running away and getting caught again. I don't want to go on slaving for farmers or cleaning some police-station somewhere for ever. No, Rawuta (*the Rand*) is rejecting me. I want to wait till I'm returned to Modderbee to get the twenty-five cents a day we're slaving for and take the next third class passage to Mafeking. I hear we're getting freedom next year.' The poor man apparently placed all his hopes for a better life on the last-mentioned idea.

'And the others? Are they staying for the same reason?'

'No. They're afraid to run. When they tried three weeks back, King Kong gave them an hour's start, saddled his horse, went to the hilltop above his house and scanned the surrounding valleys with binoculars, and when he spotted them he went after them with the horse at an easy lope. The rest you can imagine for yourself. They were lucky that he did not set his dogs upon them or that it was not at night when the brutes are prowling the farm. If you want to run away, do it when Koos and his overseer are away, and run during the day. If you're lucky you'll be far-

away, maybe even reach the highway and hitch a lift - before they return. But you must first try to get clothes from the labourers who don't stay on the farm. Those who live here have nothing to spare. Otherwise you get to the highway dressed in a sack. It's difficult to get a lift from either the people who know why you're like that, or those who don't.' The voice came out of the dark.

I did not ask these questions with the aim of using the information they brought. At that juncture I had no intention of leaving Traanfontein. It was still too early for me to do so. On top of that, in a queer way I was curious to go through with the experience of being on Traanfontein for some time.

We talked into the late hours of the night about many things. The candle, which had been lit as soon as Koos had gone (the excited baying of hounds told us he had arrived at his residence and let them out of their cages) flickered sadly and cast our giant, dancing shadows on the naked walls. The cracks between the doors and the frame were covered with sacks to prevent the light from seeping out. Our topics ranged mainly around the white people of South Africa, trying to search for reasons why a whole tribe should suffer from such a callousness as earned the condemnation of the whole nation of humanity on the planet Earth. I say it this way because to me the whole world is the true home of all the creatures that were placed there at the beginning of time. None can claim any portion of the globe as their own to the exclusion of others, because we all have to give way to posterity. We all know that the two extremes of life are birth and death, the beginning and the end, hence the African adage: 'Into engapheli iyahlola' (*that which does not terminate is an omen*). The beginning can be cheated sometimes with abortions and miscarriages, but the end can never be defrauded. Once born we all must die, so that anything intermediate between birth and death becomes only by the way, a pastime until we reach the end. In this respect no one, no matter how self-important, can rise above the rest of humanity. People may not be equal in life. Some may pass their time thinking that they are better than others, causing misery to others, imposing their so-called ideologies on others in their vain attempt to assume a god-like stature, but in death we finally achieve the desired ideal state of equality which we unsuccessfully try to pursue through the hokum we call ideology - apartheid, socialism, communism, democracy and all the things that some people say

they are prepared to die for; they are right in that they must first die in order to realize their desire. It is very comforting to remember, always, that your oppressor too, will one day die and be equal to you in that state of oblivion.

So we rambled on and on about whites. It had started when I told them what had taken me to Traanfontein.

'But what are they made of that they are so indifferent to, or rather delight in, the suffering of other people?' queried the one they called Temba.

'It's greed that makes them like that. In order to satisfy their greed they have no choice but to insulate themselves against the sufferings of those they exploit by convincing themselves that the latter are not really human beings but something less than that. They liken us to beasts of labour that they can force to do anything they will upon us,' Thabo said.

'But if it had been that way, there would have been no need to keep us in subjugation with guns. We would simply serve them without argument - it being only natural to do so,' another one added.

'How much longer do they think they can maintain the status quo, without inconveniencing everybody with an unnecessary war?' asked another one.

'Who knows. I heard once that Hitler wanted to try a similar thing for a thousand years. It took twelve years, after which he learned the hard way how wrong he had been; but not without having robbed the world of thirty million lives. Perhaps that is how they blackmail the world,' came still another voice, trying to answer the puzzle.

I saw that we would never arrive anywhere trying to pinpoint or diagnose the disease that was eating away part of our mottled human society, placed by fate in a most beautiful country to learn to appreciate it in amity, but which was failing to do so, to the utter dismay of the rest of humanity. 'It's just no use trying to find out these things. But at least let me give my opinion too. I think it's pride, an insane pride that makes them refuse to accept in the face of humanity that they are wrong. On the other hand it's cowardice, a fear of accepting failure and losing face. But then think of how great the man would be who would stand up and declare that they were indeed wrong.'

The light was put off after we had made beds with the sacks. I slept soundly that night perhaps because I was dead tired from the first afternoon's work.

As early as five the following morn-

ing there were several bangs on the door, like someone striking it with a stick. I fluttered my eyes, convinced for a few seconds that I was waking up at home. The smell of the sacks reminded me where I was. I felt for my clothes beside me without finding them. I had forgotten that the sacks were also our clothes. The others were standing up and stretching themselves.

I asked from one of the men who had long been there, 'Do you get a chance to wash here or do we go on like we are?'

'Well, I can say ya. With a piece of blue soap at the tap where the workers were washing yesterday evening.' They had queued for a tap near the granary, where we washed our hands before going to milk the cows.

A few minutes later Bobby opened the door for us and we went out into a dewy morning. There were no morning greetings between us and the baas-boy, although among us it is customary to greet others every new day. He gave Temba a piece of soap. We followed the latter to the tap, feeling naked and a little chilled under the coarse sacks. But fortunately the season was still warm, winter still a month away.

'You're going to learn what work means today, you five. You're going to bring down the wall and Baas Koos wants it down in five days. I can assure you that if you give him any reason to doubt that you can make it, he'll stay close to you until you finish. The other three are lucky, only cutting lucerne,' Bobby said behind us, and chuckled. 'Working for nothing. Don't you wish that you were born white? White prisoners get paid for every job that they do. Twenty-five cents? That's next to nothing, mos. White prisoners don't dress in sacks and sleep in empty storerooms.'

None of us felt like retorting. If every time he saw us he wanted to pick a quarrel which would eventually lead to us being scourged by his baas we were already getting wise to him.

We ate cooked samp that was full of little stones and sand, which would have broken our teeth were we not chewing cautiously. To wash it down we had black half-sugared coffee that might have been brewed the previous evening or with cold water. Then Bobby led us to the tool-shed. There we took five sledgehammers, three of which were new, bought especially for us.

'Wait for me near where you dug out that tree. I'll bring you the poles and the planks to make the scaffold.'

'Here starts the second day of slavery,' sighed Thabo as we started off to the granary.

'Every day of your life has been a day of slavery. You were born for that,' I corrected him.

'If only I had gone to school when I was young. I would not be here now; I would be in an office working with a phone and a pen,' Thabo went on.

'Ha. You'd still be serving, and you'd still not be satisfied. That would be just another form of slavery. Leashed with a tie to a desk doing the same thing half your life to make a white millionaire even richer. When a black person goes to school he does it in order to earn a certificate to serve at a better place, not for the sake of gaining knowledge to use for the betterment of his own people or to widen his scope of thinking so as to be able to analyse the world and find himself a place in it. We who serve the harder way with physical labour need not go to school for it, that is, there are no certificates sold to dig trenches and sweep streets. We're ready made as such,' I answered.

My words sparked off some interest in Jabulani, the man who had started the whip dance the previous day. 'What about doctors and lawyers? Don't they work for themselves, those people? They don't serve anybody, mos.'

'You're absolutely right — they don't serve anybody but themselves. The doctors rob sick people and the lawyers make money out of the distress and ignorance of people. Both have a common aim of leading jet-set lives and looking down upon other people. I don't say all are like that, but most of them are.'

'Of course you might be right, mfo,' agreed one of the other two men. 'You know, people don't trust the educated because the latter hunt with the wolves and graze with the sheep, mostly.'

The fifth man also broke his reticence. 'Ya — who can trust them when they keep only to their "high societies" and boast to the people about the money they make? They live on whisky, champagne, women and lust; vice is the mark of many an 'educated' person. It must be disappointing for some of the old men who worked their hearts almost to a standstill to buy their children what they never had themselves, an education which they hoped their sons and daughters would use to recover what was lost by our forefathers.'

'So you agree with me that education or rather knowledge is used by blacks only to serve the whites, if not to steal from their own brothers who have not had the same opportunities to go to school for many reasons that are beyond their control,' I said, trying to drive my point home but not knowing the right way to put it.

'The betterment of mankind is a dead virtue. Educated people should be an investment to their nations but it is they who are posing the greatest threat to the dignity of man with their class consciousness, which is in most cases negative in that instead of raising the man at the bottom, it tends to keep him there for fleecing or to deliver him to white wolves for fleecing,' Jabulani concluded. We would have liked to pursue the subject further but had arrived where we were going to work.

'I did not notice how big this building was yesterday. These hammers seem too small,' remarked Thabo.

'Don't look at it that way. It will discourage us when we need courage more than anything. Moreover it's no use because even if it were ten times as big as this, Koos would make us bring it down if he wanted it down,' Jabulani said.

Bobby was soon there with the tractor. Six strong long poles, six thick flat planks and many vice-grip devices for fixing the planks to the poles were in the tow-cart. Four of the poles had large cross bases for keeping them well balanced as long as the ground was reasonably flat. The remaining two were longer and used as leaning supports. We unloaded the wooden scaffold and raised it under Bobby's abusive instructions, fixing three platforms with the grips, starting with the lowest and going up. The grips had lengths of bars that were connected horizontally to the poles. The flat planks rested on these bars. When we shook the scaffold it felt strong.

We went up and sat equally spaced on the topmost platform, facing the wall with our legs dangling. Fortunately it was a side wall that we had to demolish and the roof rafters rested on the other two walls; so we did not have to worry about the roof falling in. The bricks were home-made and appeared reasonably soft. As long as we remembered to lean forward and not to swing our hammers too far behind, there would be no danger of us falling. I looked at my comrades and said, 'There we go, majita. Let the hammers pound while the sickles swish in the name of Koos de Wet.'

The five of us set upon the wall with demoniacal industry. The store-room had been emptied before we arrived on the farm. The hammer-falls made a hollow noise as they struck the wall. I selected a spot that I could strike with the greatest force from the sitting position and felt the soft brick give under the first few impacts. I put the hammer down and scraped the grit out. It was a double wall, so I decided the best thing

to do was concentrate on the outer layer until I made a large gap in it. Then with one great blow I hit the inner layer. A piece of wall two feet square vanished inside. A second later it crashed on the cement floor with a shattering noise. The others paused to see how I had done it. They had been hammering the wall with blows that were intended to go through the whole thickness of the wall, which sought more force but had less effect. I explained my trick to them. They tried it and it worked. Soon chunks of wall were falling into the granary and raising a cloud of dust. The bricks from which the wall was made might have been soft, but the wall was strong enough not to make the task as easy as it sounds now. It was a snail's-pace job that required an extra sense of balance, an iron grip on the handle of the hammer, and above all, patience. The jolts of the impacts jarred the marrow in my bones and the strain of the sledgehammer, which seemed to increase in weight as the work proceeded, wrung the sweat out of my muscles. Koos came an hour later to stand below us (telling us to 'roer julle gat, kaffers!') obviously delighted to see the black slaves that he had bought at Modderbee labouring precariously for him. If one of us was to fall, there was a good chance of his breaking his neck or back. I paid the slavemaster little attention, but the glimpse I had of him standing there, with his mocking attitude, with us working on the wall with violent hammer-strokes, distantly reminded me of a scene on the railway line. With my heart I sang 'Shosholozza' and then 'Sisi-Rosy', the songs of labour known to millions of my people. The handle of the hammer became hot in my palms, adding more blisters to yesterday's raw patches.

Koos de Wet had estimated right. At midday — after an endless lifting of the hammer, closing of the eyes to avoid the flying granules, striking; lifting of the hammer, closing the eyes to avoid the flying granules, striking — we had done the upper quarter of the wall. That meant we had about doubled his estimate with our trick of attacking the layers separately. The wall would be down in two days, or three, because we had to be very careful at the corners so as not to crack the adjacent walls. The only rest we had in five hours was in the pauses between the strokes or when we shifted on the planks. Bobby had not lied when he said Koos would breathe down our necks. Except for cursing, groaning and remarks about the boiling sun, hardly any words were passed between us. When we wanted to pass water we made waterfalls from where

we were. I was beginning to get used to, and even enjoy the jolts when Bobby called us down to eat.

Without the hammer my arms felt paper light. My back was also hurting from sitting the whole morning. We stooped around our big basin which was filled with the same half-cooked porridge after Temba and his two companions had joined us.

'Don't stuff yourself too much with this paste. Take only enough to hold you till the evening. S'phiwe, the good guy, is going to leave us some vegetables in the store-room,' Temba told us as we ate. After we stopped he took a packet of BB tobacco out of a fold in his sack and gave it to me. 'And he gave this too. Solly, give him some brown paper and matches.'

I was moved by the way our little hardship brought us together in unity. We might be prisoners and serving our punishment under the merciless selfishness of Koos and his baas-boy, but our recognition of each other as people, human beings with feelings and desires common to all people, still held us above those who lived with hatred. Because hatred and selfishness breed indifference to, and delight in the sufferings of others, they might be likened to a cancer of the soul, which steadily eats away the nobleness of human nature and leaves only a shell, a demon in human form, through which Belial works out his diablerie upon mankind. Hatred is 'the mark of the beast'.

The zoll was passed around. There's nothing like sharing a smoke at times of hardship. I believe that among us a 'skyf' (sharing of one cigarette) has a greater significance than just giving a man some puffs when he craves them; it is a gesture of friendship, trust and respect; and if a person is prepared to offer you a smoke, it means he is freely disposed towards you and might help in other ways too. Non-smokers may not quite grasp what this is all about, but those who partake in the habit will understand. That is where the proverb 'asibhemisani' (*we don't share smokes*), meaning that people do not see eye to eye, comes from. We shared the smoke and like the Red Indian peace pipe, it meant that we were together.

Before we finished smoking Koos appeared unexpectedly around the corner of the building. Temba and his two mates jumped up like children who had been caught doing mischief. Reacting likewise, we snatched our hammers, pretending that we were resuming work immediately after eating.

'Ja! Julle sit? Getting used to Traanfontein, hê? After work we must have

another dance to remind you who you are, where you are and what you're here for,' said the ogre, like an adult who had caught children red-handed in mischief.

What could we say for ourselves? Temba and the others took their sickles and vanished around the building. The top platform of the scaffold had to be removed so that we could stand on the second one. We put down our hammers and started with this. 'Goed. You're coming alright with it . . . Be careful at the corners . . . You work fast, nê kaffers? Those three are teaching you to sleep on your work. It's them that need some shaking up; and they are going to get it from baas Koos, because I'm the only baas on this farm. This is one Boere-seun they must take a long time to forget.'

What he said did not give us any relief. It would have been better were we all going to receive punishment. To us, watching was not going to provide the entertainment it offered Bobbejaan.

No one came to inspect us the whole afternoon. Nevertheless we did not pause for any rest since we never knew when Koos or Bobby would turn up. The punctured blisters on the palms of my hands had stopped hurting although the loose skin had peeled off. I laid down my hammer beside me and looked at my hands. Corny skin was forming where there had been blisters. I continued to batter the wall in front of me and, as I did so, many thoughts filled my mind. I found myself thinking that perhaps the Traanfontein experience was a destined part of my life, which had been set aside by Providence to take me out of my aimless life in Soweto and show me a practical example of how my people were demeaned because they happened to have a dark skin, while I jived around a shebeen table covered with beer bottles. The wall became symbolic of the wall of man-made laws that demarcates the black man from the rest of mankind and makes him the doormat of the races. At that stage I felt a new strength and fury rising up inside me and I beat big chunks down to the rubble inside the granary. What man has put together, man can also put asunder. The wall was falling and the day I, together with my fellow prisoners, would be free to leave Traanfontein was nearing, no matter how far away it still seemed.

At sunset we went to the dairy to milk the cows. This time I did ten cows. S'phiwe came to talk to me.

'When are you running?' He sprang the question on me. I stopped midway squeezing a teat, surprised that he

store for you when you stay behind. Of course I do not think Sam would have been able to take all of us at the same time,' I said, feeling sorry that others were going to have to explain how we got away and why they did not stop us.

Getting out, which I had thought would present a problem, was going to be very easy. I did not deny it when Thabo said, 'You guys all think as far as your own height. You forget that there's also some space occupied by many other things above you. If you're always looking down on the ground like pigs you'll miss a lot of things.'

The riddle was self-explanatory. We slept earlier than the night before because of the unbearable fatigue. My whole muscular system felt numb and dully painful, the way muscles not used to strain do. Before sleep overtook me I pictured myself at home.

Our wall was down in three days flat. The routine was exactly the same. After an endless pounding of the wall we went to milk the cows, ate our supper and were locked up. S'phiwe always came to chat with us at the dairy. He had told me that there was no way he could get me my clothes, but in the truck Sam had some old white overalls which belonged to men who worked at the corporation whom he had to pick up on his farm rounds. He also told me that Koos de Wet did not report people who had escaped because he wanted to avoid paying the money he owed them to the prison officials. The latter always assumed that it had been paid to the prisoners when they left the farm, as long as Koos reported that he had dismissed them according to the dates that he had been given for their release. The jail-warders at Modderbee were also his friends.

On our fourth day at Traanfontein we were given sickles to go and join the others on the lucerne field, but it was found that they had almost reached the number of bags that was wanted. So we were to start the reaping of the maize fields instead. Bobby made us take a pile of the sacks to the field and bind them in twos with strips of other sacks which were being cut by three black women who reminded me of the three witches in *Macbeth*, with their gaunt set faces. Their deep-set eyes had the wariness of the starving mongrels of Soweto. I had seen many like them at 'matiki-twane' (*the ash and rubbish dumps of Soweto*), scouring the whole day long (I never did find out what for) while their white counterparts were being driven in 'China-eyes' Mercedes Benzes to the city for eternal shopping sprees. Go to 'matikitwane' any day and you'll find black

women wading in the filth. Funny how poverty and filth go hand in hand.

The idea of binding the sacks, we found out later, was to make a sort of sling across the shoulders. You slung three pairs of the sacks and walked between two rows of maize, plucking the ears and dropping them into two sacks hanging down your sides. As the sacks filled up you got to know what was meant by gruelling work. When a pair of bags was full you left it where it had been filled and started a new pair.

There were many of us going down the whole width of the kilometre square field, men and women who arrived in groups of four and five, each going down his or her own row while Koos de Wet sat on his ginger horse marking down the names of his slaves. He looked like a mounted soldier of the Anglo-Boer war with his rifle slung on his back after going out in the early morning to hunt a jackal that he suspected of killing his small stock. Having failed to bag anything he thought it fit to come and drive the human wave going through the field, on horse-back. He shouted, 'Kom, kom, kom, kom,' as he galloped up and down behind us. We prisoners who were not used to what we were doing found it hard to match the pace of experienced farm labourers, and this lagging behind was our undoing. Koos harried and drove us. We stumbled and fell and rose and plucked, and the hot breath of the horse blew down on our necks; we were drenched in sweat and when the sun began to gain height it baked us and parched our throats. The more bags we filled, the more Koos's chances of catching the early market increased, and the more his chances increased, the greater his impatience became. The ground was marked with an endless maze of small paths made by field rats that scampered between our feet. During 'lunch' S'phiwe told us to be careful of snakes.

The following afternoon I had an unpleasant experience with Kood De Wet. S'phiwe had told us the truth about snakes. I stumbled on a black cobra as thick as my arm. Fortunately it was replete with two rats and it lay there without attempting to bite me. I dropped the maize on it and killed it with a rock as it tried to wriggle free from the weight of the almost full sacks. At that time Koos had gone up the column and when he saw the disruption of work — Thabo and the others nearby came to help me kill the reptile, six feet long and scales as big as your fingernails on its back — he came galloping towards us.

'Who killed the snake?' he asked from the saddle.

'It was me,' I answered, thinking that

there was nothing wrong with killing a poisonous snake where people were working.

He alighted slowly from the beautiful gelding, as if he wanted to take a closer look. A snake dies in a peculiar fashion. For hours after it has died its body keeps on moving slowly with ripples of muscles under its glossy skin. The sight is not at all pleasing to the eye or the nerves. Koos was unruffled. He sank to his haunches and turned the snake around studiously.

'Do you know that this snake eats these rats that destroy the maize?' he soliloquized, his eyes remaining on the dead snake. He took out a pocket knife and cut the snake where its thickness bulged out. Two wet, dead rats came out. 'You see? I told you; two dead rats that might have put away tons of grain and bred more rats. Did you think about this before you killed the snake?'

'I know that snakes eat rats. Someone might have been bitten,' I answered in unwavering Afrikaans.

'Jy praat goeie Afrikaans — hê?' was his answer to my explanation that I had killed the snake because the people were in danger of being bitten. No, that did not matter to Koos de Wet. What mattered more than the lives of the people who slaved for him was the grain. 'Have you been to school?'

'A little.'

'There is an English poem about a sailor who killed a bird he was not supposed to have killed and they hung the bird on his shoulders.' He meant Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and the implication of his example was clear to me.

He stood up with the snake held by the tip of its tail between his thick forefinger and thumb. 'I want you to wrap this around your neck like a scarf.'

Most people have a terrible phobia of anything that crawls, and moreso of snakes because snakes can kill. I am no exception to other human beings. I might have been afraid of Koos de Wet, but I feared a dead snake more. I backed away, and this brought the smile I had seen at Modderbee to the wrestler's face. 'Here. Take it, it won't bite. It's dead.'

It was like someone coaxing a child to touch a toy made of fur that the child did not trust. I was not going to wrap a snake around my neck even if it meant that Koos de Wet was going to kill me if I did not. He threw it, but I ducked, having anticipated his move. The dead snake sailed over my head and landed behind me without touching me. For some reason missing me infuriated the ape. He rushed at me and, before I

should have read my thoughts, because, in spite of my resolution to stick around for a while to learn about farm slave labour, I was beginning to have second thoughts.

'What makes you think that I want to run away?' I asked, sounding a little vexed.

'Mos, people are always running away from this slavery.' And he told me of others who had run away, of some who had been caught and of what they had gone through at Koos's hand. This was not at all encouraging for one who was contemplating escape, though he did not tell it with the intention to dishearten. He also enumerated for me the different ways by which I could leave fast and unnoticed. I was interested in one.

'Tell me S'phiwe — not that I want to bolt . . . This truck that collects the milk for the corporation, how often does it come in a week? And you say that man is your friend?' It was he who had offered the information.

'Ya. Sam is my friend and, like me, he can't stand seeing people dehumanized the way you are, even if they are prisoners. And having heard why you're here from Temba at the lucerne field I feel it was unfair that you should be punished for self-defence. He comes on Saturdays and picks me up at my shack to open the cold storage for him. I'll talk to him then. Really it was unfair. I can see you're a good guy, not a tsotsi.'

'How could I have stood a chance? I was alone, and there were four abelungu against me; the man I fought with, a woman witness, the magistrate and the prosecutor.' As I counted, the four sneering white faces came up before the eye of my mind. From time to time they would rant in Afrikaans, apparently about the immorality of my striking a white man. Perhaps I would have stood a better chance if one of the court officials, either the prosecutor or the magistrate, had been black and had an insight into the indignities that blacks have to put up with from whites.

'There's no justice in this country, mfowethu. Your skin determines whether you are right or wrong. South Africa has its own form of 'justice' that is moulded to suit the racial obsessions of those that hold the gun and the gaol keys,' S'phiwe said.

You might be surprised that an ordinary farm labourer and a group of jailbirds dressed in sacks could talk about things that are singled out for so-called sophisticated scholars' minds. But then let me ask you a simple question. What would the champagne, beautiful cars and expensive vacations at the Swazi

Spas have come to if those who enjoy these things discussed miseries that do not affect them personally? It is among the simple, despised people who feel the pinch of injustice, who scrape from hand to mouth to survive, that one finds a wisdom about life that is gathered with harsh experience.

'You're absolutely right, S'phiwe. The devil dwells in the hearts of the Koos de Wets and through them turns the world into a stage on which sadistic plays of oppression and suffering are played while he sits watching with satisfaction from hell. The South African show must be one of his favourites.' I tried to illustrate my concurrence with what he was saying with symbolism for emphasis.

'Ya, let me leave you, my friend. If you want to leave this hell on Saturday morning, start figuring out how to get out of the store-room, now. It's a pity I can't open for you but the others always got out in spite of the locks on the door being strengthened with each escape.'

I thanked S'phiwe, and by the time we finished milking, I had made up my mind to leave on Saturday. I would put the suggestion to the others that evening, because I was sure Sam could take others besides myself on the dairy truck. The sunset scene was the same as the previous evening's with the ragged farm labourers queuing up at the tap to rinse their dust-covered faces, arms and legs. Some wore sacks, like us, over their rags, but most preferred to work bare-breast. When we were fretting about the selfishness of most white people the previous night Temba had told me that these people, family men and young men with their futures still before them, stayed at Traanfontein only on sufferance because of their free labour. They were supposed to put aside six months of the year to render service to the slave-master, otherwise their families would be cast out of the farm. During the time they worked on the farm, their salaries could not exceed S'phiwe's ten rand and a bag of maize or samp per month, not forgetting of course that the latter was a permanent and experienced farm-hand. The same money went to buying the market-rejected produce as diet supplement from the landlord. These things are never heard of outside the farms because desperation and need keep the victims in silent desolation, and for any concerned person to set foot on the farms permission would be necessary from the landowner.

Take that formidable ape to keep a promise! The eight of us were still forcing down the cold samp soured with the

milk water (the latter very refreshing after the day's labour) when Koos materialized behind us with Bobby and the whip. His tobacco-stained teeth were bared in a malicious grin under the bristly moustache and his colossal bulk dwarfed the medium-sized Bobby, whose face and gait reflected an urgency to unleash his cruelty. We all stopped eating. Even if the meal had been worth eating, they would still have spoilt our appetite. They marched up to us and we backed towards the building until the wall stopped us.

'Ja. You thought I would forget to honour my promise to remind you what you're here for?' Koos said in his fast Afrikaans. He pointed to Temba and the other two and ordered them to move to one side. Then, cracking the whip once, he gave it to Bobby: 'Here Bobbejaan, show those three who's baas of Traanfontein.'

Bobby took the whip, and like all farm people he knew exactly how to use it. He did not use the tip of the whip the way an inexperienced person would, but let some length entwine itself around the body and then pulled hard. A series of claps like a small pistol being fired followed as the whip untwined. These claps were caused by the tip striking the flesh and tearing the skin at the places of contact. Trying to conceal those parts of the body which were exposed, all three men lay down and balled themselves up as best as they could. It was obvious that this did not help.

'Nee maan, Bobbejaan! You're playing with them because they are your brothers. Give me that whip,' Koos's voice said greedily. He continued the cruel task. I grimaced at each stroke.

After five minutes it was over. We were locked up and sat silently in the dark while our friends were still licking their wounds. When they could tolerate their burning skins no one said anything about the flogging. There was nothing to say, after all. We had all watched and were too sickened by the whole thing to repeat it in words. Temba went to search in the pile of sacks and came back with a bunch of carrots, turnips and tomatoes in a plastic bag. There was a gallon of milk too! We ate in the darkness. The sweetness of the vegetables provided us with a wonderful variation of diet, and the milk was refreshing.

I put forward my Saturday morning intentions. 'Majita, I don't think I can stand it much longer here. Saturday . . .' and I proceeded to lay out my plan. Everyone agreed that it was an easy way to leave the farm, but only Thabo and Jabulani wanted to go.

'Madoda, you must know what lies in

'My mind left Traanfontein and went ahead of me to where I was going . . .'

could turn, struck me down with his large hairy arm. I fell on my back. His oversized boot pinned me down on the side of my neck. The soil got into my mouth, nostrils and eyes. He unslung his rifle and I thought he was going to shoot me cold-bloodedly, a thing of which I knew him to be perfectly capable. I saw him turning his rifle in his hands and holding it by its barrel and I thought he was going to bash my skull in. He did neither, but pressed the butt into my ribs with slowly increasing pressure. I felt my ribs caving inward and prayed that I should pass out before they snapped. Crying out was impossible. The priority during those nasty moments was to get some air into my lungs without inhaling the dust as well. Just when I thought I heard the ribs cracking under my skin, he let go. I staggered and gasped and coughed to my feet.

'That'll teach you to do what I tell you, kaffer,' he said and went to his horse. 'Now, get on with the work!' he roared. Everybody scattered to their rows in a split second. The beast of prey had roared and the timid stampeded to catch up with those who had not stopped working. Within a minute we were in line with them.

At dusk when the day's drudgery was over I felt the painful lump as big as my fist under my right arm. I could not inspect it until we were in the store-room because I was naked under the sack. If I had had any doubts about leaving the following morning, the incident with the snake had evaporated them.

At the dairy I told S'phiwe to make arrangements with Sam for three people. He apologised: Sam could take only two in the cab, because the truck carried nothing but milk containers and had no canopy. The two would have to ball themselves up in the cab where nobody was likely to peer. This precaution proved wise the following morning because De Wet went to the dairy to sign the receipt book. Those were tense moments we spent crouching in the cab while De Wet moved around the truck.

The iron bar with which we would prise open the roof from inside had been hidden in the store-room under the sacks.

I did not eat that evening. Who could eat knowing that he was leaving Traanfontein, ahead of time? It might not have been a jailbreak exactly, but we felt an excitement worth mentioning. We knew that we could beat the security of Koos de Wet's farm, which was its remoteness from anywhere, and that we could beat the hounds. Putting aside the

sure flogging that those who remained would get when our absence was discovered, we knew that we were going to be free from the oppression and cruelty meted out to blacks on the hidden farms.

Jabulani had received the disappointment like the man he was. As soon as we heard the hounds barking at the start of their night prowls, we started tearing the sacks into wide strips that would hold our weight. All eight of us were tearing the strips and knotting them into a 'rope'; in no time it was ready. The roof was as high as that of the granary, but for Thabo it was easy meat to get up there and put his house-breaking skill to use with the flat iron bar.

He took one end of the rope and bound it to the flat bar. He threw the bar over one rafter and as near the wall as he could. It dangled low, swinging like a pendulum. 'Two of you hold this end tight and put your weight to it while I climb.' He went up the wall like a fly using both feet to walk on it and the rope to winch himself up. Holding onto the rafter, he hooked his leg over it, twisted himself to sit astride it, pulled the bar up, and unbound it. He felt for where the corrugated iron sheets overlapped. When he found the spot, he wedged the bar in between the sheets and told us to hold the rope tight. He slithered down.

I lay down for the last time on the sacks, which no longer felt as much like sandpaper as they had when I first came. My mind left Traanfontein and went ahead of me to where I was going. I saw myself sleeping at home under the kitchen table, the cockroaches trying to explore my nostrils and ears, not giving me a chance to sleep. The hounds that barked in the background reminded me of the location night. I thought I would soon hear the frightened scream of a woman being raped; or running footfalls of the dark night's children chasing a victim of 'inkunzi' (*mugging*); or the victim crying, 'Anginamali, akina chelete, bafowethu — *You can take everything but please don't kill me,*' the voice of a man facing death and begging it to pass him by just that once; or the drunken voice of a daughter of darkness laughing lazily as she was tickled by her boyfriends; or the Zionists' cowhide tomtom and songs of supplication receding into the distances of sleeping Orlando East and Diepkloof, on the way to shrines that strengthen the hope but bring forth no realization; or the answering tomtom of a 'sangoma' invoking the ancestors to chase away the evil spirits and strengthen a certain household. I thought about the coming months when

I would have to play hide and seek with the hunters of 'illegal Bantus' until my three month term was over and I would be able to go to 'Esibayeni' at 80 Albert Street to get another workseeker's permit to remain in Johannesburg. Going there sooner than that would be a risk because the harbingers of fate follow you to Traanfontein, to BophutaTswana if you were the man sleeping next to me, and, eventually, to Avalon, the city of the dead, so like the neighbouring city of the still living.

I wished I had a talent. When I was small I wanted to be an artist, a painter. I made sketches that were commended by everybody who had a little appreciation of creativity. Unfortunately my parents wanted me to go to school and qualify for a white collar job, to be a 'mabhalane' (*clerk*) they said, instead of sitting around the whole day drawing pictures. My teachers did no better either; they searched my exercise books for any missing pages or drawings that I had forgotten to rub out, and whenever they found these things they punished me for 'destructiveness' — which they never forgot to state in my reports. I wanted to go for the free lessons organised by the few established artists of Soweto at Orlando YMCA, and they refused. I ended up drawing 'dirty' pictures which were burnt when discovered and earned me a peach-tree switch; and without having gone any further with school or being a 'mabhalane' after all. They had killed my interest in the only thing I had wanted to do with my whole being, and which might never have been rivalled by anybody; something I would have pursued with inflexible determination and perhaps achieved great heights in. Among us 'many a flower is born to blush unseen'. Many a talented youngster is brutally suppressed by parents who look upon their children as assets, parents who were brought up accepting that to be in the paid service of a white man is the only form of work, that as soon as the child reaches 'pass-age' he or she must leave school to 'work for his parents'. Those who do encourage the child make the mistake of wanting to choose what the child must be. This attitude of parents and many teachers, the forced labour regulations and a system of education that is moulded to train only 'servants' (imagine domestic science and agriculture at Matric level, and try to find the same implication that I find) and suppresses initiative, are the main reasons for the wilting of many a child prodigy, apart from the fact that it costs money to develop talent in many instances.

Yes, I found myself thinking that, seeing I had no talent, slaving for a pittance under the constant racist harassment of the Jan du Toits, or working out a plan to steal my subsistence from those who had more than me, were the only alternatives left. Neither appealed to me: not the first, with its concomitant degradation and lack of compensation; not the second, with the risks it involved and its moral unacceptableness. My future was a blank impenetrable wall in front of me. In the same way I had pounded down the granary wall for Koos de Wet I had to hammer my way through the invisible wall with a mental battering ram. All the time I was thinking these things my consciousness was gradually giving in to the slow invasion of my last sleep on Traanfontein. Bobby had been right. The experience would be worth relating to my grandchildren.

Three months and two weeks later there had not been a knock in the middle of the night and torches blinding the drowsy people at home. I had spent the three months sleeping out at the homes of relatives and friends; or at 'parties' over weekends — just in case Koos had reported. After a further two weeks I assumed that I could go to my former employers to be signed off in my passbook, get my E and F cards (I never could find out their significance) and anything that might have accrued to me from the wage deductions that had been made in my wages in the two years that I had worked at SA Electrical Wares.

I went into the lobby without having met anyone that I had worked with. The receptionist was sitting on her revolving chair trying to catch the sunbeam that filtered into her little cubicle and concentrating on her knitting, not

aware that anyone had come in. I leant on the sill of the window that said 'Enquiries' and cleared my throat. She raised her head with a jerk to toss the long hair out of her face, then, seeing that it was a black person, she knitted a few more stitches before casually putting her wool and needles aside. She looked up slowly this time, removing a loose lock of hair from her eye and trying to look at me loftily, like Cleopatra. Recognition flickered in her eyes and she was slow to prevent herself catching her breath. She did not know whether to flash her hypocritical receptionist's smile or chase me out. From her reaction to seeing me still in one piece, I concluded that she had thought prison would gobble me up. I wondered what she would say if I told her that I had only served a week of my punishment for belting her dear brother Jan.

I came to her rescue. 'Is your boss in?'

'What do you want here?'

'Is your boss in?'

He was in his office alright — her eyes told me that, while her stupid mind creaked for suitable humiliating words. I pivoted on my heel and went further into the building. My duck was reading a 'Captain Devil'. 'Your boss in?' I asked.

He glowered at me and worked his mouth as if he wanted to ring the bell for round one once more. Experience rescued him.

First floor. A group of ten 'boys' with bowed heads and the expressions people wear when watching a loved one's coffin sinking into a grave. 'Hey't, gents! You look like a group of schoolkids waiting for punishment outside a principal's office.'

'Hawu! Is this you? When . . .'

'Who told you to walk into my office without being called?'

'Myself.'

'What do you want, work? You see all those boys standing outside? I'm just going to fire them all. Hey! Are . . . Are you the boy who assaulted your baas?' He glanced at the phone. 'You want to go back where you come from?'

'Relax. Discharge me and give me my cards and whatever you owe me.' I dropped the brown booklet on the table in front of him.

'Owe you? You want to start trouble, I'll phone "John Vorster" now.'

He signed, opened the drawer of his desk and removed two cards, one blue, one pink; he must have had them ready from the day I fought with Jan. Putting the cards between the pages of my pass, he tossed it to me. 'There's your dompass. Go!'

I caught the book and swaggered out.

'Mfo. Why didn't you let us know you were out? We would have bought you a lot of "beahs". If only you'd come here on Friday.'

If only you knew that after today you won't be able to buy any beers, I thought. 'Soory maan, majita. I'm in a hurry. See you around. Sweet.' And I skated down the stairs on the soles of my takkies.

Jan was waiting for me. I did not look at him. When I went past him I saw him out of the corner of my eye, glaring. 'When I meet you in the street I'm going to shoot you, kaffer!' he said.

I ignored both this ominous promise and Cleopatra in the reception cubicle, and went out into the clamouring Gold-en City.

MAPETLA

'WINDS OF CHANGE IMMINENT'

Cries are heard from afar
Cries that seem like unpainted walls
That seem on the verge of their doomsday
Because there is nothing that stabilizes them.

One bit falls — and the others call for support
But still support is not coming.
They call again, but in vain —
Their call seems to disappear in thin air.

You ask for water — all the rivers are yours
You ask for bread — all is given to you
You ask for moodeer — then you are bound:
All that you had you now have not.

Frustration loomed and led to hatred
Despair led to real violence
Militancy was in their minds
In order that their voices be heard.

The sun rose and seemed to spell doom to *Hoof*
Its rays shone brightly in the sky
And all its light was cast to the four corners of the earth
Thus bringing a trail of death and destruction

It was like the David and Goliath affair
But this time David was defeated by a force
Perilous to human dignity
Because his sling was not in working order
But his desires are undefeated —
He still longs for peace and justice to all

Whether his wishes are met or not
The winds of Uhuru looms in circles around all of us
And soon it will be here, bringing happiness to all
And restoring human dignity and nature.

Isaac Sakkie Motsapi

They were standing close to each other conversing. He was holding her tightly in his embrace. The sun had just 'gone home' and the people, as if in accordance with the sun, were also streaming home from work. The night had not as yet begun its black stifling duty. Some people stared with incredulity and surprise at the pair, others just went on, stiffly, with a resigned expression on their faces. The two were kissing passionately and time stood still for them.

'Know what, Thandeka,' Shikhotho said. 'There's nothing in the world I would love more than to be with you and spend all the hours of my life loving you. Nothing would be sweeter than watching the beauty and splendour of the sun set with you or to sing to you that melody: *Roses are red, my love* . . . But these are just fantasies. One has to daydream, and be allowed to, some of the time.'

'You know as well as I do how much you warm my heart,' Thandeka said. 'I have given my heart to you. I love you madly and my love for you is as big and endless as the expanse of the sea. When I am with you, I find it hard not to show my feelings towards you. Loving you is an experience in itself. During these five years that we've been in love I have somehow felt complete. If I were to lose you, I would be like a bird that's had its wings plucked off. I won't let you leave me. And no one will take you away from me; no one. But Shikhetho, you know that —'

She did not finish the sentence.

Over Shikhetho's shoulders she stared at something with shock, dismay and embarrassment; like a child that has been caught helping itself to Mummy's purse. Only the child will start 'talking himself out' of the situation, snivelling before his mother can lay her hands on him, whereas with Thandeka, she just stood rooted to the spot, dumbfounded.

Shikhetho didn't have time to ask why she changed so suddenly. He felt strong arms grab him in a vicious grip. He turned his head to see who the intruder was. And lo! His heart missed a beat and fear rode through him.

Thandeka's father!

Instinctively he tried to twist his hand away from the grip. Strong as he was, he couldn't free himself, and in that instant, Thandeka's father hit him squarely in the mouth. Shikhetho rode with the fist to lessen its devastating impact, but he still felt the power of the blow. It was like running plumb onto an unexpected stone wall. Thandeka just stood there screaming: 'Papa . . . please!'

In the struggle that ensued, Shikhetho managed to shake off his dizziness, got his footing and took to his heels, not daring to look back. He ran as if ten devils were breathing down his neck. He stumbled and lurched as he tried to escape.

He ran on with head throbbing, lungs on fire and his legs feeling rubbery. No longer able to carry his fear.

* * *

Thandeka's parents glowered at her. Tears streamed down her cheeks and her heart throbbed with hatred — hatred for the world for being so unfair to her. Why did it have to be me, she asked herself? Can't I be spared these pains? Why do I have to suffer so? Questions kept ringing on and on in her mind. Many of the questions had no answers.

'It is clear to us that you are not prepared to abide by our rules,' her mother said furiously.

The father sat a little distance away from the mother and daughter, fuming with rage.

'How many times must I repeat myself? Can't I get it through that thick and wayward skull of yours that I don't want to see you with that Shangaan nincompoop? I've told you to stop seeing him. What is he, after all, that you have to run after him? And what's more, it's disgraceful the way you hang around him: like a dog before a butcher stall. Do you have to associate with a stinking, blasted Shangaan? The filthy swine. Are you not proud of being a Xhosa? *Inene uliblazo, mntan'am.*'

'Really Ma, you surprise me with what you are saying. I can't believe what I am hearing is coming from your mouth. I'll tell you this, like so many times before: that the boy you call a nincompoop happens to be the boy I will hold hands with when he leads me to the altar. I've just turned twenty-one and so plead with both of you to let me make my own decisions. Surely, I am old enough to know what's right or wrong,' Thandeka said sadly.

'You will be old enough in your own bloody house — not here!' her father retorted gruffly.

'In this house I and only I call the tune. And I expect everyone under this roof — including you — to dance to it. I won't stand any insolence, least from you.'

Thandeka had stopped crying. She stared at her parents and somewhere . . . somewhere in the depths of her thought she sensed a ray of hope. She saw the solution to the problem that was slowly driving her into the darkness of despair.

'Tata,' she said, 'why do you have to talk like a parochial and old-fashioned parent? Why do you have to dictate terms to me because you happen to be the head of the family? Can't we have a 'family detente' instead of your adopting a baas-like attitude? It is high time you realized that what is bread for you may be poison for me. I want to be free to love whoever I want to love. I want to be free of any yoke that will deprive me of my freedom. Love without free-

dom is no love at all. In order that there should be love, unbounded and selfless, there must be freedom. The two go hand in hand. You seem bent on destroying the freedom I want — as your daughter — to do what I feel is right for me.'

The parents, surprisingly, were silent, listening to their daughter's solemn 'revelation'.

'Shikhetho is MY man. I love him dearly. Can't you understand the meaning of love? Love, brotherly or otherwise, knows no barriers. Being a Xhosa girl does not mean I have to love a Xhosa boy. I love whom I choose to. What I go for is intelligence and respect. Those are qualities a gentleman is made of. It is of no consequence how ugly a boy may be, but if he has these qualities, and perhaps a bit more, then he is a man. After all, handsome is as handsome does.'

She was now talking continuously with a soft and low voice. She was leading the conversation, her parents listened intently.

'I chose Shikhetho because of what he is. He is a gentleman through and through. He is warm and loving. Your judgment of him by his outward appearance is deceptive and false. You do not know his inner self, the true Shikhetho. You see him as a coal-black, big-nosed and pimply Shangaan boy. I will permit no one to stand between me and Shikhetho — not even you. Nothing will impede me from holding onto what is rightfully mine.'

Thandeka stopped talking. And now she sat back and stared expectantly at her parents who were in a pensive mood. Her father faked a cough as if that was the only thing to do at the moment, before he could lash back at his daughter. Parents never think of 'yielding' to their children's ideas and opinions even if they offer a good, if not the best, solution. They always think of their children's ideas and opinions as being wide of the mark and immature parents always want to 'wield the big stick'.

Thandeka sensed what was coming to her and she cringed inwardly as she saw that nonchalant, uncompromising look on her father's face.

'*Uyabona yintoni, mntan'am,*' he said, as if counselling a little child. 'It does not seem clear to you that I am the only person, inside these four walls, who will ever have the last word. Either you take it or you don't. And, you only have yourself to blame because I will throw you out of my house. I won't take no for an answer. Especially from you.'

He changed his sitting position and took a sip from the tea that had just been placed before him by his wife. Thandeka sat quietly, her mind racing, and waited for her father to continue.

'Who do you think you are to allow

yourself to be courted by that nonentity, not to mention a Shangaan. Do you have an inkling what type of creatures Shangaans are? I bet you don't. Have you ever seen the state in which their homes, not to mention their yards, are? They are left in a ghastly and pitiful state. All those maize cobs and other crops planted right round their houses. And those 'crops' are rarely properly cared for. Enter their homes and you'll be shocked. And, personally, Shangaans are a breed of lazy, dubious and shifty fellows. Now you bring scandal to the family name by associating with one of their brethren. Can't you see you are disgracing me by your stupid 'love affair'? Is there no better boyfriend you can choose? A boy with some integrity. Look at Mncedisi for instance. He seems such an obedient young man though, admittedly, he drinks more than the fish does. And becomes so 'next to himself' that he forgets his name. You can't, after all, blame him. 'Cause no human being is perfect. You could have chosen him. And with his family being so well-off, he could have married you. And you know what that means? You'll be a Mrs So-and-so. The talk of Soweto. But now you choose to love a Shangaan. I want to make this clear to you that I don't ever want to see you with that Shangaan boy again. If ever I see him with you again, I'll emasculate him. And make it a point that you're home by six in the evening.'

And with those words he stood up and retired into the bedroom he shared with his wife. Thandeka, with tears rolling down her cheeks, stared into nothingness. Her father's words, like a ramp-

aging bull, gored at her soul. She felt as if her insides were torn to pieces. For her, life had reached a point where everything seemed useless. There is no point in going on living if one has to suffer so, she woefully thought.

Her mother paid no attention to her pained thoughts. She, too, stood up and followed her husband into their bedroom. Thandeka was left all alone with her solitary self.

That Thandeka was not awake at this ungodly hour came as a surprise to her mother. It was past ten o'clock in the morning. Thinking that Thandeka still nursed her sore wounds, her mother went on with her chores.

The wall-clock struck thirty minutes after the eleventh hour and still no sign of Thandeka. Thandeka's mother became uneasy. She decided to drag Thandeka unceremoniously out of bed.

As was customary of her when she was not in her good mood, she stormed into her daughter's bedroom like a misguided missile.

'Thandeka kutheni —' she started to let go a torrent of heated words when she stopped dead in her tracks. The status quo of the room was evidence enough for her to draw her conclusions.

'We yis'kathandeka. Khawuze kubona lo mhlola ndiwubon'apha!' she exclaimed, turning away from the room.

Her husband came out of the bedroom sleepily. He detested being woken up in such an unsavoury fashion, especially when he so needed to rest. The manner in which he stretched always reminded his wife of a snail coming out of its shell and yawning. He was about to enquire about the excitement when

he saw why his much deserved rest had been interrupted.

'Tyhini?!' was all he could say.

He expected to find heaped-up blankets with the 'mould' showing; instead to his dismay he found something to the contrary.

Thandeka's bed showed that it had never been slept in the night before.

Looking at the window they saw that it was partially open. The iron grille had been removed and had been placed on the floor below the window.

Thandeka's mother dashed to the closet and threw its doors open.

The closet was nearly empty with only a school blazer, some dungarees and white shirts left.

Thandeka's suitcase was also missing. Heaving a sad sigh, she sat on the bed and stared broodingly at the floor. Her eyes welled up, then a teardrop fell on her lap. She started sobbing; quietly yet uncontrollably. Her body heaved spasmodically as she sobbed.

'O my child! My child! *Kodwa yintoni Thixo wam!*' she moaned.

Her husband seemed rooted to the spot. Though shocked, he was as cool as a cucumber. He looked at his wife and in a croaky voice that would make a frog envious, he announced:

'I had better inform the police about this.'

And without waiting for a reply he made haste to leave her whimpering, as now and then she wiped tears from her eyes with a handkerchief. In no time at all she seemed to have aged by ten years.

She stopped crying; she just sat there on the bed, sad and forlorn.

FAREWELL MY FRIEND

(To Duma)

Right now you'll be abroad
I just can't believe it
It's a sweet-sorrow
That leaves me torn
Between two worlds
But as it's for the betterment
Of our future
I wish you all the best in life.

I'll miss you dear
Yes, I will
It was good knowing you
It was more than a pleasure
To be part of you
What is left now
Is memories no one can erase.

Sorrows will die
Though distance may part us
True love will keep us together
It's hard, it's heart-breaking
But I'll have to get used to it.
Patience is bitter
But its fruit is sweet.

As for now, it's:
Go well love, Hamba kable Gatsbeni!
Have a good time and remember me
Till God us unite, Farewell.

Palesa Moriti

THULA SANA LWAM!

Thula sana lwam, Thula baba.
Hush my baby, Lullaby son.
Your father is miles away
Your granny is banned
Your grandpa has gone with the contract
Your uncle is in military
Your auntie is in detention
Your niece will be buried tomorrow
Your nephew is lost
Your cousin is invalid
Thula sana-lwam, Thula baba
Hush my baby, Lullaby son.
Listen to the crying hyenas outside
Listen to the barking of hungry dogs outside
Listen to that scream that pierces my heart
like an arrow.
Let's drink this water to survive
Maybe things will be alright
But *Thula sana lwam, Thula baba.*
Hush my baby, Lullaby son.
When will it be a family get-together.
A family reunion?
I am longing for that moment
But *Thula sana lwam, Thula baba.*
Hush my baby, Lullaby son.

Winnie Morolo

PIMVILLE, SOWETO

LOMTHWALO / notes towards a filmscript / Mothobi Mutloatse

Premise: Believe in yourself first. A short film with a single character – a girl confined to a wheel-chair in a room in the ghetto. The time is late in the afternoon . . . and all is quiet. In the girl's hands is the family photo album in which the girl is engrossed. On the window-sill is a lit candle.

Camera will fade in on girl from the outside through the old-fashioned burglar-proofing of Jabavu; thereafter a close up of the girl; pan to interior of room, very slowly to stress desolation and the sparse furniture; thereafter zoom in and out; pan the yard from the girl's shoulder and improvise along the way.

Dialogue: sometimes spoken, other times narrated briefly.

"They think I don't know . . . that they have taken my sister away from me . . . they think I am blind because I am confined to this damned wheel-chair. I don't know that they have taken my brother. They have picked up my father too, and how he did struggle. And now, they have taken my mother as well . . . Why don't they just take me along and finish me? Why don't they come for me and complete the mess they started? Why don't they come and get me and kill me? Can't they just shoot me straight and let me die? . . . And now . . . I am all by myself . . . sitting here like a pensioner and yet . . . and yet, I am only 17 . . . I am alone in a crowded city like Soweto . . . I am by myself in an over-populated world . . . I have friends who keep their friendship at arms' length . . . because I am confined to a wheel-chair . . . my boyfriend, he would rather we were just friends . . . because I am a cripple . . . he does not come often like he used to – before I got to where I am now . . . Oh, how I still miss his kisses, how he would take me in his arms, cuddle, fondle and caress me until I could not bear it any longer – oh, how I miss those moments when boys at school would twist my arm and steal kisses from me . . . I miss the times when I would run to school every morning because I had overslept . . . oh, all that has changed . . . I sleep lightly nowadays – if I sleep at all . . . I am almost awake all the time, even in my sleep . . . I miss the times when Tshidi and I would go for a swim at the Jabavu swimming pool in our bikinis bought by our boyfriends . . . but this thing! . . . this bullet that's embedded in my spinal column won't let me . . . it is jealous of me . . . it is selfish . . . it is a parasite . . . it won't let me be . . . it just will not allow me to be beautiful all over again, and run with the other girls . . . this bullet will not let me be loved by my boyfriend . . . it wants to imprison me forever . . . and yet, it doesn't love me . . . it only wants to use me – for what, I don't know . . . this thing! this bullet wants to dominate me – but I will not let it: I AM going to show it who is the boss around here . . . I won't let a silly bullet control my life up to the grave . . . I won't let it tear me apart . . . I can't stand the enforced loneliness without doing something constructive about it . . . NGEKE! NGEKE MA'AAN! Nxe . . . I must do it – now . . . do it now . . . for my sake . . . for hu-

manity's sake . . . I owe it to all people like me . . . my mother cannot be molested and humiliated in my presence like that and I not do something about it . . . NGEKE! My mother cannot be tortured for having given birth to a forceful and uncompromising child like my brother, like Tsietisi . . . oh the pain of thinking of it . . . YES! I MUST DO SOMETHING NOW!!! Before I run mad . . . I have no-one to lean on . . . nobody to help me carry this 'mthwalo that is this wheel-chair . . . maybe I should begin right away – this very moment . . . but how can I? I'm confined to this damned wheel-chair . . . maybe I should try and walk and see what happens . . . maybe I should try . . . of course, I want to walk again . . . I really want to . . . then I MUST!!

She painfully and slowly tries to raise herself from the wheel-chair, but the exercise is just too much for her and almost kills her as it involves every part of her body. Zoom in on her taut fingertips holding the chair for support, then close up to show the agony written on her face. She slumps back, with tears of pain in her eyes.

I must get up, I cannot give up so easily . . . I cannot spend the rest of my life in virtual isolation . . . I am not a caged animal . . . I too, am a human being and was born free . . . my mother needs me . . . she really needs me more than ever before . . . and I can't let her down just because of this 'mthwalo . . . I can't let a bullet bully me like this – oh Mama! . . . I can feel it in my bones . . . I can feel your spirit in my soul . . . your pain in my heart . . . I must walk . . . I must walk, Mama . . . I must walk . . . I have to, Mama . . . I have to . . . I have to walk, Mama . . .

She rises abruptly without warning, surprises herself with her latent strength and collapses headlong onto the floor, hurting her face and at the same time sending the wheel-chair almost flying . . . obviously hurt, however, she does not cry and tries to hold back the tears though the pain is stabbing her near fatality . . . but she holds on . . . she attempts getting up with the help of her hands and knees – the same knees that previously swung lifelessly . . . she is in a state of hell . . .

Oh, Mama . . . I must not give up – not now . . . I cannot go back to that wheel-chair . . . it's gone . . . it's gone . . . it's gone . . . it's gone. Mama . . . I am



Rolph Ndawo

not going to cry, Mama . . . trust in me . . . I am not going to disappoint you . . . I am going to be free once more, Mama . . . I am going to be free again, Mama . . . I cannot be a slave again, Mama . . . I was never meant to be a slave . . . I don't belong to a wheel-chair, Mama . . . I don't need the wheel-chair anymore . . . I must be free, Mama . . . I cannot be otherwise . . . look, Mama . . . look at me, Mama . . . I am going to make it . . . I-I am trying . . .

Slowly, but surely (and painfully!) she rises on her hands and knees . . .

See, Mama! . . . see me now . . . Mama, I said I would do it, Mama . . . I am going to do it, all right . . . you are going to be proud of me, Mama . . . you really are . . . I must get rid of this load on my back . . . I've got to do it for you . . . I'll lean on this wall for support . . . I'll do it for you Mama wa'm . . . pray for me . . . this is one struggle I am going to win, Mama . . . I am . . . I am going to swim again . . . run again . . . have my arm twisted again and again . . . and again . . . this struggle . . . this 'mthwalo . . . this struggle . . . this 'mthwalo . . . Haai, Mama! I'm free again . . . I am on my two feet again . . . see, Mama . . . just watch me walk . . . watch me, Mama . . . come now . . . one . . . two . . . Mama . . . three . . . four . . . Mama! Come! . . . five . . . six . . . Mama, I'm coming! . . . seven . . . eight . . . Ijoooo! . . . nine . . . Oh, Mama! . . . ten . . . Mama I have made it . . . I have got rid of the load . . .

She covers her head with her hands in a moment of ecstasy and elation, almost like the day she was born.



Rolph Ndawo

THE TAKE-OVER / Letshaba Thubela / Another chapter from his novel-in-progress I, Teacher, Humble Servant. In Chapter One – published in Staffrider No. 3 – Tshepo was the disgruntled questioner at a teachers' meeting. In Chapter Four, The Take-Over, Tshepo and his friends hit back. Thubela's hero is presented 'without make-up', and readers must make what they will of Tshepo and Co.'s convivial approach to the serious business of 'hijacking' their organization.

In the lives of teachers an uneventful period had passed drearily, but Saturday, September the 13th, was to be a great day. The day of the annual conference of the Morung-Dikgole-Masekane (MDM) Branch of the Transvaal United African Teachers' Association (T.A.U.T.A.). It was the tenth anniversary of this branch – a great occasion and a day not to be easily forgotten. Three buses were hired to ferry participants to the venue of the conference at Masekane, in the east. These buses were to leave from Morung, in the west, course their way through Dikgole, where they would pick up other teachers, and then travel all the way to Masekane.

Departure from Morung was scheduled for seven o'clock in the morning, and a few minutes before seven, they converged in large numbers to wait for the buses. The lanky, the short, the skinny and the fat, all resplendent in their uniform colours. The men wore navy blue blazers with the organization's emblem, grey flannel trousers, white shirts, navy blue ties and black shoes. The women wore white blouses and black skirts. They all appeared dignified as befitted the noble station of their profession.

They talked and laughed boisterously, the spirit of the occasion not lost on them. The buses were late but any latent irritation was quelled by the exuberant manner in which the gallant knights of the day paraded before their ladies. The tippers, as always, stood aside, looking on awkwardly at the antics of their chivalrous brothers while haggling over the augmentation for a bracer. Tshepo stood out among them like a sore thumb. He appeared disinterested, but any trained eye could have seen how he masterfully manipulated the argument through half-closed teeth.

The buses arrived a few minutes after seven, and in an atmosphere of camaraderie everyone filed into them. Twenty minutes later they rolled down toward the main street leading out of the township in the direction of Dikgole village. As the buses gained speed, so the excitement in the buses gathered momentum. From the back of the first bus, a well-worn tribal wedding song was begun by a squeaky soprano and a gruff baritone. Everybody joined in. Voices of all kinds blared forth. It was amazingly harmonious even though some voices were trying to outdo the others. The situation was very much the same in the other two buses. Tshepo and his tiptling mates sat on the back seat of the first bus. A half-full bottle of brandy stood at their feet. Their conversation was

meaningless claptrap. Suddenly, a hand pushed forward and grabbed the bottle; immediately another restrained it. The owner of the latter remonstrated querulously:

'You and I know very well the consequences of taking a lot, George, and furthermore, you and I know that you did not pop out a brass farthing towards the buying of this liquor. You and I know that you have been taking the lion's share since we started drinking.' Laughter.

'And you and I know that you have a big snout and a leaking tummy, George,' another voice mimicked. More laughter.

'And you and I know how deft your elbow is, George.' More laughter.

'And you and I know that you have short arms and long pockets George.'

This had them rolling in the aisle with mirth.

Surprisingly George was not piqued; he grinned sheepishly in embarrassment.

'Surely George, you should be planning our strategy for the conference while we attend to the more pressing matter of augmenting for another bottle,' someone added with mock seriousness.

The sing-song blared on relentlessly and at the end of every ditty a female voice, hoarse from incessant shouting, would shrill: 'Sixteen! Sixteen!' thereby indicating the end of the song. Immediately someone else launched into another ditty and the sing-song was resumed.

This went on until someone shouted that the convoy had arrived at Dikgole village. The din subsided until a suitable song heralding their arrival was found. Then it began all over again. This time the blaring and the shrieking knew no bounds. Such was the excitement of attending a T.U.A.T.A. conference.

George, Tshepo and their mates appeared to be oblivious of this excited hullabaloo. Their immediate concern was to finish off the brandy and start augmenting for another bottle. The half-full bottle went on a round of swift hard swigging, and before the bus entered the village, the empty bottle went hurtling through the window.

Hands flitted to their owners' pockets to retrieve whatever cents there were.

Poor Georgie. He hung his head in shame and studied the rubble at his feet. Tshepo regarded him thoughtfully: 'Mark my words gentlemen, I am no prophet of doom, but I tell you this, one more free-loader and we're sunk,' he said with mock resignation.

Rapturous laughter startled those seated nearby. George blushed and fidgeted nervously. He looked out of the window to hide his embarrassment.

The bus made its first stop at some shops near the entrance to the village. A few local teachers trickled in and the bus moved on. At the next stop, Tshepo, George and one of the new arrivals, approached the driver.

'We shall not be long,' George pleaded. 'It's something really serious.'

'Alright,' grunted the driver. 'Make it snappy and don't forget my wee one too.'

Tshepo winked and smiled at him, and they slunk off like greyhounds.

Though they were back on time, a few mother grundys were disgruntled.

Before the bus reached its last stop in the village, the bottle was already half-empty and the conversation of the tiptling mates had taken an earnest turn.

'You, George, make sure you sit in front in the middle, and Thabo, sit in the middle towards the right, and you Stanley, sit in the middle half-way back, and Ali will sit in the middle towards the left. Chiko and John will occupy the back seats and I'll sit in front of the M.C.' Tshepo paused. 'Every time I dis-course, ask a question, or answer a question, clap hard and long. And during nominations each of you should lift up his hand. Don't wait for someone to nominate me; do it yourselves.' He paused to speculate. 'Of course you know my worth, gentlemen. No point in haggling over that. The only reason we have to go to these lengths is because the people from Dikgole and Masekane do not know me. So it is up to you to play your cards right. You do it, we triumph. Cheers! Cabinet over all,' he concluded, taking the brandy bottle, lifting it high into the air and bringing it to his mouth. He took a hard swig at it, smarting from the burning sensation.

'Cabinet over all,' chorused the others.

The reception committee consisted of four men and three women. It was headed by the current chairman of the M.D.M. Branch, Mr Masilo. This bespectacled, wiry old gentleman, looked very much the proverbial schoolmaster. Though grey-haired he moved surprisingly swiftly for his age. The matronly old woman next to him was his chief assistant. The other members of the committee were also middle-aged or past their prime. This was the committee that was to organise events for this great day.

It was eight o'clock, and the conference was scheduled for nine. People milled around, waiting for the proceedings to begin. Tshepo and friends, in the meantime, had rushed to a nearby shebeen to while away the time.

'Ruri, this is a great day in our small

'The Chairman gave his well-prepared and well-worn speech.'

village,' the shebeen queen said enthusiastically.

'It sure is grandma. This is the tenth anniversary of our organization. Your village is lucky to host such a great event and I am sure it will be remembered a long time after we have left,' Chiko answered the auntie politely.

Drunken George complained: 'Our six rand twenty cents will make it a great day, — not this lousy, backward village.'

'Is it compulsory to pay this six rand twenty annually?' John asked.

'At the moment it seems every teacher in the Transvaal is a member of T.U.A.T.A. — whether voluntarily or by coercion, I am not sure.'

Tshepo said: 'It is not compulsory at the moment. You are not bound to be a member. T.U.A.T.A. is a teachers' organization, but it has no powers over the professional lives of its members. It is not a statutory body and no law of parliament protects it. In other words, it is not officially recognised and therefore cannot give instructions to anybody except its adherents. The only thread that holds this mighty organization together, is our irreproachable reverence for our noble calling.'

'Why is it not recognised then,' George drawled drunkenly, 'I mean, parliament could legislate or something...'

'T.U.A.T.A., this mighty organization, purporting to serve the interests of thousands of teachers all over the Transvaal, is always unsure of itself, because unlike all other representative bodies of professionals, T.U.A.T.A. lacks a professional code, a Code of Ethics.'

'What is that?' asked John.

'It is a code that governs the professional lives and general conduct of teachers. You know that it is improper and absolutely filthy for a teacher to make love to his students. This code would discourage such misdemeanours. Yet T.U.A.T.A. cannot have or enforce such a code before it is recognised by parliament.'

'It's a crying shame,' Chiko said.

'Gentlemen, so much for the Code of Ethics. It's already five minutes to time up, let's hurry it up lest we be late,' said Stanley, getting up.

At the main entrance to the conference hall Tshepo and his friends received programmes from the doorkeepers. Though written on cheap paper, they looked impressive because of the meticulous care that went into designing the pictures that adorned them.

Seating himself as planned, Tshepo opened his programme and studied it.

10TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY
OF THE MDM BRANCH
(T.U.A.T.A.)

- 9h00 - 9h30 : Opening — from the chaplain's pulpit
- 9h30 - 10h30 : Opening remarks and welcoming speech — M.C.
- 10h30 - 12h00 : Annual Secretarial

Report

- 12h00 - 14h00 : Lunch Lunch Lunch
- 14h00 - 17h00 : Symposium: Theme — *Teachers, Students and their Inter-relationship in the Present Era of Conflict*
- 17h00 - 17h30 : Refreshments Refreshments Refreshments
- 17h30 - 18h30 : From the Treasury : Financial Report
- 18h30 - 19h30 : Elections Elections Elections
- 19h30 - 20h00 : Refreshments Dinner Refreshments
- 20h00 - 22h00 : Opening Gala Tenth Anniversary — Music & Dancing
- 22h00 - 00h00 : Beauty Contest and Closing
- 00h00 - 01h00 : Music Dancing Music

AU REVOIR! BON VOYAGE!
ADIEU! AVE!

Tshepo looked at his watch: it was exactly nine o'clock.

The executive committee trooped into the hall and took their seats up front at the special table reserved for them. None of them seemed to Tshepo to be less than fifty years of age.

'Bony rags and stuffed bags,' Tshepo observed cruelly.

When everyone was seated the chairman, Mr Masilo, wiry and bent albeit sprightly of disposition, stood up and declared the conference open. Having done so, he called on the chaplain to lead the devotion. The grandfather chaplain delivered his fire and brimstone sermon in a shaky monotone, and eventually asked for the blessing of the Lord.

As the chairman rose to welcome the guests, and introduce his executive committee, Tshepo observed the grotesque spectacle the executive committee presented.

'Tired old men and frumpy old women, vying with each other to appear youthful and vigorous. How grim,' he thought. 'This setting is really sick. The rest of them are virtually tottering on the verge of moribund decay. I wonder who would be so cruel as to elect them for another term of office.'

The deliberations of the morning went on uneventfully. The chairman gave his well-prepared and well-worn speech. At the end he made a poor joke which was followed by an embarrassing silence.

The secretary rose majestically, but gave an uninspiring report. Repetitive in content it lacked imagination and lustre in style and language. Tshepo caught a word or two, but the rest of the report went by unheard.

After lunch everyone returned to the hall for the symposium. The chairman, Mr Masilo, rose to open the symposium: 'Ladies and gentlemen,' he began. 'For many years people have debated over this intricate theme — *Teachers, students and their interrelationship* — differing only in the periods of time in

which they find themselves.' He paused, took out a pocket handkerchief and mopped his brow.

'What then do we understand by this theme in relation to our own time?' He paused again. 'Firstly, a teacher is a servant of the people, but more important than that, he is leader of the people, of his own community. As a leader, teacher should set an example. People and students emulate whatever the teacher does. It is, of course, unfortunate that today we find students who refuse to obey teachers. What makes them insubordinate? we may ask ourselves. Students pelt us with stones, swear at us and generally harass us. Where is the fault? Students refuse to write examinations, come and go from school as they please. Where does the fault lie? My contention, ladies and gentlemen, is that the fault lies with us. We have been taken in by clichés like: "Spare the rod and develop an individual." The truth is, ladies and gentlemen, "spare the rod and spoil the child." Look at what sparing the rod has done. The very individuals it has developed are burning property, looting shops and generally causing havoc.' He paused. 'We must take our children in hand and show them the correct way of growing up. As for bullies, we must put them in their place. We cannot allow our children to walk all over us, can we? It behoves us to set the example too, for children will never respect intellectual or moral cripples. Let us refrain from frequenting places of evil. The place of the Lord has all the entertainment a human being may need. Spiritual, physical and mental pleasures are also found in the house of the Lord.' He paused. 'Set the example and our battle is half-way won.'

Sitting down, he announced: 'The theme is open to discussion.'

Hands shot up from all directions. The old man took his time in selecting the people whom he wished to speak. Almost all those he selected, concurred with his version of events. Only a few differed or dissented, but these were not coherent enough to detract from what the chairman had said.

'It is now time for questions and answers,' the chairman announced.

To the question — what is to be done in extremely unruly situations, the chairman invariably answered: the students need firm discipline. 'As for the tsotsi element,' he thundered, 'don't waste your time, the police are there to take care of them.'

The elderly members dominated the symposium until the chairman relented and, for the first time, allowed a young member of the audience to speak. It was Tshepo.

'Tshepo... Tsh—e-e-p-o-o'. They shouted from all corners of the hall. When the shouts died down Tshepo began his discourse:

'Thank you mister master of ceremonies, honourable ladies and gentlemen. I wish us to go back to our theme

for the day: Teachers, students and their interrelationship in the present era of conflict. This has been clearly explained by the chairman and I agree wholeheartedly with him, when he says the relationship between teacher and student is not what it is supposed to be. However, I beg to differ from the chairman as to the causes of this conflict.' He pretended to study the notes on the blotter in front of him, then continued: 'The causes are not as have been defined. Neither are they as easily surmountable as they appear to be. To clamp down on students without trying to find out in depth what their dissatisfaction is about, is an exercise in futility.' He was warming to his subject. 'Dictatorship has never brought stability. Neither has it been able to quell insurrection, nor has it been able to serve as a bulwark against anarchy. Iron-handed dictatorship will only suppress the dissatisfaction for a little while, but will not get rid of it.' He paused. 'We need to be objective when we try to look into the troubles and conflicts besetting our modern student. As teachers we must adjust ourselves to the fast-changing social and cultural outlook of our students. We must jettison any ox-wagon or Rip van Winkle ideas we may still be harbouring and come to grips with what is troubling our students. Our objectivity should, however, not be without sensitivity because students are as human and as passionate as you and I.' His eyes travelled over the heads of the audience, then returned to the chairman. 'Only in part do I agree with the chairman that weak teachers, with weak personalities, are to blame. They certainly are a contributory factor, but they are not wholly responsible for the discontent. It should be clearly understood that by weak teachers with weak personalities, I speak not only of intellectual and moral cripples; I also refer to our lily-livered brethren, the fence sitters. This last lot is the most reprehensible of the three groups and the one that is largely to blame for any stigma that may be attached to our good name.' He paused, reflected a moment, then went on: 'The turmoil in which the students are embroiled, stems from a deeper-seated resentment than one imagines.' With a knitted brow he continued, 'You do, of course, remember that just recently the students boycotted classes, demanding that Bantu Education be abolished before they would return to school. This was refused by the authorities. What is that refusal, if not a fertile seed bed for anarchy and destruction?' he asked reflectively. 'We should wake up to our responsibilities. Our duty is not to punish the innocent or exonerate the guilty. Our duty, as men and women of the noble profession, is to restore sanity.' A deafening applause lasted for a few seconds. Then he continued:

'Let us take it upon ourselves to help restore justice. Gathered here, we may be the proverbial drop in the ocean, but we do have a mother body to whom we

owe our unshakeable allegiance. Long live T.U.A.T.A.!' he shouted.

'Long live T.U.A.T.A.! Long live T.U.A.T.A.!' Everyone joined in spontaneously.

After a feeble attempt to recapture the show which failed dismally, the chairman looked at the audience uncertainly. Then he announced:

'Our time is almost up. We may as well go for refreshments.'

They rose and left the hall.

For refreshments, George went for a bottle of brandy, and now the epicureans were gathered once more, chattering and drinking.

'Let's be quick boys. We have fifteen minutes only, and hey, Tshepo, well done baby, well done,' said Chiko.

'You did a fantastic job boy, a Martin Luther King incarnate. You should have seen yourself, boy,' said John, awed.

'I thought you were running for the presidency of the States,' added Stanley.

'We're late, let's go,' muttered Tshepo, highly flattered.

The treasurer, a gaunt old man, handed each member a typewritten financial statement of the Branch, then made an elaborate display of his honesty as he read it out. He thumped himself on the chest and said: 'Not once has a single cent been missing or gone unaccounted for.'

Wild applause followed, and people said what a wonderful treasurer the Branch had.

The chairman, his ego and confidence once again restored, launched into eulogies on himself and his team of dedicated men and women.

The time for electing new office-bearers had now come. Tshepo was shivering to his very bowels. He knew the reputation of the incumbent chairman, and the events preceding this moment had unnerved him terribly.

What if he was nominated then slaughtered mercilessly? What if he was not nominated at all?

'I am a newcomer, it does not matter whether I am defeated or not nominated at all,' he consoled himself.

He peered over the heads to get a glimpse of his friends but he could find none of them. He needed them, he needed assurance, but none was available.

'Have they deserted me?' He shuddered at the thought. 'Could they? No, never. If they have, I'll take it like a man,' he mumbled to himself.

Before the elections started, the chairman paraded around the stage, trying to show everybody his worth and his greatness. This palavering also unsettled Tshepo.

Then the actual moment came. The Executive Committee formally disbanded and the Returning Officer took his position next to the portable writing

board that had been brought to the hall for this purpose.

'We shall now start,' announced the grey-headed gentleman. 'First, we shall elect the chairman. We need three names to be nominated for this position. The candidate that polls the highest number of votes becomes the chairman. The one with the second highest number of votes, automatically becomes the vice chairman as is stipulated in our constitution,' he concluded.

'The youth don't stand a chance,' thought George, 'this self-opinionated rooster will see to that. I'm damn sure.'

'Your nominations please?' enthused the Returning Officer, excitedly strutting about the stage while looking for a hand he found favourable.

The mood of the elections caught on, and everybody craned, pushed and strained in an attempt to get a better view of the proceedings.

'Yes?' he said pointing at an old haggard hand that looked as if it would squeak if its owner bent it sharply.

'I beg to nominate Mr Masilo,' said a surprisingly forceful voice.

'Any seconder?' the Returning Officer asked. 'Any seconder, Mr Masilo is the immediate past chairman. Stand up, let them see you sir, some of the members may not know your name.'

Mr Masilo stood up, and immediately there was a large mixture of boos and secondings. His name went up on the board and Mr Masilo genuflected gracefully before he sat down.

The Returning Officer strutted about as never before as if encouraged by the nomination of this particular gentleman. 'Another name!' he hollered.

Carefully he chose a hand, pointed at it and said, 'Yes?'

'I beg to nominate that gentleman over there, I don't know his name.' The old lady pointed in the opposite direction to Tshepo.

Tshepo's heart sank further. He was not going to be nominated after all.

'The gentleman in the white jacket,' said the lady.

A not-so-youthful gentleman stood up. He had participated remarkably well during the symposium.

'Yes, that's him!' cried the old lady.

'Seconded . . . se-c-c-con-d-e-e-d!' shouted the audience.

When the din died down the Officer asked without zest: 'What's your name?'

'Andrew, Andrew Mokone,' replied the nominee.

His name was added to the one on the board.

'Any other name?' the Officer asked indifferently.

'Yes?' He pointed to a dwarfish old man submerged in the buxomness of the ladies sitting on either side of him.

The old man struggled out of his fleshy bonds and stood erect. Even then, he was no taller than the tallest seated member of the audience.

'I nominate that gentleman who gave us the last discourse of the symposium,'

'The people were enraged. One young lady rudely ordered him to add again.'

he said in an effeminate voice.

'Who?' You mean the chairman, sir?' asked the Officer.

'You know very well who I mean.' There was now an edge of annoyance in his voice. 'You know very well that the ex-chairman has already been nominated. I nominate that young man, Tshepo, if I am not mistaken.'

This hit Tshepo like a thunderbolt. Stupified, he stood up, and like an automaton, moved within vision of the small man.

'Yes, that's him! That's him!' cried the old man with glee.

'Seconded . . . se-e-e-c-o-n-d-e-c-d, young b-l-o-o-d, y-o-u-n-g . . . b-l-o-o-d,' they shouted.

When the din died down the Returning Officer made a point of showing his contempt for Tshepo, before asking him who he was. Even after hearing the nominee's name, he dragged his feet to the board and wrote it in a scrawly handwriting.

'The nominees will leave the hall so that we can vote for the chairman and his vice-chairman,' announced the Returning Officer.

The three left the hall. The one in front, the immediate past chairman, with misgivings; the one in the middle, Andrew, with hope; and the last one, Tshepo, in triumph.

Outside the auditorium the three stood awkwardly together.

'Why do they still bother old men,' complained Mr Masilo. 'They should be giving young men like you a chance to develop your potentials. With us old crocks, it's a waste of time.'

Tshepo and Andrew regarded him incredulously.

'He took part whole-heartedly,' thought Andrew. 'He could have declined the nomination if he means what he says. I suspect he fears a humiliating drubbing.'

Mr Masilo sweated profusely.

'Anything wrong sir?' Andrew asked earnestly. 'You don't seem to be well.'

'No, I am alright. Nothing wrong. Old age I suppose.'

They then let him alone and talked to one another.

Inside the hall, something unprecedented was happening at the instigation of the Returning Officer; 'As this is the tenth anniversary,' he said, 'we shall start by voting for the name at the top, and then proceed down to the name at the bottom.'

'Boo . . . boo . . . boo . . . b-o-o-o-o' the audience chorused. 'Nothing doing, nothing doing.' They stamped their feet as they sang in a jerky sing-song.

'Alright! Alright! Ladies and gentlemen,' pleaded the Officer, 'I'll do as you wish.'

The stomping and the booing then simmered down.

'Those who say Mr Morloug should be the chairman please raise your right hands,' he commanded.

It seemed as if not one hand remain-

ed down. After taking the counts from his assistants and adding them up, the Returning Officer walked over to the board and wrote 358 after Tshepo's name.

The people were enraged. Some threatened the Officer with violence. One young lady rudely ordered him to add again. He peered into his memo pad for a second, then erased the 358 after Tshepo's name, and in its place wrote 578.

The wild cheering lasted for a couple of minutes. Then Andrew polled three hundred and fifty one votes.

Mr Masilo's turn came. Though the hall was bare of hands the officer wrote 353 after his name. The pandemonium that followed lasted a full fifteen minutes. The Returning Officer was pelted with mineral water tins, orange peels, peach pips and many other missiles. He was ordered off and a new officer was installed.

'Those who say Mr Masilo should be the chairman, please raise your right hands,' he said.

Steadily hands went up one by one. There was no sign of intimidation on either side, yet on the final count, Mr Masilo polled a mere thirty votes.

A year later, through a window to yesterday one could see why Mr Masilo had polled such a low vote: His over-zealous supporter, the Returning Officer, had ruined his chances.

Tshepo and Andrew entered the hall to thunderous applause. Mr Masilo never bothered to return. He had got the bad news from the fleeing Returning Officer.

The matter of the chairman and the vice chairman settled, the elections of the other office bearers were swift and amicable. Only one member of the old Executive Committee found his way onto the new one. He was, of course, the gaunt old man, the likeable treasurer, Mr Mosupi. He was entering his tenth term of office.

The Returning Officer then assumed the duties of the master of ceremonies. This anomaly was caused by the fact that the former Executive Committee, having been so long in office, did not see the need of appointing a disinterested party to conduct its affairs especially on the days when elections would take place. It was also caused by the fact that the Branch's constitution had no clause that provided for a caretaker Executive Committee.

The Returning Officer swore in the new Executive Committee and asked the new chairman, Tshepo, to say a few words.

He rose to uproarious applause: 'I'd like to thank the master of ceremonies,' he began, 'for affording me this opportunity to say a few words to you. Ladies and gentlemen, what can I say to you,' he choked with emotion. 'Words fail me. My gratitude to you cannot be expressed in mere words. My committee and I are your servants and we shall endeavour to serve you to the best of our

abilities. We look forward to building up this Branch from its present state of obscure mediocrity until it is one revered in the country. Thank you ever so much.' They applauded enthusiastically.

He handed the microphone back to the master of ceremonies and whispered a few words into his ear. The master of ceremonies grinned and nodded approval.

'The chairman wishes to thank you once more,' began the master of ceremonies. 'He hopes and wishes the best for every one of you. The chairman has also one little request to make. He and his executive committee wish to meet with the members of the out-going committee over dinner this evening. A special table shall be prepared for this purpose. Now we shall move to where we had our lunch today. Thank you.'

They rose and left the hall.

Tshepo went to the master of ceremonies and said: 'Thank you sir, thank you very much. From now on, Mr . . .

'Ngomane.'

'Thank you. From now on Mr Ngomane, I'll be greatly honoured if you would run this show. Don't depend on me doing it, this territory is yours and I am sure you have your bearings right.'

'Thank you Mr Chairman, it will be an honour. I am overwhelmed,' said the new master of ceremonies.

'Okay, see you then.' And Tshepo was gone.

By 19h00 all the guests had taken their seats in the dining hall. Up front, at a well-decorated table, sat the very important personalities: the out-going executive committee and the new executive committee. Seats at this table were occupied regardless of seniority. Tshepo had chosen a seat next to his secretary, a young lady, about his own age, called Mary. Everyone was engaged in conversation with his neighbour, and Tshepo had Mary in stitches with his mildly ribald humour.

The meal was a gourmet's dream and everybody ate with relish, except Mr Masilo who nibbled at his food and chased it around his plate disinterestedly.

'I do hope that we can rely on you people for assistance with our forthcoming work. It is not going to be easy and we'd appreciate it if you could give us a hand here and there,' Tshepo said. Everybody immediately became attentive.

'What assistance are you referring to? I should have known you'd start ordering us about so soon,' said Mr Masilo, aggrieved.

The frumpy old lady next to him nudged him and whispered: 'Don't spoil the dinner Mr Masilo. The young man is only asking.'

The old man shrugged and started pushing his food around the plate again.

'I only mean that we'd like to have the Branch's assets. Bank books, secretarial materials including machines and

KATLEHONG

so on,' said Tshepo defensively.

'The bank books are with me,' said the treasurer apologetically.

'You can have the minute book and the rest from me, but don't count on the machines because the Branch has none. I have been using my own machine to type circulars and correspondence, and I have been cyclostyling them on Mr Masilo's own machine,' smirked the former secretary triumphantly.

'You mean the Branch has no machine?' Mary asked incredulously.

'No!' Mr Masilo said vehemently.

'But you have so much money,' Mary said.

'It is our duty to look after the money of the Branch, not to spend it extravagantly, madam,' the treasurer said.

Tshepo was attentive to what was

being said. 'So,' he thought, 'this group of antiquated administrators has been putting all they could into the Branch. Working selflessly on the wrong side of the facts towards a wrong goal. No wonder they chose to hold the elections immediately after the reading of the financial statement. Getting money out of this chap—' he eyed the treasurer slyly, '— is going to be an up-hill battle.'

'Spending money on things like machines is a good investment for the Branch,' Mary was saying to the treasurer, 'it is not extravagance. I can't see any reason why I should use my own machine when the Branch can afford to buy its own. You said the Branch has seven thousand rand in its coffers, so how can spending a hundred rand or two on a valuable machine be an extravagance?' She was riled.

'I worked for nine years to put that money where it is now, and I won't stand by idly watching the lousy lot of you frittering it away like peanuts,' barked Mr Masilo.

'Your tongue Mr Masilo, your tongue,' Tshepo reprimanded.

'Who the hell do you think you are talking to!' The old man glared at him. 'What the hell do you think you are! You . . . you . . .' He stood up, smouldering. Everybody's attention had been drawn to the table by this outburst. Seeing the old man everybody stiffened. For a second, he stood there bristling, then without looking back he stomped out of the dining hall.

In the deepest recesses of his mind Tshepo could hear the oft-repeated words ringing clearly: 'How embarrassing.' He smiled to himself.

THE SILENT LISTENER / Chidi Wa Phaleng

I hear voices

Echoing throughout the dark forests of Africa

I hear voices

Urging the plough-drawing oxen in the fields

I hear voices

Chanting strange litanies and incantations at sunset

I still hear voices

That were swallowed by the gurgling foreign seas with *The Mendi*

I still hear voices

That turned sighs in Rivonia

I still hear voices

That sang from a dock in Pretoria

I still hear voices

Screaming from dark dungeons on a cold island

I still hear voices

That rose with black smoke in Soweto

I still hear voices

Groaning blood-curdling death dirges beyond the Northern Borders

I hear too many

voices . . . voices . . . voices . . .

In my foul and bitter life.

NOMVUZU / Chidi Wa Phaleng

Somewhere

In the misty mountain gorges

Of forest covered Macgumeni

Somewhere

In the mysterious land of

Sandile and Velile and Mxolisi

Where now hails Maxhobayakhawuzela

Somewhere

Not far from where are perched

White concrete block houses and white rondavels

That are mourning Ginsberg

Somewhere

Beneath the gaunt and rugged hills of Matshaweni

Where solemnly winds the seaward-bound Buffalo

There oh, my brother

Lies a bright and beautiful jewel —

A rare breed in the house of Mgijima —

In patient wait

To be claimed

By no one save I.

I hail thee Radebe!

Your favourite daughter

Shall not miss thee in these mine arms.

MESSAGES IN QUOTES

General reading makes a man's knowledge wide and blunt, whereas specific reading makes it sharp and narrow.

Moloto wa Moloto

Most of the world's governmental systems are nothing but poisonous sugar-coated pills which are daily undergoing change of external colours and labels in order to suit the current market demands of democracy, with the same constituent formula of ingredients regardless of the consumer's high rate of mortality.

Moloto wa Moloto

Nostalgia, like cancer, is one of those dangerous incurable maladies which cause a man's mental health to deteriorate. Unfortunately the only way of healing it is to risk your physical health by treading the soil of your original roots, and falling into the hands of the uncompromising powers-that-be, who caused your nostalgia in the first place.

Moloto wa Moloto

Slavery can never be totally eradicated. You can only change its forms: say, from political to economic; from religious to social; even to psychological and academic forms — depending on the circumstances prevailing.

Moloto wa Moloto

POEMS / Cedric C. Thobega, Joanmariae Fubbs, Bafana Buthelezi, G. L. Hill

RADIPHUKA / Cedric C. Thobega

He takes his dry bones and throws them
 On the floor; his head sad-looking;
 He wears a hat made of skin and sits –
 When he sits on the floor, he whistles a tune;
 And suddenly – birds gather by his side –
 He takes off his leather coat and sings
 A song that worries the sick woman;
 Staring at his dry bones, he speaks to them –
 He calls – 'Sejaro, Tshwene, Moremogolo!'
 When he calls, I see snakes coming to him;
 The black mamba, the cobra, all creeping
 Slowly towards the witchdoctor, bravely:
 He spits saliva on his hand and looks at the
 Sick men and women – his eyes moving
 Like those of an angry chameleon;
 The yellow-and-black python moves around
 The hut of the witchdoctor; looking for
 The one who is about to die, it moves
 Towards the man with a black shirt and
 Sits by him; the poor man shivers with fright,
 He gasps with difficulty and collapses –
 But the witchdoctor RADIPHUKA stands up
 And smears the saliva of the beautiful-looking
 Python on the body. When he came, he could not walk;
 But now, the man has been cured. He goes home –
 RADIPHUKA wears the feathers of a peacock on his head;
 He sleeps with them, on his head; he eats with them,
 On his head. He never takes them off at any time;
 When it rains, he gets angry, he goes outside the hut;
 Angrily, he points at the clouds, with a horn in his mouth.
 That horn of the future, the horn of a wildebeest –
 Ah . . . that is the miracle of RADIPHUKA:
 That African witchdoctor who stays at the lands:
 Looking at the bones, he can see your enemy –
 Looking at the bones, he can see your future.
 The funniest part is when he groans: that
 Shows that he is beaten: you will have to die –
 Because that rusty poison you ate from that food
 On Sunday, from your girlfriend, will have done its work:
 You die instantly, without question.

HOSTAGES OF HATE / Joanmariae Fubbs

Ulu-lu-lu-lu-lu-lu-lu-lu-lu-lu.
 The chant echoes its
 Pulsating rhythm,
 But in the vanguard
 The tune of death comes
 Drumming, drumming, doom.

Shots. Stampede. Panic.
 The mob goes beserk
 Pandemonium
 Then desolation.
 Death is the victor.

Snapshot in surprise
 His buckle glinting
 Yesterday's courage.
 His white teeth etched
 In his chocolate face.

A cross glittered on
 His naked chest. Blood
 And flies. Yet the face
 Looked at death serene.
 He believed in God.

MY SMILE / Bafana Buthelezi

My smile
 is just a mask over my face:
 my true self is a countenance of anger
 rooted in black blood.

I am the Black Soul
 habitant in the land of my fathers
 resisting inroads into my integrity
 from the ignoble foreign entities in my midst.

I stay in a house
 roofed by gun muzzles counting our heads:
 so Sharpeville came to pass,
 then Soweto thundered over –
 but still everyday I swear:
 To the last man I will resist,
 strong in my solidarity.

I walk on streets tarred with black blood
 with gun muzzles jutting in the corners:
 for me the white world is a valley of death
 and I walk in the valley of death
 with the courage of my Power –
 the Black Soul's dynamic energy.

NEW DAWN / G. L. Hill

Light
 Filtering through incalculable dust particles,
 Dust
 Hugging the horizon like a shroud
 Lending an air of mystery to an arid land.

Sky
 Washed with new-minted colours
 Spreading improbable pink fingers towards infinity,
 Defining the clear, unbroken line
 Between earth and universe.

Blue-purple furze-veldt
 Covering the wasteland
 Blanketing
 The aridity beneath its mantle.

Early Man was here.
 Staring
 With unseeing eyes
 at
 Another new beginning.
 Starting here
 to
 Mould the tools of knowledge.

Cool, grey mist-haze
 Now
 Hiding History's secrets
 in
 The Land that does not speak.

The Silent Land
 Spanning the silence of centuries
 Implacable.
 Waiting.
 Refusing
 To render assistance.

Man's life-force rising
 To describe its interminable arc
 Heralding
 A New Dawn.

A New Day
 Beginning.

Nhlanhla Paul Maake / FOUR POEMS

JUNE SIXTEENTH

the sixteenth
day from the first
after the midwife
safely delivered
the deformed child
paralysing my body
with cold

the month brought
the dawn of the day
that levelled my thinking
like the Russian and Cuban
tanks on the plains
and sands of Ethiopia
and pierced my heart
like the French and Belgian
bullets in the thickets
of forested Zaire

my bones cracked
when i beheld
the salty tears
flowing down
the widowed woman's
cheeks

the sobs of the mother
left childless
by stray soldiers' guns
tore the skies
and rose higher
than the tip
of Kilimanjaro
when she beheld
the mau-mau
and never protested

the sixth day
from the tenth
in the sixth
month from the last
rose with peace
that never was to see
sunset
like the *Titanic*
that left its native shores
for a destination unknown
beyond the tumultuous
salty sea

nineteen hundreds
seven tens
and six people and many more
cried louder than the
echoes of machine guns
and their tears
flooded our hopes
like the falls
of 'Musi-wa-Thunya'
and left us the remnants
of the kingdom of Zimbabwe.

Nhlanhla Paul Maake

ACROSS THE RIVER KEI

i have lived
and hunted
in these forests
and seen trees
rise from seeds since
here i first hunted

my marrow
cracks with ice
and the leopards
of the trees
hunt me
in light
and darkness

i would leave
my bows and arrows,
take a dive into
the river Kei
and drown, for crocodiles
to sup on the hunter's
bones, but this river i would not
cross to be devoured
by fangs of hunger

Nhlanhla Paul Maake

OLD MAD LOSER'S CONCERTO

i was scorched
but something deep
in me was touched
and will never sleep

nothing is incurable
while ambition survives
everything is endurable
when courage revives

the labyrinth may be ramified
in many ways
and mountains magnified
while we drink the days

Nhlanhla Paul Maake

INFORMER

happy birthday
star of the auction
block
born in the ghetto
bred in the brick
and mortar pillars

who can forget
your ubiquitous
ear
that can hear
whispers in a
tremor

none
none so dull as
to miss your forked
eyes
that cut through the dark
to look at things
they cannot
see

peverted seller
of human
souls
diseased with deceit

feet
nimble with tales
and mouth talented
in lies

in darkness
your shadow
becomes blacker than
blackness
while your purchased
soul
remains pale

Nhlanhla Paul Maake

ZIMELELA PHEFUNULO WAMI

Enogazi intokazi kaShenge
Umuntu wamancoko amnandi.
Umuntu wamahlaya.
Ubungahleka kuze kuvele
Elomhlathi ngimfunge uNomasiliva
ka Munukwa cse-Sifuleni-kwaGwegwazangene,
Wayenenhliziyi emhlophe uDummie.
Enomoya wobu ngewele
Ezithobile elokhu azalwa
Wayethanda ukwaneliswa
Izethembiso ezinezinhloso
Ezizulile izinhloso lezi!

Enogazi intokazi kaShenge
Wayenemibono ejiyile
Enesiphiwo esingandile
Ubeyi funda ivaliwe okaShenge.
Emhlophe ngebala
Elingene nje; ngesidumbu.
Emzimba ubushelelezi
Okwebhodlela
Ebabazeka ngobuhle
Ebabazeka ngobuntombi
Esilondolozile isimilo
Bengithatheka ukumamatheka kwathe.
Encomeka ngolimi.
Eziqhenya ngobuzwe.

Wayethandeka uDummie
Eyimbali kwelase Bhodwe
Kungelula ukuvalelisa
Edle ngokuphilela amaqiniso.
Enombuzo onesidingo
uMuntu wezilokhotho
Enensosha ka Thembelihle.
Kanti ma eseluleka
Bengikhumbuza uNcineleni wascBova
uNobuhle wemvelo
Empumalanga Tilasivali.

Kunendawo engiyaye
Ngimkhumbulele yo na
Ngihlala ngiyiphindaphinda
Ngamehlo nange nhliziyi
Kepha uzike umphefumulo wami,
Ngikhumbule sisqhettha sobabili
Ezitha ngamini zozwelo lukaBukeza.

'Ngithanda ukukufaka ugqozi,
Futhi ekusebenziseni isiphiwo sakho.
Ngempela unobuciko ekwenzeni,
Into inkondlo yakho.
Ongibhalele yona
Ingenza ngizibone ngikubona ngamehlo.
Ngingazi noma lokho
Okubhale lapho kuyo;
UKubhale ngoba kuyizifiso
Ezisekujuleni kwenhliziyi yakho na?
Noma kungoba uvivinya ubuciko bakho na?
Uma kungoba kusekujuleni kwayo
Ngiyethembisa ukuthi
Nami lezizimpande zothando
Ngiyozimbela ngizijulise
Kweyami inhliziyi.
Kodwa uma uviva ubuciko bakho
Ngiyakuhatalisela ngithi;
HALALA NGOBUCIKO BAKHO
MFOKA SHENGE!'

Ngi yaye ngiwelamele,
Lomlimela lezizimpande zezimbali
Zika Bukeza
Eziqhakaza ubusika nehlobo

Lapho zisabalele khona
Ngenkulu intokozo zizimelele
Ngokujula kwazo ku Ncineleni wami
Kepha zicenge uwuphendule
Umphefumulo
Ungikhumbule
Ungikhumbule.

Ngala maqiniso-ke
Mntaka Shenge
Engiwaqophile ngawe
Ngiwalumbanisa naka Ncineleni
Ngifuzise ngawo
Mntaka baba nomama
Ngokuzinikela ngiqhoshe njalo
Ngikhumbule ukuba
Ngizelwe nani e Afrika
Nginobuchopho obukhanyayo
Noma ngingenqinamba
Eshiya umbuzo emqondweni wami
Ukuba kazi labewuhlala khona.

Sengofica bani?
Avale leligebekazi lesikhala
Sokungikhonza kwakho
Ubungikhonzile
Ngikhonzile
Ungithandela noThandazile
Ubungazisa ngikwazisa
Ngiyakwazisa – Dummie.

Ngu-Lizwi B. S. Buthelezi,
Dundee

WANTED

A thousand and one thoughts are housed
In my tiny mind.
Now and then I look outside
To make sure they are not coming.

Heavy clouds deprive me
Of the sight of twinkling stars.
I become drowsy
But know I shall not fall asleep.
They went to my work
But I was not in.

I think of those who crossed the border;
I think of their parents and friends
who may never see them again.
The world is too small for anybody
To hide away from miseries.

Away they took Bra Mof
And Brother Willie and Bra Joe
And it's already been a year and many months
And they have never returned them
If ever they will.
I wait for them to pitch up
And when they are through with me
I may not return.

Bulara Diphoto
Kroonstad

STAFFRIDER WORKSHOP

Es'kia (Zeke) Mphahlele / WORKSHOP 1 / SOME GUIDELINES FOR THE SHORT STORY

This is the first in a series of 'workshop' articles which will be written for Staffrider by Es'kia Mphahlele. It was originally used as a working paper at the PEN writers' workshop held on the Reef 25 - 31 October.

1. A short story, like a poem, grows from a specific experience. This is going to be its theme. But it is not the raw experience that is going to be the reason for writing a story. *The writer feels an inner compulsion to explore the MEANING of the experience.* This is why he sets out to work on a story (or a poem or play or some other piece of imaginative writing). A woman dies in a train compartment. This is the raw experience. This death may touch you in a way other deaths have not. Because of certain circumstances surrounding it. She may have been a great eater and did not bother about the fat that weighed on a heart; she may have been going to collect or claim a large sum of money she suspected someone else had willed to her; there may be a special relationship between her death and other people connected with her. What interests the writer are the whys and hows and what was and may be relating to the experience.

2. An experience may be a happening and therefore dramatic. Either the writer can be imagined to have been involved in it or to have been a witness to it, or he may have been told about it in a manner that struck him. In any event, the incident must be the kind that touched off emotion/s in the writer enough for him to want to write about it or create a story out of it. He/she has to feel *passionately* about it. Or else the urge to write a short story or sketch may be touched off by a strong emotion which may be a general condition. The author then has to invent a dramatic incident to explore the original emotion. The incident will then give the emotion a focus, a definition.

For the writer of these notes, the idea of a story has always been provoked by a dramatic incident — any one of the following kinds: (a) one that he was witness to or heard about, or read about in a newspaper; (b) one that he was personally involved in. News items in the papers yield an abundant supply of incidents worth exploring in a story.

3. Exploring? Yes. Our intention is to explore the *meaning* of a situation or experience. Its meaning usually comes out in relation to other incidents or in relation to the people involved and to others outside of it. It is not enough to *report* in a story that a family is being evicted from a township house under the pretext that the rent is in arrears; the fraud that leads to the incident. It is certainly a happening worth considering for a short story. But to merely report it, however brilliantly and powerfully, is to treat it the way a magazine or newspaper writer does. It remains a piece of

reportage.

4. First, the fiction writer has to feel *passionately* about the incident. Second, the writer has to feel compelled to explore the meaning or significance of the happening as it affects the actors of the drama now. Often the incident may in itself appear trivial and yet touch off powerful emotions which we feel compelled to explore. The significance of the happening may be seen in relation to future time or to the larger community. We explore it in order to discover a meaning or possible meaning of the incident that took place and the emotions it could possibly provoke. We have to spend time observing and imagining what a happening can possibly mean. This is the writer's *intention*. Because a short story is complete and self-contained even in the few pages that it takes to tell it, *we must be quite clear in our minds what we intend to explore what we want to reveal concerning the incident and its associated emotions — clear even before we commit the story to the written word.* After reading the story, remember, our readers are bound to ask *What is the point of the story?* For obvious reasons, this is a question readers never ask of a journalist. A journalist has to be factual. If he reports that six persons were murdered in one incident we have no right to suspect that he is trying to shock us. But if a fiction writer dwelt on the details of the killing spree, blood and all, and failed to move us by exploring the implications, the emotions surrounding the incident and initial horror, its significance, we would have no use for his story.

A man and a woman are charged in court with child abuse. They often tied the child to a bedpost or locked her up in a room for hours. An ugly incident. We all know that. It is for the news hawk to tell us what happened, where, how, who were involved. It is for us as fiction writers to dig deeper with our imagination. It is bad news all right, but what does it mean? How does the couple live? Maybe for some reason the child reminded them of their own childhood. Maybe she was an illegitimate child. Questions like these, and more, should bother us. We must explore human emotions and behaviour in depth. But, in the short story, we have to do it *with economy of language.*

5. *Resonance:* It is the meaning/s of an incident and its relation to the people involved and/or others or to the larger community and how we work towards it on the written page that produce the echoes or resonances or vibrations that are experienced during and after reading a good story. These

echoes or resonances are experienced in the reader's mind as he responds to the story. We use certain techniques to create resonances. An incident, trivial or big, may not move the writer to the extent that he would want to explore it. He must drop it and wait for another or go down the list of possible themes in his notebook. Usually the happening nags you for a long time, almost crying out for attention. Because a writer is forever a puzzled, enquiring person, wandering about the whys, the hows, the meaning of it all. When it nags you like this, it is most often a sure thing that you will use it. The work itself entails the use of the imagination: you need a story around the event; you invent it: how could it have started? What attitudes and emotions could be involved? Could the event come at the beginning of the story and then move on from there according to the consequences imagined? Or could it be the climax, i.e. the incident towards which everything else in the story is driving and so come at the end? Or could you start with it on paper and then work by flashback, telling the story that led to such an end? These are three main possibilities.

As to which to choose, you should be guided by your *intention*, the point you want to make; what it is you want to reveal or throw light on; the meaning you want to explore. You may not always arrive at a specific meaning. Indeed we should not, as writers, pretend that we have all the solutions. A pretentious writer is useless. In a subtle way, the resonances or echoes or vibrations help to suggest several possible meanings leading from the main point you have made or spotlighted. These meanings often come to the reader as associations darting this way and that to enlarge the main point that has been made. And yet the writer has to keep these associations under control so that they do not end up in absurdity.

So you want the story to yield resonances. How? *If the subject is weighty enough to have nagged you, your main task is to let it vibrate through*

- (a) The meaning you are exploring (this rules out trifles).
- (b) The language you use, including dialogue where such is called for. Dialogue should echo African idiom if the people do not speak English as a mother tongue. In any case, it should sound natural, but serve a purpose in carrying the story forward. Characters should not just speak because they happen to have

STAFFRIDER WORKSHOP

been thrown together. Let the dialogue be expressive. In the use of language generally, too many adjectives check the movement of a story or poem, whereas vivid, expressive verbs will always push it forward and keep the reader interested. Images play an important role as part of language.

(c) The setting – where the main event takes place: the landscape, buildings, streets, a specific spot, e.g. a railway station, as in Nadine Gordimer's story, *Enemies*.

(d) Objects or actions that you use as a symbol. See the objects in the excerpt from Nadine Gordimer's story which are a symbol of all that goes with prosperity, the comfort to which a servant contributes, the fussiness that goes with age. We imagine, too, that we are hearing and seeing all the movement on the platform, which give us a sharp focus on the woman and her servant.

See also the excerpt from Richard Rive's story 'Rain'. Rain is used throughout the story to emphasise the woman's dejection, loneliness. She is like an island, cut off from

the mainland, its traffic, its people, its lights, i.e. from the social mainstream, by water. A symbol also contains images that call up numerous associations.

(e) A fitting connection of an incident with an historical event or character, so that the former can be seen to have grown out of the latter, will give the story historical resonances. Sometimes a folk tale is used, as a frame of reference for a present-day happening. An example of this is a modern Kenyan short story in which the village medicine man announces that the gods are claiming the ruler's beautiful daughter who has to be sacrificed in order that a severe drought may cease. The girl has to go to the lake and throw herself in. The monster inhabiting it will take her. Her boy-friend meets her on the shore and persuades her that she is about to do the most foolish thing: why she and not someone else? As they cannot return home, they flee that part of the territory. The rain comes down in torrents, notwithstanding. It is the irony here that vibrates in our consciousness: the

village is certain that the sacrifice has worked!

These are the main techniques we use to achieve *resonance*. It is not enough, we repeat, to tell us that a situation is bad or ugly or happy. That's the newspaperman's bread and butter, so to speak. And a good news reporter knows on which side his bread is buttered. We have, as poets, fiction writers, playwrights, to search for a meaning beyond the event, beyond the object, beyond the person, while using these items as a means to that end. One can say this without implying that the journalist's writing skill is less noble or sublime. A journalist without imagination in the use of language is fit for firewood.

Let us remember: If the meaning you are exploring is not profound, is not a major human concern, no linguistic tricks will lend it depth. You will be trying to shoot a finch with a machine gun.

Because of the nature of poetry – its use of intensive images – a poem, if well written, will contain more concentrated resonances.

Reviews / Reviews / Reviews

Lloyd Spencer reviews *We Killed Mangy-Dog* by Luis Bernardo Honwana (Heinemann African Writers' Series), *The Blackman of Shadwell* by Chris Searle (Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative) and *Dusklands* by J. M. Coetzee (Ravan Press)
 Osofo Ramaano reviews *This Earth, My Brother* by Kofi Awoonor (Heinemann African Writers Series).
 Catherine Glenn reviews *The Marabi Dance* by Modikwe Dikobe.
 Patrick Cullinan reviews *Karoo Morning* by Guy Butler.
 Meshack Mabogoane reviews *The Black Interpreters* by Nadine Gordimer (Ravan Press).
 Sally N. Suttner reviews *Mhudi* by Sol T. Plaatje.

***We Killed Mangy-Dog* / Luis Bernardo Honwana**

This is a collection of 7 very powerful stories from pre-independence Mozambique. The author, Honwana, is a highly skilled craftsman with something to teach each of us about storytelling as a craft. Each story works and has been worked on in a different way.

The first story, which is 20 pages long, describes the experience of an old man hardly strong enough to manage the tortuous manual labour he is forced to do – weeding corn-fields. The action takes place during a lunch-break. His daughter comes to see him but is taken into the corn-fields and raped by the overseer instead. Madala, the old man, sees this, but has no strength left. The younger man who tries to act has his face crushed by the overseer's boot. *Throughout the story the corn-fields are compared to the sea. Inside Madala there is a terrible sickness clawing its way into him like a weed that cannot be pulled. This sickness has something to do with anger, but not with an anger that can flare up and make an old man strong. It is an anger always there, and it has eaten away all of his strength.*

The second story is barely 4 pages long – it is simply an *Inventory of furniture and effects*. Someone unable to sleep describes the rooms of the small house and introduces you to the people asleep in the other beds.

Honwana's art is the art of understatement. It records the experience of people only just aware that it has become habit to choke back their anger. It is the experience of people who live with despair as if it were a slightly lame foot that sometimes troubles them very badly.

Nbanguitimo is the story of a black man who believed that he could prosper on his small farm and who goes crazy when it becomes clear that Senhor Administrator is going to rob him of his livelihood. But the story is not his story. It is given to another to tell. It is put into the mouth of a rather senseless youngster, who, when he hears that they are hunting the crazed man, is only sorry to have missed some excitement.

Honwana's art is the art of understatement. His stories are often a bit like detective stories. They have a clue hidden in the beginning which is there to show that the stories are 'about' something they (can) hardly speak of. For instance,

near the beginning of *Nbanguitimo* the single phrase – '... where the administrator had not yet decreed the abolition of the native reserve' tells us what the story is really going to explore. And in the story called *The old woman* it was only when I had finished the whole thing that I realised that it was about the actions of the police. No policeman is ever directly mentioned, or called a policeman – he is only referred to in one sentence: 'I became aware of the darkly clad legs, stiff and tense, straddling my body, stretching way up, and converging onto the shining metal plaque of the belt.'

Read these stories to discover what storytelling can be like when it is practised as a *craft*. But read them also to witness storytelling at its most *crafty*.

Honwana never preaches, never raises his voice. Perhaps this is what will make sure that his stories keep their power, and never grow hoarse.

The last, and longest story is perhaps the most powerful and it is the story which gives the collection its title. But there is very little I can say about it. It is not a story which can be explained. It is about the 'mercy-killing' of a mangy-

dog. Two children know the dog to be, like themselves, an under-dog. Perhaps one could say the dog becomes a symbol. But it is a very real, very gripping story about a killing. If the story has a moral it is never explained.

There is a story called *The Hands of the Blacks*, very short, and perhaps very silly. Its moral is clear: that all, black and white, are alike — under the skin and in the eyes of God. But this is not what is interesting about the story. The story is of a young boy who goes in search of an explanation of why the hands (and feet) of blacks are so much lighter than the rest of their bodies. Everyone has a different story to tell, a different myth or legend to explain this fact. Each story shows the world seen in a different way. Honwana's is a story about stories. He reminds us of how important stories can be in explaining ourselves to ourselves, in defining ourselves.

Of course, it is not every society in which the story works as effectively as these stories do. In industrialized society we have other materials for self-definition, and the literature (especially the novel) is more the literature of isolated individuals who operate alone in trying to give significance to their lives. Stories such as Honwana's remind us of the purpose of the story which is to join the experience of others to our own.

A different sort of meaning of such stories emerges when characters and readers dream of the same thing, appear to strive toward the same goals. Through stories such as these the fragments of experience of people we have never known personally, but only as a people, becomes part of our memory, the kind of memory which we shall struggle in order never to forget.

The Blackman of Shadwell / Chris Searle

These are 4 stories about the relations between black and white. They are simple stories but they do not oversimplify. They are remarkably 'true' and for a short and simple story to reveal something of the truth behind all the official lies about race requires a great deal of integrity and clear-headedness from a writer. Chris Searle is an exceptional author.

The first story begins with a meeting between an Englishman and a black American travelling on a bus across Canada. They become friends and the black man, Jack changes plan and decides to travel with the Englishman. Jack's whole life has been defined by his experience of being 'coloured' in a white society. Later he asks the Englishman to hold him in his arms and to love him but the Englishman cannot. His inhibitions are made perfectly understandable. The two part without a word. Both characters are seen with equal sympathy and insight. What is not equal is what has happened to their two peoples during the last three hundred years. It is a

massive historical process which has made impossible a limited personal redemption for these two men.

The best story, and the longest, is about a slave uprising in Tobago, in the West Indies in the 1770s. Chubb, the leader of the revolt, is eventually caught and executed. The story is being told by the man who was a soldier and Chubb's jailer, and who became his friend. The story raises questions about freedom, about the freedom of the jailer and the jailed, and about personal and historical freedom (Chubb cannot accept love and pleasure while he and his brothers are slaves, he cannot accommodate himself to indignity). The story is the kind that would be tremendously powerful in any medium, as a play, a film or dance. I appeal to all production and workshop groups to consider it.

The other two stories are good. A rich, tired tourist chats with a young West Indian girl. A runaway slave is befriended by London dockworkers and discovers that which they have in common, their unfree labours.

Chris Searle lives in Britain and teaches and helps run a newspaper in London's poorer areas. Britain has become probably the most racist country in Europe. It is the first of the advanced capitalist nations to go into severe decline and suffer a new form of underdevelopment. Unemployment has become chronic. Previously it ruled a vast empire and grew rich through the subjugation of all the races of the world in its far-flung colonies. With the collapse of the colonial empire many black British 'subjects' have taken up residence in Britain after fleeing from their own lands which the British helped to drastically impoverish. Now, down and out in the British Isles, blacks are seen as a threat, as a factor causing unemployment, and keeping wages low.

Chris Searle's stories do not explain racism in these terms but they reveal a great deal about the consequences of racism. Read also his book, *The Forsaken Lover*, for some really good writing on the effect of the English language in reinforcing racism.

About price. The two pounds ninety-five pence English price translated into R7,80 when I paid for this book. Perhaps the kind of book to borrow, or to club together to buy!

Dusklands / J. M. Coetzee

There is no doubt about Coetzee's brilliance as a writer. This novel will be around a long time. It is one of the most important 'statements' to have come from the ranks of South Africa's whites. It richly deserves the prizes it has won.

The book is divided into 2 narratives. The first is the story of an American psychologist working on psychological warfare tactics for use by the US government against the communist forces of North Vietnam. The second part of the book consists of 3 pieces. Each tells the

story of the explorations of Jacobus Coetzee in a different way. First Jacobus Coetzee tells his own story. Then two centuries later his descendant delivers a lecture to a historical society on the historical significance of Coetzee's journey. The third piece is the official sworn statement given to the Dutch East India Company who at that time ruled the Cape.

Read this book if you want to understand the psychology of colonialism and oppression, and the world of the oppressor. Coetzee's view is that its a very lonely world. Why is this?

There is the tragic-comic tale of King Midas who turned everything he touched into gold. Imagine his joy — the most wealthy (and, therefore, the most powerful). Imagine his horror — nothing could nourish him (he could not eat food after his touch had turned it to gold) nothing to love him (he turned his daughter to gold when he hugged her).

This is how the European coloniser is seen in *Dusklands*. He comes to Africa and other New Worlds in search of the unknown, the totally different. He penetrates from Europe, deeper and deeper into an *outside*. But by means of this very same violent penetration he turns every 'outside' (and only an 'outside' can test his manhood) into something somehow *inside*, something conquered and taken into the European world. When the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is published it signals the fact that the world as world is known, Europe's fierce explorers and Europe's great minds have eaten it all up.

This Earth, My Brother / Kofi Awoonor

This Earth, My Brother is a difficult book for the average reader (and that includes myself). And maybe annoying too. Its complex structure has chiefly to do with this. A simple straightforward narrative runs parallel with a heavy poetic narrative. But as one perseveres, the book becomes fascinating and thought-provoking.

"Was it a busy day?"
 'No.'
 Silence.
 'No?'
 'No.'
 'But you look tired. Take off your shoes. Sit down.'
 Then she would sit down first, carelessly, revealing her ass. She would wear a blue skirt and a scarlet blouse.
 'Are you hungry?'
 'No.'
 'No?'
 'No.'
 Silence."

"Deme lies on the great northern road that cuts across the abdomen of Eweland heading towards Kete Krachi, towards the north."

This continues to the end of the book. Two styles of narratives. Each

picking up with its subject in every other chapter.

The book, to say the least, is Ghana's history itself, or the history of any other West African country that gained independence and is 'struggling to be a nation'. Its writing structure is one factor that symbolises a sharp contrast between Ghana under colonialism and Ghana with Osagyefo — The Redeemer.

Kofi Awoonor chooses Amamu and some few other characters to show the problems that bedevil a country 'emerging from the colonial haze'.

This Earth, My Brother rings very much like another book by another Ghanaian writer. But, unlike that one, Awoonor gives us a solution.

The Marabi Dance / Modikwe Dikobe

The Marabi Dance was published in book form in 1973, after being partly serialised in *South African Outlook*. The book was written in the late sixties, but the story covers a period stretching from 1938 to 1946.

First and foremost this South African novel is an African one written by an African writer who has experienced the living conditions he describes. As a 'Black Interpreter', Dikobe does not tackle the theme of the 'Return-of-the-Been-to': his characters have not made it to foreign universities; the heroine, Martha Mabongo, was taken out of school as she was sitting for Standard Five. While the theme 'The Ancestors versus the Missionary' is kept in a minor key, the novel powerfully strikes the chord of 'Let my People Go'. 'The Way it was Back Home' and 'The Countryman-Comes-to-Town' receive privileged and original treatment; the title could easily provide the phrase for a sixth theme emerging: 'The Way It was in Town', in the thirties.

The Marabi Dance is a city novel, and an historical novel at that, as the slum life of Doornfontein's overpopulated yards, alive with memories and shreds of tradition from the kraal, Amalaita fights, women rivalries, gang raids, beer brewing and Marabi parties, disappeared when the demolishing squads wrecked the iron sheet houses and the inhabitants were removed to Orlando Township. The title of the book epitomizes the backward glance on that period, which Dikobe is casting from the sixties: the book vividly recaptures a bygone age of singing and ragtimes. At the same time it pitches the first generation of Countryman-Comes-to-Town', bewildered by pass-laws and unemployment, desperately clinging to traditions of witchcraft and lobola, against a new generation of Africans, city born, determined to stay and fend for themselves. The total denial of the validity of returning to the farm in 1946 significantly heralds the present resistance to the Back to the Homeland policy. The heroes of the book are urban blacks.

The Marabi Dance is a good novel

combining the development of a character from a girl to a woman who asserts herself, and the accurate portrayal of a milieu where the main forces of society at large are felt and grappled with.

Martha, and many of her time, hoped that the law would treat them as human beings because they had attained a certain measure of civilization. It was not to be.

Moipone resists her parents' pressure to marry a farmboy for lobola. She is totally estranged from their tribal customs and belongs irreversibly to the city, where she is called Martha. She could not do without the Bantu Men's Social Centre and the Bioscope. Yet she is not prepared to accept the hard life of a washerwoman for a paltry pay. Her middle-class aspirations are made clear when, short of an education, she eagerly accepts the opportunity of being trained as a professional singer. Implicit in her attitude is the notion that 'a person is to be judged according to his talent', and she is aware that she can make money from her 'round female baritone voice'. In spite of the tribute paid in the title, *The Marabi Dance* illustrates Martha's rejection of the 'low type' mode of music and entertainment for 'homeless ruffian children', in favour of the more respectable concerts where professional black singers and musicians perform for an appreciative black and white audience. Marabi is associated with wild dancing, drinking and lovemaking. She goes for respectability and security.

She develops as a character, because, although she fails to make a career, she accepts the responsibility of precocious motherhood, sticks to her guns and battles to 'bring up a respectful child', Sonnyboy, and to give him the education she failed to have. She welcomes her move to Orlando Township, where at long last she can live in a house with rooms and a private toilet, away from rubbish heaps and Marabi. But Dikobe does not altogether endorse Martha's satisfaction with her lot as a Township resident.

She owes the house in Orlando to a stroke of luck hitting her from paternalistic quarters: what may seem a mishandling of events through a benevolent deus ex machina actually puts the white man's role in proper perspective: for the better, but more often for the worse, the white man rules over the black man's fate. He metes out jobs and passes, allocates housing, sends to jail or hospital, assigns roles as washerwoman, delivery boy or informer on fellow workers. SAR or municipal employees, Pass Office officials, rather good blokes individually, operate the system and maintain the power structure. The couple of white employers who develop as minor characters fit in the picture: their discreet meting out of blessings aims at keeping head boy and washerwoman in their subservient place.

All the African characters in the novel are aware that 'you are white and I am wrong'. Most of them grumble at the in-

justice or burst out in vocal menace to 'fix them up one day'. There are echoes of Makgato, the talks on the City Hall steps, and of 'agitators in Johannesburg' questioning the good will of the baas. Martha's anticipation of her house in Orlando fades into the murmuring of the other removed families who voice their discontent and anguish at being chased far from town.

Beyond the happy ending of Martha's love, eventually requited and blessed by matrimony, the return of George, the ex-Marabi pianist, must be seen in its socio-political dimension: he refuses to inform on his brothers organising for better pay and shorter working hours. George achieves self-respect and dignity at the cost of unemployment. Significantly George and Martha are married by the bogus reverend who, having experienced the sterility of acting 'the black Moses speaking to farm people about freedom', makes an ominous come-back in the epilogue. Now a mine worker, he devotes his offshift days to organising his congregation in Orlando. The Lord's Prayer and a hymn usher a sermon related to their living conditions. Beyond 'The Missionary fighting the Ancestors' theme, the Christian faith develops into 'The Church of Africa' pointing at the inconsistencies of the white man's Christian ethos.

Simultaneously, Martha and George's final stance makes it clear that, if protest about work, rent and schooling must be hushed in secret organising, it will be up to Sonnyboy, 'in and out of jail', to stand for 'Let my People Go'. No more 'beating of drums and wild praying', no more wild singing. The last Marabi dancer is chased away. Other things are at stake.

Dikobe's remarkable achievement in his short novel is to tell a story of hardships without ever lapsing into self-pity or bitterness. Each of the eight chapters is an instalment of cheerful storytelling, where minor as well as major characters get their due of the storyteller's interest and affection for their weaknesses as well as their valiant struggling. The squalid circumstances are never allowed to get the better of the characters' vitality, expressed forcibly in their drinking, ineffectual grumbling, fighting, loving or humour.

As a storyteller Dikobe restricts his intrusions to a few clarifications of African customs or Native Laws. He matter-of-factly registers the speech of his characters, leisurely translating the African (or Afrikaans) parts of dialogue. He is more interested in the vivid transcription of the tragi-comedy of life in Doornfontein than in effects of style. As a good storyteller he highlights the comic side of situations and even provides a happy ending, leaving it up to the reader to ponder and see the tragedy, and its ominous relevance to our present time. His humour in carefully balancing the underlying tragedy of the world of Martha by comic, sometimes hilarious,

scenes is attuned to the dignity his characters achieve by meeting the worst humiliations with a joke. This is Dikobe's way as a writer to pay respectful tribute to his fellow Africans. When most white writers in South Africa are involved in stylistic acrobatics to explore the miscegenation theme, it is refreshing to hear a buxom African woman laugh the issue off.

Dikobe stands out on a literary scene strewn with morbid white psyches: with no stylistic flourish beyond comparisons culled from the plants and animals of the South African land, he brings out the vitality of characters very ordinarily involved in the hard struggle of living, surviving, dying, giving birth and hoping against all odds.

Karoo Morning / Guy Butler

This is the story of a white boy growing up in Cradock in the years before the war. His parents were puritanical and always short of money but as Prof. Butler puts it: 'I was given a good life in a lovable world.' By contrasting family history, life in a small town during the depression and incidents of Karoo life he has given us a record that irritates and delights, that illuminates.

For what comes over clearly is the vulnerability of Butler, the man and the writer. This has positive and negative aspects. He tells, for example, how he learns that 'Bushman' are to be despised as the lowest of the low in the hierarchy of race. His teacher is a Coloured. The story is ironic, embarrassing, yet it rings with truth. This is how things were, and are.

In contrast the saga of the Butler family and its relations is far too extended and, to any one outside that circle, gratuitously tedious. At other times a self-conscious literariness intrudes as when the Diederick cuckoo is confounded with the legend of Eurydice. But both these examples are characteristic and cannot be ignored; they are part of the vulnerability that Butler offers. This lack of critical ferocity applied to himself, may explain why he has assumed stances that have made him such a public figure, have almost ossified him, at least in the eyes of some critics. It may be unfair but the book will be seen as both autobiography and case-history. As the blurb says he is 'one of South Africa's most widely known and admired literary personalities'. Who doubts that?

If the book is flawed in the way I have suggested it is nonetheless an illuminating contribution to writing in this country. Its faults and virtues are perhaps those that lie deep in all English South Africans, surfacing clearly here, embarrassingly. There is much to admire and celebrate in this book and there are many questions to ask, scrupulously, avidly about it. It is important for both these reasons.

The Black Interpreters / Nadine Gordimer

'My own definition of . . . African writing . . . is writing done in any language by Africans themselves and others of whatever skin colour who share with Africans the experience of having been shaped, mentally and spiritually, by Africa rather than anywhere else.' (p.5.) Definitions are intended to serve as guides to gear one along certain paths.

From this we should expect Ms Gordimer to give us a broad spectrum of those who have been shaped by Africa. We are however plunged immediately into a rebuttal of certain writers as not being members of this broadly defined body. On the same page the Negritude artists from the Carribean are set aside as foreign because 'they have never set eyes on Africa, Africa had passed, along with their African names, religions and languages out of living memory.' p.5. All this is largely true. Yet there is a rider here which contradicts her very basis of discussion.

When people like Aime Cesaire, Leon Dumas and other Negritude protagonists turn to Africa, even through their imagination, as an indispensable aspect of the creative process, for inspiration, a spiritual phenomenon, can we not say that they, as writers, have been shaped by Africa?

This problem is further compounded by certain omissions. None of the writers born in Africa using the indigenous languages is mentioned in the book. This is excusable, though unreasonable in view of her definition. Ms Gordimer is not an African linguist. But when she further omits such authors as Alan Paton, Olive Schreiner, Nadine Gordimer, Langenhoven etc. then one begins to suspect the motives behind her interpretation, in view of her definition of what an African writer is.

It is a pity that Ms Gordimer has made such a fundamental and glaring mistake by omitting black writers from the Americas. This exclusion shows how superficial her approach is. Black American and Carribean writers are after all faced with the same problems of cultural alienation and conflict as the Africans are, especially those in South Africa.

In this book Ms Gordimer quotes Njabulo Ndebele's poem:

'I am sweeping the firmament with the mop
Of your kinky hair
I shall gather you
Into my arms, my love
And oil myself
Yes anoint myself with the
Night of your skin . . .'

Njabulo Ndebele is a South African. A Guyanese, Leon Dumas, writes (quoted in Ms Gordimer's book):

It's the long road to Guinea
Death takes you down
In the dark land of dark men
Under a smoky sky pierced by the cry of birds.

Ndebele refers to racial characteristics,

Dumas concerns himself with blackness and Africa. What is the difference?

Both deal with the issue of identity within a racial context. Even in terms of relationships across the colour line one would expect that a close study of the situation in the United States and South Africa could have been made. Such writers as Leroi Jones (he changed his name to Ameer Baraka) who is also Black America's most articulate dramatist and poet, have preoccupied themselves with the issues of both identity and race relations. The same can be said of many of the poets who emerged in the late sixties and early seventies in South Africa. Such shortcomings are serious enough because they show a lack of perception of the underlying continuity among black writers especially in America and South Africa where the problems of cultural/race alienation, and the existence of a large proletarian black population are present and dominant.

The value of this book lies not in what it ostensibly sets out to do - to give an interpretation of black creative writing. It was not, I suspect, Ms Gordimer's intention. What she has done is to give a resumé of black African writing in English and expose many people to the issues that apparently concerned the creative writers. At the time of her writing the book, which was originally called African Literature, many African writers were at best unknown and at worst regarded with suspicion and scorn by an audience that was accustomed to European and American voices in literature.

Ms Gordimer, who is herself an accomplished writer, sought to show that not only is there writing on the African continent in English but that it is a very significant expression that deals with social issues and the many other situations that concern writers as people who reflect their societies.

The book has to be regarded as an introduction to African writing and will appeal more to the newcomers than the initiates: the latter require a bolder undertaking on the part of Ms Gordimer.

Mbudi / Sol T. Plaatje

For me by far the greatest asset of this Heinemann edition is the inclusion of an outstanding introduction by Tim Couzens which serves to dwarf the efforts of all foolhardy reviewers. He has placed *Mbudi*, the novel, and Plaatje, the man, in the social and political context of their times.

In 1876 Solomon Tshekošo Plaatje, a full-blooded member of the Baralong tribe, was born on a farm in the Kimberley district. With an incomplete primary school education, he became a post messenger, then a court interpreter and thereafter continued to expand his horizons as a man, a writer and a politician. He was a founder of the South African Native Congress and a vociferous pro-

tester against the iniquities of the Native Land Act. He was a well-travelled man and by the time of his death in 1932, he had made contact with all the major black leaders abroad.

The writing of *Mhudi* was complete by 1920, but due to difficulties in securing a publisher, it was only published in 1930 by the Lovedale Mission Press. It is an historical novel set in South Africa in the period 1830-1840: a timespan covering a number of major events in South African history.

Two of Mzilikazi's tax collectors were killed by the Baralong. The Matabele retaliated by devastating the town of Kunana, forcing the remaining Baralong to flee to a clansman, Chief Moroka at Platberg. The Boers started their trek, the Great Trek, away from the Cape and British authority. The Boers lost all their livestock to the Matabele. The Boers were assisted by Chief Moroka with food, cattle and hospitality at Moroka's Hoek. Having recouped their losses, the Boers persuaded various black

tribes to join with them against the common enemy, the Matabele. The Matabele were defeated, their power broken. Haley's comet was visible and was viewed by many as playing a role in the shifting of power in Southern Africa.

The book is written in good narrative style and has an engaging story line. However, to pass it off as a mere pastoral historical love tale would be doing Plaatje a great injustice. Couzens emphasizes that Sol Plaatje was intensely involved in protesting the Native Land Act of 1913, and the parallels between what transpires in the novel and what befell blacks after the Act, is not coincidental.

The book makes subtle and often not so subtle comparisons and contrasts between the Baralong and the Matabele, the Baralong and the Boers, the Boers and the Matabele. Each is used as a foil for the other on many levels: valour in battle, weapons of warfare, attitude to civilians in warfare, regard for women in society and their relative role, manner

of meting out justice and discipline, attitude to the stranger, the role of chiefs and leaders, religio-magical guiding influences, attitude concerning propriety, treatment of servants, language differences, societal concepts of honour etc.

In *Mhudi*, Plaatje usually shows the Baralong in the best light, the Matabele in the worst, with notable exceptions as in the case of Umnandi, favourite wife to Mzilikazi. The Boers are depicted in various ways from the vicious, cruel and calculated to the noble characters of De Villiers and Hanneljie echoed in our Baralong couple, Mhudi and Ra Thaga. It should be remembered that Plaatje is a descendant of the Baralong and in the narrative refers to hearing the story from Half a Crown, youngest son of Mhudi. This direct line of contact helps explain the immediacy and authenticity of this book.

Although favouring the Baralong, I feel *Mhudi* helps to set right the balance of South African history.

Mafika Pascal Gwala reviews *Behind the Rising Sun* epic novel by S. O. Mezu (Heinemann African Writers Series)

Behind The Rising Sun relates the troubled period of the Nigerian Civil War. It depicts the split loyalties and conflicting ambitions of those called upon by tribal identity to defend the Biafran secession and to register their disappointment with civilian rule in the former Federation of Nigeria.

When the Nigerian Civil War starts, the intellectuals and students whose tribal origins identify them with Biafra find themselves with little choice but to join forces with the tribalist secessionists whose major ambition appears to be greed for power and social comforts in the young state of Biafra. Lawyer Afoukwu, itinerant ambassador for Biafra, expresses his class-fostered high-handedness by saying, of Biafran soldiers, 'I'd rather see the house destroyed by the Hausas than live to see those bastards enter and soil a house my company built.'

In direct contrast to Afoukwu is Dr Okeji, a Professor of Physics at a German university, who gives all in his efforts to see to it that the Biafran people are able to stand on their own and survive the war.

Secession is becoming a commonplace problem in African politics, a negative self-determination. Trapped within the absolute contradictions of bourgeois democracy, those that don't know the forces at work wish they knew; and those that claimed to know realize they didn't know.

In May 1968 Freddy Anuoha, who

witnesses the futile efforts of those organizing the war-effort in Europe, finds himself in a Paris of student contestation for power, student-worker solidarity and the American-Vietnam peace talks. It is also a Paris of swindlers whose 'help' for Biafra is inspired by mercenary considerations. Anuoha's growing impatience and desire to get to Biafra is accelerated. He finally leaves for his home country to face the war.

Meanwhile, under stress of war shortages back home, members of the Biafran delegation led by Obiora Ifedi do their family shopping at the top stores of Paris.

Denied productive living by the ravages of war, Anuoha finds himself joining a group of braves who are on a mission behind enemy lines — this is a BEL group whose heroic exploits become legendary.

Through the Nigerian Civil War the author plunges the reader (especially the African reader) into the historical character of literature. He opens up for us the variables of realism within given contexts in epic literature. African writers are still to explore the epic form. Mezu shares the experiences of the civil war tragedy by telling the story as frankly as could be possible. He also shows, without preaching, how political concern is unavoidable in African literature — because of the very political nature of societal patterns obtaining in present day Africa. The author presents the reality of the civil war, unprejudiced

by tribal or political sympathies. From the stark reality of a Biafra seeking world recognition and support in European capitals, the story winds up with the stark reality of a Biafra that cannot stand on its two feet under the leadership of people (like Ofoukwu) whose ambitions are of negative intent. Refugees, armies wiping each other out, allegations of genocide: a not unfamiliar picture.

The final chapters declare the options open to a society that has had to learn the hard way of the devastation that war brings. Dr Okeji and Anuoha demonstrate by examples that 'people must change their attitudes and see the nation first before their own private interests' (p. 41). The girl, Titi Duru, whom Anuoha marries is demonstrative of the hopes, anxieties, aspirations and resignations in an individual whose personal and social responses are almost absolutely subjected to the social, military and psychic pressures of a nation at war.

Indeed the civil war could have given cause for variant alternatives to those Nigerians who have their national integrity at heart. The author's allusion to communalism at the end of the story is perhaps a pointer to that trend.

This epic novel shows that, despite the foreign language medium, Africa is not without the potentials of a Sholokov. One cannot help viewing Mezu's book as a literary harvest.

Staffrider's review section specialises in African literature and is not devoted to new books only. The reading revolution in Southern Africa means rediscovering the old titles as well as spreading the word about the new ones. We are particularly interested in short (up to 500 words) reviews which say why a book should be read now. If you want to review for *Staffrider*, write to us (at Box 31910, Braamfontein, 2017) and ask for the book you want.

News from Southern African PEN Centre (Johannesburg)

The Centre is at present working in three main fields: 1) organization and co-ordination of readings in the Reef area; 2) workshop activities; 3) assistance to harassed or imprisoned writers and their families.

Readings are at present taking place approximately once a fortnight. For information on forthcoming readings, availability of transport, etc. telephone the chairman of our Centre at Johannesburg 39-1178 or the secretary at Johannesburg 724-4033. All **Staffrider** readers are cordially invited to read their work or join the audience on these occasions.

The visit of Ezekiel Mphahlele to the Reef for a week at the end of October has given a tremendous impetus to the workshop side of PEN's activities. As well as conducting a weekend workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand to which all writers were invited, 'Zeke' also conducted six other workshop sessions in Soweto, Sebokeng and Alexandra. It is hoped that he will be able to repeat this visit on a regular basis during 1979.

The PEN Centre sees it as its task to secure *the right to write*, free from institutionalized harassment, for all South African writers. It is therefore taking up cases of alleged harassment whenever these are reported, and asking writers to stand firm and united on this issue. It is also raising and distributing financial support for the dependants of imprisoned writers.

Membership Form / To be posted to Southern African PEN Centre (Johannesburg), P.O. Box 32483, Braamfontein, 2017.

I am a writer and would like to be a member of the Johannesburg P.E.N. International Centre. I enclose the annual membership fee of R3,00.

Name :

Address :

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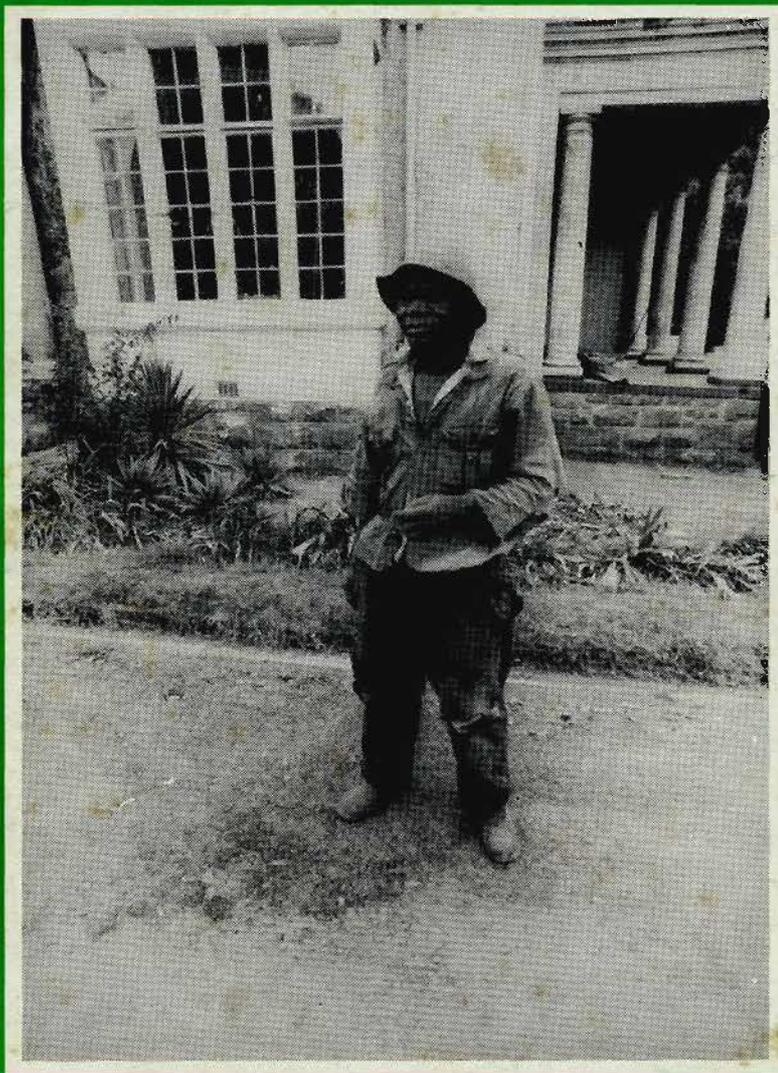
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(Thinks)

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