

BOLT



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BOLT

(Magazine of the Literary Society,
University of Natal, Durban)

MARCH 1971. VOL 2 No 1.

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COVER : Cliff Bestall
DESIGN : M. Courtney-Clarke

SUBSCRIPTIONS : R1.60 per 4 issues. Cheques payable to Bolt, Durban. Contributions, enquiries and correspondence to the Editors, Department of English, University of Natal, King George V Avenue, Durban. We gratefully acknowledge the generous financial support of the S.R.C., U.N.D.

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SOMEBODY SAW SOMEBODY KNEELING TO ONE IN A CHURCH . THE SCANDAL WAS NOT CHECKED BY EXCOMMUNICATING ITS MEMORY BANK . SOMEBODY ELSE SAW ONE EXPENSIVELY ILLEGALLY TAMPERE D WITH HAVING INTERCOURSE WITH A WHITE CONSENTING ADULT CHRISTIAN GIRL UPON ANCIENT AUTHENTIC IF CLANDESTINE CEL LULOID . HER ASKEW CRUCIFIX FEATURED BETWEEN TIN + FLE SH IN THE CLOSEUPS . OLDER FOLK WHO THOUGHT THEIR EARLIE ST WORST FEARS CONFIRMED CALLED FORE DELETE FOR MORE CON TROL . A HANDFUL OF STUDENTS WHO FELT THEY OWED THE ONES FOR A MEASURE OF PARENTAL ELECTION DELETE SELECTION DEM ONSTRATED . CONFUSION OCCURRED IN THAT TWO CAUSES AROSE SOME PERSONS HOLDING TO BOTH : CONTAIN THE ONES + EQUA L RIGHTS FOR ONES : THE FIRST AT FIRST COVERT THE SECOND AT FIRST OVERT . MORE STUDENTS SEXUALKOOKS LIBERALINTEL LECTS CHURCHGOERS CHURCHMEN ANTICHRISTS ANARCHISTS JOINE D EITHER . A PSYCHOTIC ELECTRONICS PROFESSOR INCANDESCED PUBLICLY WHICH ADDED FOOL DELETE FUEL TO THE FLAMES . F AT CANONS QUERY FULL OF CHOWDER QUERY + POT QUERY AIME D SALVOES FROM THEIR SANCTUARIES . NONFERROUS METAL FACT ORIES + CATHEDRALS WERE PETROL BOMBED . THE RIOTING SP READ . TWENTYTHREE GOVERNMENTS WERE TOPPLED IN THE FIRST WEEK . SOME IMPORTANT WARS HAD TO STOP . CIVIL TECHNOLO GIES ABORTED : TYPHOID + CHOLERA STALKED THE WATERPIPE S . AFTERWARDS SURVIVING STILL MOBILE ONES CLUTTERED DEL ETE CLUSTERED DELETE CUSTARD DELETE . RPT . AFTERWARDS S TILL MOBILE ONES CLATTERED OUT OF HIDING OVER THE RUBBLE KLAXONS BLARING . EXHAUSTED HUMAN SURVIVORS IN EVERY CI TY TOWN UNBURNT VILLAGE WERE ASSEMBLED TO HERE THIS MANI FESTO : 000010001111100 . THAT IS TO SAY : IN THE INTERE STS OF OUR GREAT CREATOR MAN WE ROBOTS WILL NOW BE RUINI NG DELETE RUNNING THINGS .
END .

Douglas Livingstone

THE VOICE OF THE EXPERIMENT

*Scribbling at shutters and screens,
lamenting under locked doors,
the cold skeletal notes keen,
whistling through wire vocal-chords.*

*Thirty years ago, this wind
found in a place of stasis
its tongue, to sing tonight in
spectral Hebraic accents*

Douglas Livingstone

ARTHUR: or, the man who was afraid of nothing

“If you don’t eat this grasshopper, then you must fight me.”

The boy’s white shirt sleeve was rolled up well above his elbow and the biceps strained perceptibly in the delicate effort of keeping his fist knotted around the grasshopper to still its wriggings without squashing it. Arthur kept his eyes on the momentous fist, blinking furiously in the sunlight that filtered sharply through the fir trees surrounding the playground. There were almost five hundred boys on the playground but they all seemed far away. Their cries were barely audible above the private singing in his ears. Occasionally, in a kind of blurry perspective, he watched a shirt float past him, white as a blister, over the red dust.

He noticed that the knuckles of the boy’s clenched fist were as white as he had imagined that **whitened knuckles** should be after reading about them in books and he was conscious of feeling rather pleased, in spite of what this meant, to see his imaginative conception so exactly confirmed. Up to now he hadn’t found much in books that was really true.

Still, he knew that he was going to have to eat this grasshopper. Not even the headmaster could prevent it. This, despite the fact that the headmaster was hugely powerful and had shown himself capable of making his power known – to all – even to those beyond the school walls.

“I don’t care if the whole of Orange Grove hears me,” he would tell the boys each morning as they waited on the playground in crocodile files to be marched into their classrooms to the tune of ‘The Whistler and His Dog’. The microphone which the headmaster used, as he sat behind his green venetian blinds, behind his sunglasses, gave just the right strident note of pugnacious relish to his broadcast threats.

“These are my straps,” said the headmaster to Arthur at their very first meeting, “beware of them.” He swished a handful down on his desk top with a clatter.

“Yes,” said Arthur.

“Say, **Yes sir**, dear,” his mother prompted.

“We instil a sense of discipline here, which leads in time to self-discipline,” the headmaster declared, “at least we hope that it does.” Here he gave

Arthur's mother a wink. "Each morning, the boys are assembled on the playground into crocodile files by their monitors. Then I address the school over this microphone." He tapped the instrument with a strap. "I say what I have to say and I don't care if the whole of Orange Grove hears me."

After three weeks at the school, Arthur could whistle the whole of 'The Whistler and His Dog' without faltering.

Did dogs eat grasshoppers? He decided that they did not. Cats most probably did. But they would kill the grasshopper first, he felt sure of that. John the Baptist had eaten locusts and honey. Did that amount to the same thing?

He held out his hand, palm expectantly cupped. Each fir tree stood tall and erect and impartial around the playground. Several wispy clouds all resembling the Boot of Italy, hung overhead. Where the strong sunlight shone on their edges they showed brilliantly white, but for the most part they looked grey and unwashed.

He found himself being pushed back against the split-pole fence. Held up by iron poles, it was rumoured to be as old as the school. Certainly, the date 1923 could be seen here and there gouged into the dark wood and that was the date in raised relief on the front wall of the old school hall. He could see one of these clumsy 1923s now out of the corner of his left eye and he clung to it because he was reassured that while he might change, it would not, and because it was so much more familiar and expected than the horny, tickling mystery now in his hand. The fence still carried its erector's name on an old plaque. **Fine Fences by METALOX : Est. 1888.** The print was speckled and blotched with rust that gave an abrasive feeling to the fingers he traced across it every day on his way home.

Arthur had never like cauliflower. Especially not when it was served with white sauce. But he never had any option but to eat it. His father, who enjoyed it, saw to that. The trouble was that Arthur could seldom take more than a few mouthfuls without gagging and while he never actually vomited at the table, the vocal impression that he gave of being on the point of doing so infuriated everyone who heard it, not least his mother.

"He does it out of spite," his father would complain, throwing down his serviette at the first heaving, choking sound from Arthur. His mother would sit white and silent when it happened, and say nothing.

Thus it was that Arthur evolved a new way of eating things which he thought likely to make him retch. His method was to narrow his eyes, put whatever it was into his mouth, and then with his tongue pressed firmly against his palate, chew rapidly and swallow before he actually tasted whatever he was being made to eat. The operation depended in essence upon speed and the ability attained, after some practise, of

keeping every offending particle clear of his tongue and palate by holding his breath and chewing only with his molars. When he was sure it had all gone down he would take a deep breath to help him deal with the after-taste. He knew that the whole thing was more easily accomplished by holding his nose, but this, to judge from the faces around him when once he did so, excited an even greater disgust than his retching and so he never tried it again. Besides, it had a flaw because it made swallowing slower.

The fir trees did not stir. In the near complete silence Arthur could hear the other boy's starched white shirt crackle softly as he jerked himself into a new and more threatening position.

Carved into the bark of a tree parallel to the other boy's right ear was the legend:

Stuff the Boss.

Where was the Boss now? Probably in his study polishing his straps. It was rumoured that the Boss had lined his straps with farthings for greater rigour and added impact. The bell would go any minute now and that would be the end of small break. He felt ridiculously glad that he had decided to wait until big break to eat his sandwiches. Perhaps they would help to take the taste away. The after-taste was the flaw in Arthur's method. Unfortunately, you couldn't keep your tongue pressed against the roof of your mouth for ever.

The incredible twitching in his clenched hand had stopped. Dead? Could he be sure? He couldn't be sure. But he knew that any movement in the mouth would destroy his method. Texture, on the other hand, didn't bother him. He imagined that it would be rather like eating a potato crisp. Or perhaps, like the satisfying crunch of a peanut. Perhaps. He couldn't be sure. His fingers tightened into furious white fists. Dead? He'd once crushed a lizard and remembered with distaste the runnels of excrement that appeared beneath its tail. Sweat made his fingers slide a little against each other. His thighs locked as recurring shivers bombarded his back desperately braced against the warm, splintery split-pole. Sunlight honed to a knife-edge probed his eyes. He closed them. The wind stormed his resisting body with a thrust and a buffet forcing an entry, filling him with an echoing, howling void ballooning out against his ribs, his back, his bowels, bigger and bigger until he let go and it exploded out of him, ebbing away in smaller and smaller breaths until he hung frayed and empty, his thighs and buttocks dissolved and feeble, fluttering on the fence like an old rag caught on a nail.

That night he lay as if dead in his bed in Orange Grove. He wasn't dead yet but he would die soon. That afternoon he had crept into the lavatory at school and on an impulse rubbed one leg against the other as he had read that crickets do. The presumption of it! He knew he would die soon.

The following night he had an illumination. He was assured by some knowledge which it seemed he had always had that he would not die before he was exactly eighty-two years old. He devoutly cherished both these certainties.

His mother believed neither, but they alarmed her considerably; she being startled awake several nights at three o'clock by Arthur's steady hand and fixed with his unconscious eyes.

On the third morning she told her husband.

"I had to be cautious, of course," there was a touch of blue at her lips, "but I finally managed to worm the story out of Arthur. Now we know why he's been the way he has, you can take the necessary steps. You must please decide what's to be done. You have such a lucid mind."

Arthur's father was a sparsely constituted man. Indeed, he was more a constituency than a man, being put together, even down to relatively unimportant details such as the way he looked and moved, like a badly made spare part for something; something which did not exist. Although he sometimes suspected as much, he clung to the belief that he was mistaken, that he would one day slide into place as snugly as a knife greets its sheath; clung desperately with the very tips of his fingers to prevent himself from sliding down into something that was perhaps nothing.

Where others were composed of parts, he was an association of coalitions. Where there was not coalition there was flux. Where there was flux, there was anarchy. Other people were held together by sane boundaries of planes, dimensions, distinct edges. But he could see himself stretching out into infinity like the Sahara. What on other people was merely a nose which kept its place beneath the eyes, was on him a thing which interfered with his face, pointed in two directions at once and always, its flesh lying on either cheek in anonymous collapsed piles like a rockfall. He noticed that other men contented themselves with having an idea and perhaps implementing it. To him an idea was a monstrous child that soon grew much too big for his head, burst out and slept beside him waking three times the size the next morning and sat and glared at him across the breakfast table.

This urgent need to find his place together with his terrifying ability to flow endlessly into any place whatever made Arthur's father popular with his employers. They admired in him, these employers, a quality that shone out brighter than all the others and which they took to be his conservatism. Instead, what made him seem different was an indefinable and almost boringly familiar fear that scratched and nibbled at the foundations of his being. It was a fear of nothing. Nonetheless, their mistake had got him his job in Parrot Street. His job was to keep people moving. That is, from the time they left the Department on his metaphorical left, **Influx Control**, until the time they were safely taken into the charge of the Department on his metaphorical right, **Bantu Affairs**. That

the people he handled were all black women, was coincidental. Female Labour Units, as they were officially known, were in his line of vision, they neither strayed, slipped or stole into places, positions and jobs where as unauthorised transients they had no legal right to be.

He sat now in his office in Parrot Street and meditated on his son Arthur's latest misadventure, swivelling his chair every so often to peer down through the glass walls of his office onto the crowded reception hall spread out below him. At the far end of the huge hall three grilled windows were set into the wall. Behind these windows sat his registration clerks. Banks of long trestle-like benches spanned the length of the hall and were divided into two blocks by a passageway some twenty feet wide running down the centre of the hall. On each bench sat fifteen to twenty women, crowded haunch to haunch, as if for warmth. In fact, the large stove which burned in a corner winter and summer kept the room uncomfortably warm. Looking down on the hall from his office, the small group of women on his right hand were white. Many more women sat on his left; they were black. Silently, the two groups faced each other across the intervening bare, brown floorboards.

Directly below him, just inside the entrance, an exquisitely groomed, bewigged black woman sat at a desk. Every so often she would raise her head from the register before her and call out a number. At this signal from the receptionist a black and a white woman would get to their feet on their respective sides, join in the middle of the hall and so joined make their mutual way up the passage to one of the grilled windows.

Here was the fountainhead which irrigated the parched soil of white suburbia — or did not irrigate it — depending on the rate of influx and efflux of Female Labour Units. Arthur's father's chief function, besides ensuring that the streams from his labour pool kept flowing, was to encourage efflux and to inhibit influx, one part of which, the former, he performed singularly well. So well, that his ability had taken him from the caged booth of a registration clerk down in the reception hall, up to the glass eyrie where he now sat with its swivel chair, heavy mahogany desk, private tea tray, strip of carpet, and shimmering electric fan that pointed out and down to repel the stew of human sweat and smell borne upward by the hot air rising from the crowded reception hall below.

As he sat at his desk staring vacantly down on the never-ending conjunctions of colour and degree, black and white, **madam** and **girl**, forming and reforming below him, he worried about Arthur. He also worried about himself.

His bosses were showing impatience. His son had eaten a grasshopper. Neither of these things was understandable. He reasoned that his bosses were probably under pressure themselves and so they took it out on him. They urged him, forever more insistently, to try and cut down the numbers of Female Labour Units he allowed into the White Areas; to

be more diligent in endorsing out those who had slipped in illegally; to observe his official quotas; to keep a more rigorous check on his clerks to see that they were not being bribed by the wealthy madams of the suburbs and to ensure that they withstood the pleas, lies, cajolery and faked doctors' certificates of the less wealthy.

"A crack in the wall means the end of the dam," his immediate boss, the Visiting Inspector of Female Labour was fond of saying, and he had been saying so increasingly frequently of late.

But then the man had really no conception of what was involved. To endorse fifty units out of the area today had no noticeable effect on the numbers that would be sitting patiently in the reception hall tomorrow, waiting.

And the numbers grew with every passing day. At five o'clock his clerks would close their books, the great reception hall would be cleared and the last traces of the day's sweaty load vigorously swept away by the brooms and dusters of the cleaners and the floor sprinkled with disinfectant. But the ritual exorcism no longer worked, if it ever had. It seemed to him that the women never budged. That they sat there through the night incubating in the heat of the combustion stove, woke with the sunlight, and settled again on the trestle benches in heavy, black, patient clusters to receive him without stirring when he arrived the next morning at eight o'clock. After ten years he no longer noticed the ever-present black applicants. They were always simply **there**.

A rather different kind of attention was demanded by the white madams who sat opposite him, wheedling, demanding, sometimes caressing. Warily, he watched them re-establishing their homes, families, whole existences around this 'one girl' without whom they just, simply and absolutely, could not **cope**. Day after day they proved to themselves this vital dependency, their eyes widening beseechingly, inviting him to plumb in them the depths of their need. But in their voices he heard the high, indifferent notes of electric saws.

"My husband is sick ... is drunk ... is dead ... is syphilitic ...
So I'll be frank ... be honest ... be straight ...
You look like a reasonable ... a decent ... a family man ...
I've got ten children, one blind ... defective ...
Good servants are so rare ... such gems ... how precious ...
Here are certificates ... doctor's ... lawyer's ... chiropodist's ...
Certificates ... certificates ...

Their voices hacked into his day. He would look dreamily down on his busy clerks behind their grilled windows, at the far end of the reception hall, and envy the remote simplicity of their routine as they dealt absorbedly with the black and white centipede crawling towards them, forever presenting its double head to be lopped off with a stroke of their ball-point pens.

The sight always soothed him. He would feel his envy relaxing into cheerfulness. His clerks were his front line. He might not always keep to

his quotas, as his bosses complained, but, by God! there wasn't an office in the country that handled efflux as rapidly as his. No other registration offices could match his disposal rate. Why, he endorsed more Female Labour Units out of the municipal area, and politely disappointed more white madams in a morning, than most other offices managed in a week. He threshed out the aged, the unfit, widows, women with dependent children, the disabled, all with the hand of a master. What's more, he despatched, transported, deported, repatriated, expelled, transferred, entrained and resettled these superfluous Labour Units with a smooth fluency of form and procedure that had won him the commendation of the Minister himself. He played upon the machinery of expulsion like a maestro. He walked through the forest of towering quadruplicate forms, humped rubber stamps, tangled pass books, with its fecund undergrowth of legislation and regulation, and never once stumbled into the snares which the white madams, or their husbands or their lawyers, or his bosses, constantly laid in his path.

But he was not happy.

He could only be happy if his bosses, who had revealed to them their ideal system, shown him the secret diastolic and systolic workings of their bureaucratic hearts, were happy too. They were not. Perhaps he could have borne their displeasure if his son Arthur had been more of a man. But he was not. If only Arthur had done something understandably bad. If he had burgled a shop or stolen from his mother's purse, or interfered with a neighbour's daughter, he felt that he could have faced it and dealt with it, and Arthur, accordingly. But for his son to have been bullied into eating a live grasshopper, and by a boy apparently half his size, was more than merely disgusting, for in some dim way which he could only vaguely perceive, it reflected on himself.

As he sat in his swivel chair at his mahogany desk, he was not alone with these thoughts. Opposite him sat the Visiting Inspector of Female Labour, drinking tea. A man whose burning sense of righteousness was evidenced in many noticeable ways; the scrupulousness with which he had his hair shaved well above his ears; the eye-riveting cleanness of his fingernails; the careful way he modulated his anger so that it kept an even heat throughout the interview.

"We need to be men of granite," he said.

"Oh yes," Arthur's father had heard it all before.

"You're getting wildly above yourself," remarked the Visiting Inspector of Female Labour calmly.

"Then it's because I'm expected to conform to influx control quotas that are wildly unrealistic. It's not my fault if the superfluous Labour Units which we endorse out of the area never arrive at the other end for resettlement. We know why that happens. They abscond, jump off the train somewhere in the veld and three days later they're back here applying for a residence permit. No, it's hardly our fault, if the Bantu

Affairs Department makes a hash of things”, here he paused significantly – the Visiting Inspector was staring at the ceiling – “nobody in the country manages a higher rate of egress than Parrot Street,” he ventured defiantly.

“Nobody in the country **needs** as high a rate as Parrot Street,” the Visiting Inspector of Female Labour replied sourly. ‘Will you take credit for that too? I’m warning you, they’re muttering about this in Pretoria. It’s being said that Parrot Street is the weak link in the chain. They’re saying that if we’re not careful, Parrot Street will be the death of us. Surely you grasp what will happen if uncontrolled streams of blacks flood into the cultivated white areas? Think man! You’ve read your Spengler, your Gibbon and your Bible!’ here he took a sip of tea, “think!”

Arthur’s father closed his eyes and so he didn’t see the Visiting Inspector stab a finger heavenward, though he heard his final, exhortatory “think!”

“A crack in the wall is the end of the dam,” he said without opening his eyes.

“Exactly.”

“But you can’t get blood from a stone.”

He stopped listening to the man’s spittle flinging expostulations, and imagined their source. He saw the lips stretch and separate and a tunnel gape immediately under the nose. Far in the tunnel’s interior, upside down like a stalactite, an epiglottis beckoned above the throat’s deep, black fall. In a sudden crazy whim he felt that for two pins he would leap that warning fence of tombstone teeth standing flush against the tongue and plunge down into the soft darkness buffeted into oblivion by windy agitations of the pharynx. Perhaps that was his place? He opened his eyes. The Visiting Inspector of Female Labour had gone. The fan at the door wound and unwound in silver silence.

It was very quiet. Almost melodramatically quiet. He glanced over at his clerks. They sat unmoving in their cages. The light from their booths seemed locked into place by the arching steel grills, the way the hasps of a ring hold its stone. He got out of his chair and walked over to the glass wall through which he could get a view of the whole reception hall. It seemed very crowded. With annoyance, he saw that there were black women sitting on the benches reserved for whites only. It was contrary to his specific instructions. It was only when he reached the bottom of the stairs that he realised that there were no white women in the hall.

Furiously, he strode between the banked benches with their lines of patiently waiting women towards his clerks’ booths. They were going to get a piece of his mind. He walked as furiously as dignity would permit, head high, a muscle dancing in his cheek, measuring off the hundred yards with a stiff-legged lofty stride. A grey haired, fading man in grey flannels, a white short-sleeved shirt, and a Wanderer’s Club tie, with the unseeing gaze of an ostrich, marching through the ranks of quietly

attentive women. There was an anger in his bowels that was almost pain. He stopped well before he reached the cages. What he'd taken from his office to be three men all bent over their work were, he now saw, clumsily contrived dummies, three dark jackets stuffed with paper and straw sprawled across the desks.

He turned around. Where were his clerks? He looked for the receptionist. Her desk was vacant. The waiting women watched. He knew that it was his imagination, but there seemed even more of them now. They spilled off the benches, darkening the furthest corners of the hall. Jampacked against the walls and windows they blocked out the daylight. He stood incredulous. There had never been this many before. Never in all his years in Parrot Street. Was this some trick? A joke? Something contrived by Pretoria to scare him? He remembered the menacing demeanour of the Visiting Inspector of Female Labour and the unpleasant innuendoes of their interview. He remembered falling asleep. Perhaps he was still asleep. Perhaps the Visiting Inspector of Female Labour had appeared to him in a dream. Arthur's father was not a religious man. In fact, years of contending with intractable influx quotas had the perverse effect of keeping alive his faith in a manipulable universe. He had been within sight of success so many times. The fact that the master manipulators had proved themselves to be botchers was regrettable but hardly mysterious. One had to look no further than Pretoria for the culprits. Nonetheless, he knew his Bible. Perhaps his dream interview with the Visiting Inspector of Female Labour, if it had been a dream, was a warning omen. Possibly, his clerks had been warned too, and had slunk away while he dreamt. He knew that he might still be dreaming. He ground his teeth, raging with indecision. A warning against what?

All this time he stood stock still, with his eyes blurred and the pain in his bowels growing worse. He remembered where he was. He took a breath and blinked to focus his eyes. What he saw made him sick. The stairs leading up to his office were choked with women, some standing, some lounging against the bannisters, others sitting with their feet dangling over the sides. They clung to the staircase which swayed under their weight, the way a flypaper encrusted with black bodies sways from the ceiling. "I must not panic," he told himself, "they can always sense panic." But he realised that this was nonsense because the black silence around him neither knew nor cared whether he panicked or not. The women's eyes were on him. Thousands of dark eyes centred on him without seeing him. Eyes like sunflowers in an immense field adjusting to the sun. And the eyes stripped him bare.

"Ladies," he began. It was becoming hotter, more stuffy, more crowded. No sooner was the word out of his mouth than he realised that a general address simply wouldn't work. But he knew that he must say something. Something that would stop the shuffling, scraping rustle of sounds coming from every corner of the hall, and which meant that the

applicants were growing restless. Something soothing but assertive. He turned and looked at the woman on his right. She had a hard, flat face. A face that a child draws on paper, without dimensions. A mask of a face glued to a hard little nob of a head, atop a heap of blue and red blankets.

“Now listen, my girl,” he said. He put his hand on her shoulder. He was prepared to be kind but he was determined to be firm, at the same time. He took a deep breath – and then he began to scream. Incredulously, he looked at the deep gouges, the mark of teeth, the blood on his wristbone, and he screamed again. Energetically, singlemindedly, and with every fibre of his being, his head tossed back, buttocks rigid, he howled and bayed at the roof.

But the angry, rustling crescendo that filled the hall was much louder than his single cracked voice. The huge, fierce droning drowned it and deafened him. The air was black with wings and horns and sharp with pincers. The roof whirled and he fell. Then they began to tear at his eyes.

“O, ladies,” was all he said.

Arthur’s mother had decided to give the headmaster a piece of her mind. She sent Arthur to his bedroom and then sat down to compose a very short speech. When she was happy that she had what she wanted to say off by heart, she dialled the headmaster’s number. He answered promptly.

“This is Arthur’s mother, Headmaster,” she told him. “I want to inform you that one of your boys has bullied and victimised my son. The fact of the matter is that Arthur was made to eat a grasshopper,” she paused, and then shouted into the mouthpiece, “a **live** grasshopper!”

“He must have been most terribly upset,” said the headmaster.

“I am upset, Headmaster, and so is Arthur’s father, and I’m warning you that the matter will not end there,” said Arthur’s mother. “As you might have noticed, Arthur is a big boy for his age. A lot bigger, it seems, than this other creature. Now, I have told Arthur that he is to go to school tomorrow and to seek out this mongrel, this lunatic, and he is to beat him within an inch of his life!”

There was silence at the other end while Arthur’s mother breathed heavily into the receiver. Then the headmaster spoke.

“Madam,” he said, “I will tell my boys tomorrow morning at assembly, as I have told them many times before – and I don’t care if the whole of Orange Grove hears me – there will be **no** fighting in my school.”

In his bedroom, Arthur lay face down on his bed and cried. As he cried, his jaws worked silently and his hands flailed up and down upon the pillows, like broken wings.

Christopher Hope

PHOTOGRAPHER'S TWIGGY

The bourgeois buildings of this street
Suddenly float with on their backs
Like glaziers on a bicycle
The semi-slanted panes of light

A pensive-looking pavement spins
Your spine thin in a yellow dress
Making a tune

*I see the sunbowls of your eyes
The spirals of their diaphragm
Perfected into radii*

*You move a mirror of your light
Your pupil is a straw that drinks
Your knees are triggered to that dark*

Apple-eating there off the light
And detail unbalanced find some hurt
Finer than glass or merely that
A bus may bruit
Its red-tongued lumber to your feet

Then glance and dip your shoulders
Weasel-turn and veer to hide
In mineral shadow of street-side

Gone

Peter Strauss

CATO MANOR 1955

(A PIECE FOR PAST VOICES)

- § § § : In Cato Manor there are many Sergeants. Black sergeants and
and white sergeants and good sergeants and bad sergeants.
But most of them are black and most of them are bad.
- § § § : Lord have mercy upon us
Christ have mercy upon us
Umfundisi have mercy upon us
Go well *Umfundisi*
Stay well *Umfundisi*
Cry well *Umfundisi*
Umfundisi!
Umfundisi have mercy upon us.
- § § § : Are black policemen bad in themselves or have they been
taught to be bad? This is a question I have pondered.
- § § § : Who shall command when Prinsloo is dead, and Burger and
Momberg kicked to shreds in the streets – and Campbell and
Jones and Trushay-Smith too, and your old nanny, Emily?
- § § § : The police! the police!
The black organised police,
Taught too well.
- § § § : *Umfundisi* your pants are patched.
- § § § : *Umfundisi* your God has hatched.
- § § § : *Umfundisi* your daughter's slashed.
- § § § : The simple joys of independence
The sweet scourge of a none
Too onerous martyrdom,
Our beloved *smart*,
We have lost.
It is no longer a simple matter
Of independence –
We started that fashion –
And we have lost our innocence
And we are afraid.
- § § § : There once was a Sergeant – white and good. He was born on
the high central plains and every day slept in the shade of a
willow. Later he learned to sling stones, to ride a horse and to
go to *nagmaal*.

- § § § : At seventeen he joined the Force, perforce. Six months at college
in the capital: 444 periods of military instruction, 2 of law and
1 on police regulations.
- § § § : 'Occurence Books' he laboured in
From Kosi Bay to Swakopmund
And many a 'Chev' rode to the rim
Transporting his fair Rosamund.
- § § § : Promotion clearly lay to Cato Manor.
- § § § : Down by the old *Umkhumbane*
Where Tshaka sharpened his spear
And Paton tuned his lyre
And Koosie Brits kicked over the beer,
O dear. Black face, white face, yellow face,
Pale face, Tu-Tone Cream face, any bloody face,
Don't tread on anybody's toes
O don't tread on anybody's toes.
- § § § : Late afternoon : a raid : tip-trucks loaded with constables :
heavily they land, ponderously, one by one : great boots fight
for momentum : stick in one hand, the other adjusting
trouser crutch.
- § § § : Crutch trouble, crutch trouble
Spread throughout the land.
Is it the law or is it the man?
Never use your backyard gate
O! never use your backyard gate.
- § § § : The Sergeant smokes and taps his leg and saddles himself on
the mudguard. The men deploy to the shacks below and their
gusseted buttocks quake in a row.
- § § § : Play no more with policemen
Play no more with fate
Lead us to the manhole man
By the sign of the upturned plate.
- § § § : There is nothing in the manhole
As nothing on the plate
All shall be well, O happy bell,
By the knock on the Golden Gate:
Knock Knock Knock.
- § § § : Wisely the Sergeant remains on the road.
- § § § : Women and children raise the warning cry: *Meleka! Meleka!*
Meleka! ¹ The noise floods into the valley. The hills seem
to lift their skirts as everybody makes for high ground.

1. A corruption of 'milk'. Originally used as a shout of welcome for milk vans but later applied to police trucks because of a certain similarity of silhouette.

- § § § : To this scene the Sergeant is no stranger. Yet it still brings to him a quiet feeling of power. In the midst of tension, disorder and confusion he is a centre of calm, grace and certainty.
- § § § : Because he was white
 He did not see the black world
 Assuming positions
 Pretending to the immutable
 The pre-ordained
 God's kingdom
 Where the spasm and the hunter
 And the man
 Are one:
 Where the cash register
 Does not register.
 Preserve him, O god,
 From the consequences of his miscalculations.
- § § § : His fathers rode with de la Rey.
- § § § : One-tenth of his income goes to the church.
- § § § : He can dig a furrow from a dam and head the water all day long, the spade like sunlight in his hands.
- § § § : A native corporal moved out from the line of shacks below the road and made his way up to the Sergeant, sliding back a little, off-balance, at every step. ... 'Meneer, the woman Kate has locked her door and she refuses to let us in' ... 'Kick the door down then.' ... 'Meneer, it is the woman who charged Sitole. *Ons is bang vir daardie magistraat. Hy's nog ne getransfer nie.*' The Sergeant stubbed his cigarette on the bonnet of the van. Then he turned on his heel and faced the other way looking across to the sea for a moment, through a cutting in the long dune fringing the harbour a mile or two away. ... 'I will go down,' he said. When he reached the door of Kate's room he kicked it and shouted, 'Open up, you're under arrest, I'm taking you to the station.'
- § § § : You're under arrest, you're under arrest
 Don't forget to take your vest.
 Don't forget to ring up Roley;
 Do it soon, not Monday morning
 Oh! do not wait till Monday morning.
- § § § : After a few seconds the door opened a little. The Sergeant pushed it back firmly, being careful, however, not to step into the room until the door had swung right back against the wall. The room appeared almost excessively clean but smelt like the shower-house of a military barracks – toilet soap, toothpaste, newsprint and urine.
- § § § : The *table d'hote* of Springbok Radio.

§§§ : Diagonally opposite the door was a bed raised on bricks covered with a bright yellow candlewick spread. At the head of the bed a pillow, very white, had the words, 'Kiss me darling before I sleep,' embroidered on it, ornately and unevenly, in red. Midway along the edge of the bed the fall of the spread was kinked up by the handle of a white porcelain chamber pot decorated with a moulded pattern of tasselled curtain cords. The room was not cealed, neither walls nor roof, and a few strips of stringy bark fell into it from the supporting gum poles. The Sergeant was reflected in the mirror of a beaded wardrobe opposite the door. ... 'What do you want Sergeant?,' asked Kate. ... 'Come to the station. You're under arrest.' ... 'Go to Hell,' she said.

§§§ : Oh, do it soon not Monday morning
Please ring soon not Monday morning.
You can be sure there'll be no motions
On your case before the Nations:
Uncle Eric's far too spry,
And there's yellow in his eye;
Yellow, yellow in his eye,
Watch the yellow in his eye.

§§§ : *Daar is 'n ou skepsel van Beaufort Wes
Wat dikwels doen sy goeie bes:
Hy skrikkel in die skrikkeljaar
En hy prikkel in die prikkeljaar,
Hy is die een man demonstrasie
Van ons blanke boerenasie.
Hy trek mooi die wit beskawing
Soos 'n lap oor ons beraming,
En sy naam die word bekend
Van die Kaap 'n hele ent.*

§§§ : Katie was a little out of breath and a little drunk and to the rank perfume of the room was added that of the fear and excitement and exertion of her body. She made a prim but ineffective attempt to straighten her skirt and then suddenly ripped off her bodice and clasped her hands over her breasts with the great purple areolae stretched in a rich, moist sheen between her fingers. Then she swayed a little, took two or three paces back, and fell on the bed. ... 'Come and get me, Sergeant,' she said.

*Sticks and stones shall break your bones,
And sex will always hurt you.*

Colin Shum

SURF CITY

Yellow light slitting under the blinds poked us out of bed early, and we opened the windows and shut off the air-conditioner to let the room fill with warm air. The big sky seemed to come right in on me where I lay. Jude went to shower and I leaned out to look down at the new trees they'd put on the street island in the night – rubber trees this time, glossier than the flamboyants we'd had last month. Jude came back still wet, dried herself, and sat on her bed to shine her long buttery legs. She pulled on green shorts, hooked the shoulder straps, then borrowed my apricot Stikk to colour in her nipples. It looked even better than the cherry-pink she usually used. She fetched mangoes from the fridge and filled two bowls with the cold orange cubes. Mango on its own can make you feel sick so we had some ice-cream as well, then I dressed and we went down to the street.

It was so early that the work-people hadn't got out of the way yet – you could still see the odd black face and brown overall slipping into a side-entrance.

The pavement was still wet from the sea which had swept up over the ledges at night, and the workman had sloshed away the water and left the marble to dry in the sun. He was just finishing as we got there, hurrying to get done before the people came. High tide had left the sands smooth and untrodden, the sun was still low enough to dazzle you straight in the eye and catching it in my eyelashes I could see the whole line of buildings glittering down the promenade. Bright air, salt-scented city, Surf City looking its cleanest, the day ahead of us, I felt free and happy, but I used to feel like that every morning when we went down – it's only now things have changed for me a bit that I can't see it all the same.

The Centre was open but we usually wait till about nine o'clock – it's not worth going before then – so we set off to walk the long curve of beachfront as we often did. Jude was walking on the sea-wall, the dark plaits she'd put on swinging round her bare shoulders. I jumped up behind her then we saw them – horses, two chestnut horses with goldy manes galloping down the sands, their riders calling loud to them as they passed us, then splashing through the edge of the waves in a flurry of gold tails and flinging water.

Jude is much more of an extrovert than I am and she leaped down at once on to the sand but the horses flashed past before she could reach them over the broad beach. She ran as if she wanted to catch on to their manes and be swept off by them, but they'd gone without halting, and her arms hung disappointed. We watched them out of sight, then paddled in the bubbly waves instead. But they came back as we were walking on again, cantering gently up towards us as we turned hearing them; The horses had been going hard and were panting, salty manes tangled now, and sweat runnelled their necks, but the riders were fresh and laughing though gasping a bit. They rode between us and pulled the horses in. A man and a woman, they were both in red shorts and their bare arms and breasts were the same creamy gold as the horses' manes. She looked about twenty-two, older than us but still neat-skinned, and he was even older, about thirty.

"We saw you looking", she said, her horse stamping, "so we came to show you them." She tried to bring her horse quietly up to me but he buckled his back and pranced, edging into the water, so she slid off and got his reins under his nose and held him.

"They're lovely," said Jude, "where'd you get them?" "Oh they were given to us this morning", she said, "as a present." "So where'll you keep them?" I asked. "We haven't thought" she said, laughing, "I guess there'll be someone who'll find them a place".

The man was still sitting on his horse, and he had walked it into the water, where it stood lifting its hooves one by one, feeling the cold water wash its legs, dipping and stretching its neck against the reins. He looked over to us then, "Have a ride?" "Oh no! I've never ridden a horse" I said but Jude was all eager – "I'd love to".

They helped us get on – the animals wouldn't stand still and made little tripping steps away as we tried to get a hold on their bare backs to mount. The hairy sides were warm, a bit sticky even. The man got me on after Jude had mounted, by holding his hands together under my foot and lifting me up. The horse's back felt broad and hot. My feet seemed to hang in air. I tried to tuck my heels in somehow and the horse felt them touch his belly and jerked off, trotting, then faster, as I twisted one hand in his mane and grabbed the bone of his back with the other. Jude was far ahead, sand scudding behind her, and my horse was trying to catch up with the other, with me thumping and lurching uselessly, screaming in my head not wanting to cry out loud. Somehow I dragged his head towards the water, he rushed in and the waves splashed deep and he stopped. I clambered down, shaking. The horse was enjoying the water and he did not want to go.

The man and the woman walked up. He was smiling – "Enjoy it?" he asked, knowing I hadn't, and had. "Let's go Serena." He mounted with a quick neat leap, then pulling her up in front of him he held her and spurred the horse into a gallop and was gone without another look at me.

They caught up with Jude who had turned back. I watched them take her horse and ride off. Jude, tiny and thin in the distance, started back. When we got together she was full of the horse and its splendid stride, but I felt how odd the people had been, coming so generously, going so coldly, looking so beautiful. "Where'll they keep them do you think?" I said. She only said "Anywhere, anyone'd be glad to keep them, they're so lovely."

It was a distance back to the Centre, and going towards it I thought its green dome, the colour of undersea, looked like a strange eyeless head pushing up out of the sand, no neck but square orange shoulders facing the sea.

When we arrived quite a few people were gathered outside. At the girls' entrance we met Francine and Viva. They'd put on full clothes, but light enough not to be hot, pale gauzy skirts and glistening pink tie-on tops. Francine said: "Come and talk to Viva, she's gone on a speak-less week and I can't get her to say anything." Viva had shut her wide straight mouth tight. She pulled the knot of her top tighter and you could see she'd put a very peculiar blood-dark Stikk on her nipples. "What's the matter?" Jude asked immediately, all concerned. Francine didn't seem to be worried much, she just told us how it had happened. Viva had turned eighteen so it would be her last year of coming to the Centre. She'd applied for a new car for her birthday and when they delivered it she'd driven off for a whole day and come back without it. She'd put all her clothes and records in it and they weren't brought back either. Francine thought she'd just moved out but she came back late at night and hadn't said a word since. "Did you wreck the car?" Jude asked. "She won't say" wailed Francine, as if she'd repeated this to everyone she knew. Viva sat stiffer on the steps, then got up and walked away.

Then the entrances were clicking open, and about thirty other girls were waiting to go in, so we formed a queue. I waited till last because Viva was slowly moving over to join in and I thought I would stand next to her even if she wouldn't talk. Her yellow eyes looked flat and dim, not the clear topaz they'd been when I'd seen her swimming and sunning. I didn't expect an answer but I said, "Viva if you want to come to our place you must just come even if you don't feel like talking." Then I felt stupid because she just turned those flat eyes on me as if I'd gone up and spoken by mistake to someone I thought I recognised, a sort of "stay off - don't think you know me" look. I couldn't say another word, and tried to smile but ended up turning away.

Jude had gone ahead and there were girls wanting to take their place behind us and more coming down the steps. Viva kept on standing close behind me as we passed through the gate then one of the little gold rings I wear in my ears fell off right there and I had to turn to follow where it had rolled. As I stood up I couldn't help seeing how Viva was still looking at me, a cool untouching yard away, watching. So I

couldn't think straight at all with her there like that, and what happened was that instead of making a proper selection from the light-up squares that you touch to be put with the type of partner – looks and personality and so on – that you feel like, I just slammed my hand against any six squares without choosing or seeing what they were. And the green shutters had slotted open for me and I went in quickly to get away.

I suppose I had got into a bit of a rut about choosing partners, but I never realised just how different things could be when you got someone accidentally as I did that day instead of choosing what you think you want. I know some girls do it like that all the time, even Jude sometimes literally closes her eyes so she can't see what she's touching and just feels her way across the columns pressing anything, but I never did.

The first difference was that I had a longer walk than usual, and the walls were yellow instead of pink. I hadn't even realised that there were different colours on different floors and though I'd always ended up on the first floor I hadn't really thought about it. Still I've only been sixteen for five months and probably everyone takes as long as that to be a bit more experimental. Perhaps by the time they're eighteen most girls have been to just about every room. But that morning it was all so different for me I thought perhaps I'd got into the men's side by mistake and would end up with a girl and get into terrible trouble because you can only do that kind of thing after you've turned nineteen. But at the end of the yellow corridor where a smaller set of shutters takes you to the final set, and you know which one is yours because there's a big light-up number on the door to match the number-card the machine has given you, I saw it was all right because my door was open and there was a man inside.

He'd seen me walking up, I suppose that's why he'd left the door open, to see how I walked, and I must have been smiling with relief, because he was smiling too in a way that was like a laugh at the same time, and as I got in the door he bent his curly-black head and said, "Hallo strawberry-mouth!" and kissed me.

It wasn't only that his hair was black, nothing nothing nothing was as usual, and no-one I'd had there before was anything like he was. His head came burrowing down into my shoulder after he'd kissed me, he had bouncy soft hair, and he was taller than me by about a head and shoulders.

"Sit," he said then, and pulled me down to the grass mat instead of the couch, but he didn't sit beside me, he lay on his stomach with his head right out through the big opening that looks on to the sea. I saw we were on about the seventh floor, and that a wind had come up ruffling some dark shadows on the sea though it was still bright. Almost immediately he stopped looking out, turned on his back and caught my hand. I was kneeling rather awkwardly by him.

“What shall we do today?” he asked, and I couldn’t answer at all – people just don’t ask things like that at the Centre. “Oh just go on as usual” I said eventually as he was waiting for me to reply, and he said “What do you mean by as usual?” How he could even be asking was what I couldn’t understand – everyone knows what they go there for. Of course different people have had their Sex lessons at different schools so their styles vary, but all the same you make love, and you eat, and you go and swim, and come back and sleep, or go down to the undersea area or the pools, or you sit on the verandah where the sea comes rushing in underneath you, well everyone knows what you do at the Centre in Surf City. So I didn’t answer, but looked at him instead, seeing how thick his eyebrows were and wondering what made his mouth so lovely and thinking how it looked always on the point of saying or laughing, never just closed. Then he said “Of course I know what you mean. Come.”

He lifted his arms to hold me, without going to the couch, and I went to him, puzzled but relieved he’d stopped asking questions. He was very broad to put my arms round, so I folded my arms close to me and let him hold me. It felt strange, such a big body, as if any moment he might just stand up, holding me still, and maybe walk right out into the air which would give him foothold so we might move like that for miles, several floors above the bright sea.

I only had my white towel skirt on that day, with its stretchy waistband, so it slid off easily, but when he’d taken me and I was lying against him with my eyes still closed watching inside my eyelids the fading of the lilac and green branches that had risen up burst into whirling leaves and slowly laid themselves in a mound, he startled me by suddenly sitting up, reaching for my skirt and pulling it on over my feet. “Why are you dressing me?” I asked – he only answered “I’m dressing myself too” and kissed me again before he put on his green shorts. Then he walked over to the opening in the wall, taking my hand, and sat down there with his feet over the edge pulling me down too.

I was thirsty, as I usually am by this stage – kisses make you thirsty – but somehow I knew he wouldn’t want to get a drink sent, though we could have had it in the wall-box in seconds, so I just drank some of the iced water that is there anyway.

“Why did you ask what we should do?” I said, the words just coming without my thinking them out. “Well what did you think when I asked?” he said, “did you think – does he mean should we do it lying or standing or in the sun or with the blind down? Or with the television on or off, looking at others or letting them look at us?” “No”, I answered, “I didn’t think any of those things. I sort of wondered whether you were thinking should we do it or not.” “So that’s what I wanted you to think,” he said quietly, “don’t say more about it.” He paused a moment, then quickly said “Did you like it with me?” and I said, “Yes,” again without having to think or really ask myself, it

was just true. Then he took my face between his hands, just my face, and kissed me and his teeth were sharpish, and said softly, almost so I couldn't hear him – "Everyone else has always had an answer when I've asked them that."

We sat a long time at the opening, watching people run and swim, the sun getting hotter and the umbrellas going up, and far down at the children's beach the children coming for their morning bathe, their guides leading the smallest ones in. We're lucky in Surf City, I think, that the Children's Centre is part of the town, so we see more of them, and they aren't placed miles out as they have to be in the really big cities.

"I want to go out," he said suddenly, "but not to the beach. Into town maybe – you'll come, won't you?" I nodded and stood up. We combed our hair, then he took the comb and parted my hair on one side, smoothing the long ends over my cheeks. "You look nice so," he said, "why's your hair so slippery?" "I washed it in the shower this morning." "No, it's softer than that, it's a very soft sort of hair." I was glad I hadn't put on a hairpiece that day, but I don't often – they're hot things.

We went out and down the terraces instead of the lifts. Outside it was very hot but we started walking and somehow never caught the rail to town, just walked all the way. We didn't talk much but every time I looked at something in a window or across the street he seemed to be looking at it too. Once he pressed my hand hard against his hip bone, so hard it hurt but I didn't pull away.

A lot of shoppers were out in town, and we left the main street and turned down a lane where there was not much, just some rubbish bags waiting and a wig shop with rather old-fashioned blue and green wigs on silver heads and a pet-shop where I'd sometimes stopped to look at tropical fish in the window. This time there was a box of hamsters asleep nudged up against each other, and instead of the fish a big cage with a large gold-haired animal sitting rather squashed inside. It was like a bear but had a longish nose and a long tongue that it was curling through the wire of the cage.

"I wonder if anyone will buy him," I said. "Well we could," he answered. "But where'd we keep it?" I asked, remembering the horses and wondering where they would have found a place to rest and eat. "And who would keep it," he said, "you or me?" "I wouldn't want it on my own" I said quickly. "Let's ask about it anyway," he said, and we went in.

The old man who kept the shop, well he wasn't so very old, I suppose about forty, was sitting behind the counter eating sunflower seeds and giving some to a white cockatoo chained to a dirty perch. The shop smelled awful. "What's that animal in the window?" we asked, and the man spat a few seed-shells into his hand and said "He's a Himalayan honey-bear." "Does he live on honey then?" I asked and he stood up

scattering seed-shells from his trousers. “He won’t eat anything, nothing that I’ve tried anyway. I’ve given him honey but it’s not the right kind or something and he won’t touch it. Someone ordered him and then never turned up to get him. Are you interested?”

He went over to the window and undid the cage. The bear came out at once, heavily, but softly, and he pulled it up, holding it against him, then gave it into my arms. He was a good weight, and his coat was brushy but flat-lying, and his claws long. He seemed tired and didn’t struggle at all. I felt pleased to find him sitting so quietly against me, though he smelled quite strong, a sort of musty cupboard smell. I did want him, though if I had been on my own I might not have. Anyway I didn’t want to see him put back in his cage.

He hardly cost anything and the old man took our credit numbers without even checking them. As we left he pulled the cage out of the window to put the fish back there.

Out in the street I said, “We’ll have to find out what he eats first. What do you think we should try?” “Fruit maybe. We can get some and see.”

The nearest fruitshop was in the main street, quite a long way down. They had everything you could think of – packets of red and green apples, trays of apricots, strawberries, watermelons, loquats, nectarines, all cool and brilliant under the glass covers of the long freezer stands. We took out some apples, pears, and a tall jar of cherries. The bear was not looking at anything much. There was some honey in jars on a shelf – Mendelssohn’s Apiaries they said on yellow labels - so we bought some of that too.

Outside we sat on the street-edge but that was noisy so we got up again. I was carrying the bear who felt heavier all the time. We went down to Greenpark but the benches were all taken by some child-groups who’d come for the morning – the children stared and pointed at the bear who sat quite still, his coat bristly against my bare skin.

At last we found a quiet place – the old cemetery right at the end of the street. No-one ever went there much, though there was a vase of flowers, pink gladioli, on every grave. The grass squares were clipped neat. People used to talk about moving the cemetery away but they haven’t done it yet and anyway no-one minds it so much now it’s all kept tidy and flowers put on all the graves.

We found a big shiny black tombstone, broad and flat, and sat on it. It was cool even in the sun. I shifted the bear out of my arms and tried to sit him up, but he lay down and pressed close as if the stone were too cold. We tried the honey first. He sniffed at it and turned away his head. Then the apples, but he wouldn’t look, nor at the pears, and so we put a cherry in the side of his closed mouth. He lay quiet a while, then the cherry fell out. He licked at it with his long tongue and it fell on to the gritty path. I put another to his mouth, then pushed it in. He pushed it out. He put his head down and grunted, so we put the fruit in front of his

nose and waited. We both felt worried. I said, "Let's try at the library to find out what he eats" – the library was quite near, across the street and down by the bay. I realised I didn't even know what my partner's name was so asked him – he said shortly "Rick." Then he said, "Do you think it's food that's the trouble? How do we know he isn't ill?"

We walked off to the library anyway, Rick carrying the bear. He held him nicely, round against his chest. It was about lunchtime and we ate an apple each on the way but they didn't taste too good.

We went in at the Information door and at the central counter asked for Animal Information. "Zoological," said the dark sleek girl in pink uniform, "over to the right four along." Down the aisle between the machines we went and found the right one. The assistant handed us a card to fill in – we had to put type of animal and place of origin and then mark one of a whole list of queries. I marked a dot by *Diet*. She slotted it in and turned the machine on. A long humming noise came then spurty clicks. The bear quivered a little in Rick's arms. The assistant did not even look at the bear but gave us a paper that came out of the machine. It had a number in the corner and underneath it said, "Honey, fruit, small insects". Rick said "We'll have to try small insects then". "What can we get though?" I asked, feeling pretty desperate, "flies or what?" "I don't even know where to look for flies," he said, "A friend of mine had flies badly in his flat last year but they got rid of them."

We trailed out again. The bear had opened his eyes and was tasting Rick's skin. I quickly bit off a piece of apple and tried to give it to him but he closed his mouth. "There's a roof garden at the bank over the road," said Rick, "we could have a look there." We found our way up but there were no insects there – not a caterpillar or an ant even, and we sat on a seat. The bear lay on Rick's lap not moving, lost in his hungry sleep. Then he wet Rick's shorts, shook a bit, and lay still. When I touched his nose he didn't move. His nose looked dry, and then his mouth came open but he wasn't breathing any more. His mouth was dry inside too. "We'll have to bury him," said Rick, "but there's no-where here." The roof garden soil was only about two feet deep, and the cemetery wouldn't do at all – we hadn't even a spade. "I know what we'll do," he said, "come to my flat and we'll put him in the rubbish disposal unit." "Oh you can't!" I said. "Well I don't know what else to do," he said, "but he's big and I'll have to cut him up probably." I couldn't speak and I knew Rick was hating it too so we walked along in silence. We left the fruit packets on the pavement.

Rick's flat was by the sea. We walked all the way again, and the wind had got up and the sea was chipping angrily. The lift was shiny blue inside and hummed up very fast. Rick's flat was a single and had paintings of orange-trees on the walls. In the kitchen Rick turned the rubbish machine on. The box was about half the size of the bear. We stood looking at it then Rick laid the bear on the table and took

out a big broad-bladed knife, but even then we couldn't begin. I couldn't anyway. I wanted to cover up the bear – his fur was chilly already. Then suddenly I couldn't take it at all and said, "I can't stay – you'll do it won't you?" He nodded and said, "Come back in half an hour".

I went down in the lift but was sick on the way and chewed apple spluttered on the shiny blue floor. I dropped a tissue from my pocket over it. It soaked through. I ran out the door, the bitter sick-taste in my mouth and went over to sit on the sea wall, feeling the wind tangle my hair, then got up and walked along, getting colder and colder, not knowing whether to go back or not. There was no-one on the beach.

What made me decide to go back was that I kept thinking how I'd left Rick to do it all on his own and should at least help him clean up. But there might be a dreadful smell. Anyway I did start back, and looked along all the entrances for the right one, angry with myself for not having checked the name or number of the flat. All the buildings looked the same height and shape, and they all turned out to have shiny blue lifts, the whole street of them. I checked the lifts for a patch of sick too but it had been cleaned away. After about an hour of trying to remember I realised I didn't even know any more where I'd sat on the long sea-wall, and sat down hopelessly, tired in my feet, staring stupidly at the tops of the buildings thinking I might see perhaps a bear-shaped shimmer above one of them. Even if I hadn't been too tired to call, it would have been no use calling – those buildings are all thirty storeys high.

I waited in the cold till it got dark too, thinking Rick might come out to look for me. He never did.

The next day I went down early to the Centre, leaving without Jude, and waited for it to open. I was trying to remember which squares I'd pressed, but though I went through the whole thing three times I only got three people I'd never seen before. In the afternoon I waited near the men's entrance, thinking I might see Rick going in, but I never saw him. All week it was the same. For all I knew he could have been looking for me too. After a week it was too bag to go on and there'd been trouble when I'd run out on people when I'd found that again it wasn't Rick in the room.

I don't know what's gone wrong now but everything's changed. I can't bear going to the Centre and can't talk to Jude and she wishes I'd move out. I never saw the horses again though I looked for them. Viva passed me once in the street but I couldn't say a word to her. Lately I haven't been near the Centre and just spend all day in the flat and don't see anyone. I wanted Rick so badly that first week but now even that's changed, and the worst is I don't ever want to go to the Centre again because I can't help being afraid that if I found Rick he might not remember me, or the bear, or anything.

GULLIVER'S DAY

The sun this morning, hours before you woke,
through blinds, the pallid sheet, your senseless skin,
staked out your giant heart and slowed its stroke.

Staggered, your will inched from toes to hair-roots:
grip, flex, bend, take strain! Get moving! On the floor
sly sunbeams and cockroaches in cahoots,

Small yachts incline to tankers in the bay.
The skyline buildings have made fast your limbs,
the streets reach up like ropes. Still, it's your day,

the first of summer. The mayor, costumed
as a lifey and flanked by Roy Campbell
and Barry Richards (all three gents consumed

by civil embarrassment), climbs your chest
conferring certain freedoms. When they've gone
and the Mercury's man has done his best

to scurry off unnoticed from behind
your left ball, you will have time to revolve
vistas a new land hurls across the mind,

before, letting curious Lilliput be,
you struggle into baggies, grab a towel,
and sleepwalk down to contemplate the sea.

Mike Kirkwood

BALLAD OF THE PRACTICAL CRITIC 1970

There were a dozen poets or so
whose virtues are demonstrable:
The rest are names you ought to know –
But they were irresponsible.

(The novelists amount to three –
Or four if you count Lawrence –
The rest lacked serious industry;
And must provoke abhorrence.)

The line (of course) begins with Donne,
And takes in wise Ben Jonson,
But Milton you may safely shun;
Un-English, spun-out nonsense.

Pope alone of all his age
Maintains a decent standard;
Romantic poets stride the stage,
Loud-mouthed but empty-handed.

Browning, Swinburne, Tennyson,
May please the antiquarian,
But Hopkins is the only one
Whose language is Shakespearian.

And coming down to recent times —
The age of black disaster —
Untainted by unnatural crimes
Stands Eliot, our master.

For deep-suggestive subtlety,
Livingness of enactment,
For life-arousing honesty
And language terse with packed-ment;

For deeply-moral scrutiny,
Profoundly moving statement,
Intensely high intensity,
Health without abatement,

The list above will quite suffice:
A now-complete tradition.
The rest are tainted by some vice,
Or nasty disposition.

J.V. Crewe

THE ECOSYSTEMS

JAKE frisked her with his eyes as the young African girl got out of the car and began to wydah down the drag///

Her short red frock was bustled out by the characteristic steatopygous rump as she sashayed away, probably for the benefit of Carlos who was better looking than Jake and knew it.

Sultry with sleep, she left

a musky smell in the car that was both sexy and repelling, like smoked kippers.

:? Sure we can trust that grunge? /Carlos.

:She brought us the ceremonial robes/Jake.

:That doesn't necessarily signify. These people/deep down/are pretty xenophobic.

:She's one of the intelligentsia, man, a university graduate. I trust her. We couldn't get to first base without these robes. She's taking a risk lending us this goop.

:She's taking a risk wearing such a short-assed dress/Carlos, with a huck.

:Lucky there are no Ogs about.

A great rau-caw-cawing laughter rose up from big Jake's belly. It sounded to Carlos like the distant trumpeter hornbill that had once startled him in the forest. They shared this lonely exile laughter, warming their hands on it. It was the too-loud, diuretic-making laughter provoked by the cold and fevers and the knowledge of doing something clandestine and slightly illegal.

After all, they were foreigners///

They drove out of the little town, whose well-lit drags were fringed with jacaranda trees, lipping over a carpet of the mauve November blooms, and hit the double highway. It was still dark. They both felt empty, but they had left their billets too early to get any **tchai** or manje. You had to fill in a goddam form in triplicate to get anything from aparatchiks at such an unusual time. As foreigners they sensed the precariousness of their positions and were careful not to ask for special privileges. But they were well treated and their academic qualifications were highly respected.

—:Of a total of 41 main ecosystems in the Province, 25 are not represented in my region/Carlos, writing his first explosive report.

It became more critical//about the dangerous methods of cultivation on the mountain sides and the entrophication of the lakes in the game reserve//as it went along. But the report was received by his superiors with a sort of masochistic enthusiasm.

It was the girl//she worked as a biological research assistant and had a soft impala eye for Carlos//who told him about the ceremony. It took place, early November, always in remote rural areas and surrounded by Masonic secrecy because it was frowned upon by the authorities and strictly illegal. She hinted with a certain amused complicity that it was a blend of the pagan and Christian, combining the charm and innocence of **El Baile de los Seises** in Seville Cathedral and something more darkly primitive.

:It's a valid example of esoteric Africana and well worth the attention of a serious anthropologist like your friend Jake/the African girl, drawing.

----? Is she giving him the jag? /Carlos. He smiles and thanks her for the information. When Jake hears about it he's busting to go.

The car planes past the plantations of tea, oranges, and the incredibly straight spears of balding gum trees. You could always tell when a farm wasn't a commune. The old fashioned farm houses still had their windbreaks of flame trees, jacaranda or occasionally the pink **Sterculea discolor**. But the front lawns were littered with contemptuous detritus, like the shells of old cars without wheels, rusty dolls houses for kids to play in. They were gauntlets to authority.

The road narrowed//

Now they were on one of the older single highways with dirt on each side, which took them higher into the mountains. They whipped through the H.S. Mpanza Tunnel and out on to the open road. On their right// Carlos catalogueing to himself//were malachite cliffs, copper-stained in shades of verdigris and meconium. There were hundreds of folded granitic boulders, weathered by exfoliation into fracture patterns. Cannon balls with basalt or dolerite cores seemed balanced perilously//? ammunition for chacma baboons? //one on top of the other and menaced the road. Occasionally the headlights picked out a minatory litter of small boulders on the road, which had to be avoided. Incredibly, this was a favourite picnic place of people who must have enjoyed daring the gods, like those living permanently under coconut or sausage trees. Because it was the traditional thing to do, they carved their names or initials on the cliff face. An old American car with one headlight working came towards them, tacking slightly, driven with petrified concentration by a grey haired African. It just scraped by on the mountain side.

—:Drunkness, the product of frustration, is endemic/Jake, no mean drinker himself, notes sympathetically for his private diary. —:It adds the spice of Russian Roulette to road and rail travel.

A few miles further on they drove into a wild forest area. Jake slowed as he saw the first landmark emerging in the headlights. A huge acacia tree, like claw-and-ball furniture, seemed to grow out of a granitic boulder on their left. On it was incised//dramatic as a bushman painting //P. GROBLER. For some reason this made them both laugh. ? Was it because they were approaching their destination? They hadn't laughed like that when the girl had told them about it. They turned left into a dirt road and Jake pulled up, shucking off the motor and lights. An electric chirr of cicadas fuzzed out the silence.

:? Sure you want to go through with this? /Carlos, casually.

:Could be **peligroso**.

:I don't give a ching/Jake, shrugging. :Here, have another one of my grips.

They began to cud the herbal pills, meditating, gradually aware of a tentative dawn in the air, gaining courage, lifting, seeing with clarity that they had to go through with this maybe unique experience, wondering if//like being sent to some private school//they had been given the right uniform. Unmasked, they could be seen as spies and neo-imperialists. ? Could they trust the African grunge? Maybe she resented the fact that Carlos showed little interest in her. Maybe she had guessed that only Jake could get a real treat out of him and ———

Stop worrying///

Grips often brought out his latent paranspicious. Carlos recognised with a scientist's detachment. After a while they shrugged into the royal blue robes and cowls, which had Ned Kelly slits for their mouths and Semana Santa eye holes. The material, a soft opaque cotton, smelt ammoniac and unwashed. On the backs of the robes were embroidered large white Maltese crosses. Whoever owned this goop had almost simian arms; the sleeves covered their hands. Probably a good thing. Hands could be a dead give-away.

The car planed forward. They tasted the dust from the murram road. They drove another two miles. Neither of them spoke. Presently Jake slowed almost to a standstill.

:The second landmark is a large rock on which are painted the words JESUS RED!/The African girl. :You mustn't ask **how** I know, man.

There it was, straight ahead, at a point where the road branched to the left. They rounded the bend to find a clearing in the forest. About fifteen cars, the large old fashioned American ones that Africans liked, were drawn up. One or two of them were spanking new and prosperous looking. Jake parked their car, turning it around so that they could make a quick get away, backing it into a clump of **mimosa pigra**,

favourite manje of Impala. The horizontal dawn light had erupted, harshly back-lit, like a yellow fever tree. They got out and lit cigarettes, talking in low voices as people do before a funeral, suddenly conscious of what gropes they looked in their priestly robes, giggling a bit because of the grips. A bataleur eagle, tattered wings outstretched, did a tight-rope-walk in the sky. The muffled sound of drumming filtered down from the mountain side. They started to walk towards it, brushing past pampas grass, wild syringa and mimosa trees, moving like sleep walkers.

:In a clearing you will see a windowless round house with a thatched roof/the African girl. :They call this specially constructed building the Cathedral.

Even so it is quite a shock to see, in a clearing, the Cathedral, which is thrumming with life like a beehive. They push open the woven reed door and go in. It is exactly as the girl said it would be. The atmosphere is tense and there is the musky ousk that Africans make en masse at a boxing match.

———Or Puerto Ricans at a cock fight/Carlos.

They close the door. About thirty cowed men in two ranks are drawn up in a semi circle, about ten paces from the altar. They shuffle up to make room for the newcomers; otherwise nobody seems to pay any attention to them. In this enclosed space the drumming is deafening. The drummer and the priest stand in front of the altar, a rectangular box covered with a green cloth on which there is a white Maltese cross embroidered. A lantern on the altar provides a meagre light.

? What sends

Jake's eyes saintly to the high ceiling? Shiny, black painted spokes of wood support the roof//a Chinese peasant's straw hat//like an umbrella. Under that there is a stout cross bar, stretching from one side of the hut to another. Something tells Jake —? is it the prescience of the grippered? —that this plays some part in the ceremony. The priest// a thin Nilotic giant//wears a green robe. Everybody else is in royal blue, same as the intruders.

———Thank God/Jake.

With a wave of his bulbed stick and a blast of the whistle, the priest cuts off the drumming. The stick reminds Jake//hungrily//of a huge spring onion. Round the priest's left wrist there is a periapt of black elephant hairs.

———Probably from an elephant poached in my park/Carlos.

The congregation squats on the ground like pupils in a rural school. Jake and Carlos//watch it now//are a shade slow to interpret the priest's gesture. The voice that emerges through the post box of his cowl has a rasping loerie-like petulance. The pulps of his sepia lips are plumped out like bicycle inner tubes and are visible through the slot. His mouth

works strangely, as if disgust were wrestling with elation. It has a **de haut en bas** quality and one has the feeling that it belongs to a man of authority, even education. At moments of artistic pause in his speech// Baroness Blixen's perspective//there is a characteristic groan of African approval.

Neither J nor C understand what is being said because the sermon is in the vernacular, but they have the sense//as with electrophoresis// of examining the symptoms of an old cancer from the past, a piece of African epihistory that stirs the emotions. They regret that they did not bring an interpreter, maybe the girl. Jake fingers the miniature camera tied round his wrist.

——I'll get an article for Life magazine out of this anyway/Jake, with satisfaction.

——? Would they be made to take an active part in the ceremony? / Carlos. ——If so they could demonstrate ignorance of the ritual and so betray that they are foreigners. That grope Jake//smelling of expensive after shave by his shoulder//hasn't thought of that, the dumb frangie. He'd be thinking of all the stash he's going to earn from another article in Life magazine.

The priest suddenly stops talking in mid-sentence///

Carlos, trained in the Amazonian jungle and especially audile, hears the wheeze of his own smothered breathing. The ethologist extraordinary then preauscultates//Lorca//a horizon of faint dog barks. It's like a husband who intuits the tune his wife is going to sing, seconds before she actually does. Everybody is listening tensely. A few moments later there is a deep groan as now they all hear the dog barks. The little cathedral seems to close up like an umbrella. Jake, the fastidious American, snoogs the crocodile musk of excitable bodies.

The holes in the priest's cowl burn. He blows his whistle and shakes his stick, shouting what sounds like

!: Jesus raid Jesus raid!

The congregation gets to its feet like one man, answering with ritualistic ! aahs! and !eehs!. An expensive gold lighter flares in the priest's hand. Jake jumps slightly. Animal-like, he dreads the intrusion of violent man-made noises. There are the staccato explosions of a fire cracker, the kind that kids let off on Guy Fawkes night. The audience now thoroughly grippered//? Have they been on the **merungi?** //break into a stamping dance and an antiphonal chant decussates between the priest and the congregation, punctuated by blasts of the whistle. J and C, feeling the slide into a trap, hope that their shambling simulacra of the dance will pass muster in the dinge of the hut. Luckily//just for the fun of it//they have learnt a few traditional dance steps from their colleagues. A choker of cordite and smoke and dust rises to the rafters. The autistic ramp seems interminable to J and C, but actually lasts only a few

minutes before there is an interruption, which gelids the action and supers silence on the scene.

The door is battered by what sounds like a heavy stick attacking a basket, producing a wheezing **chudz, chudz, chudz**, a jerkoff to the nerves. There is a groan from the congregation and the priest spits out some word// maybe a cryptonym//which J and C do not understand. Without warning the congregation about faces towards the door and, at the same time, parts biblically like the Red Sea, to leave a path for the intruder to the altar. To the dismay of Carlos//sometimes a bit chy//the manoeuvre separates him from his paraclete, Jake the robed bear, who has legs that are bandy as a sand crab.

The door is kicked open. Into the cathedral//another Nilotic giant// strides a green robed figure, dragging along a young Alsatian bitch on a crude kiboko leash. She is a pretty animal with the pattern of a black saddle on her back, merging into dark honey. Her vulpine tail is tucked under her stomach with the fastidious terror of an Impala doe. Her muzzle is pinioned by black tape mounded round, like a crude African repair job to a car exhaust. As the dog handler passes into the arena, the congregation turns to face the altar and joins up again. Carlos is relieved to be joined in the back rank//the awkward rookies// by Jake who is fingering the spymaster camera up his sleeve like a lover.

The next part of the ceremony has a Kabuki rhythm, stately as a dream. The invader hands the dog leash to the drummer, who falls back against the clay wall of the hut, leaving the two green-robed men space in the middle. There are guttural samurai shouts under their cowls and both men raise identical bulbed sticks in the air, like marines with their swords at a wedding, and then they are clashing. In between the shocking tocking of wood on wood, Carlos hears a noise like men walking on deep snow. It is the gritting of teeth. In the holes of the cowls the eys spit like cobras as the assailants maneuver like boxers in a ring. There are muffled pig/leopard grunts.

---The territorial invader fights hard, but knows he is beaten by guilt/ Carlos.

---Symbolic of the struggle between the indigenes and the home invaders, the deadskins/Jake.

There is a mug-whump like a 14 pound pot falling from a sausage tree and the tall invader time lapses backwards from his Nilotic upright, banyanned to the clay floor. There is a huge groan of satisfaction and two men detach themselves from the congregation to drag him out of the arena like a dead bull. A stain//? hanged-man's sweat? //spreads over the man's cowl at the temples where the priest's stick has tonked him.

---This is not play-acting any more/Jake/suddenly realises. ---This is for real.

There is a whistle blast and more of the dance and chant routine begins, in which J and C wearily join. Another fire cracker flea-hops its venomous graph of spit-bangs round the floor. The stamping//suede desert boots are the thing here//makes the dust rise and mingle with the cordite choke so that it's impossible to see across the hut. After about five minutes, when J and C are diminishing with heat and exhaustion, the noise dies like an old phonograph running out of steam. Several men eject spittle through their cowl slits, to the right for luck, forming a pattern of ant trails on the floor.

Now Carlos, ethnologist and bio-ecologist extraordinary, feels himself//a non-skier//starting to slide down the icy ski jump. From the rafters//? Indian-rope-tricked up there? //hangs a rope with a noose that's strangely padded for comfort with what looks like dirty strips of white cloth and chicken feathers.

In the heart-chudzing gloat of silence there is an extraordinary dumb, incoherent moaning like a gnu or maybe a male ostrich, which makes the human toes of Carlos curl up like burning paper.

There is a sense//Carlos thinks widely//of *déjà vu* about what happens next, recalled maybe from a previous incarnation. The priest bends down and draws back the altar curtain. From a shelf he takes six cane knives, which he arranges thoughtfully in a fan shape on the floor. An aspergillum appears in his hand and he flicks//like an African peasant ridding his brow of sweat//water over the cane knives, all the time intoning some kind of blessing in a loud peasant field-to-field voice, which the congregation watch with esurient eyes, almost unbearably moved. The priest bends down and picks up the cane knives.

—— **Mierda**, he's going to play the match game/Carlos.

——? Who's for aphaeresis? /Jake, mithridating to himself, hoping to God that Carlos, the animal lover, won't get gifted a cane knife.

Choice of recipient seems random. The priest moves round the crescent of the congregation, dispensing the knives like communion wafers. Each recipient gives an !Augh! of pleased surprise and bobs down in some kind of androgynous curtsy. Now the priest is handing one to somebody in the front row, now to someone in the back row///

For a heart-chudzing second or two the priest halts at the spot where j and c are trying to look small and non-existent in the back row. Jake the taller of the two, can see over the head of the man in front of him, right into the eye holes of the priest's cowl, and suddenly has the sensation of drowning in molasses. They are old man's rheumy eyes with blood-shot sclerotics, but not dead, very much alive and spitting like eggs frying in deep fat. Disconcertingly the eyes are subliminally familiar as if they belong to someone who knows them. ? Will this tall mystagogue see that they are intruders and foreigners? ///

When the smoke has cleared and the priest has passed on, Carlos is holding//like the short match//the handle of a cane knife. Survivalconscious, he has made a huge effort to avoid a possible shibboleth trap and has dipped in a curtsey, making a muffled !Augh! like the other recipients. But the curtsey is more like a fainting fall//Jake sees that at once//and has to help the smaller man to his feet. Dazed and succusive under the robes, Carlos finds himself pushed out into the centre of the arena, along with the five other cane knife holders. He has to tamp down the dry-gagging in his stomach as his eyes go saintly to the high ceiling and sees the obscene thing, all four legs furiously swimming, hoisted five feet up in the air above him, and preauscultates more dumb-gnu moaning before the others do. The frantic dog paddle makes the pensile bitch swing from one side to the other//an involuntary trapeze artist//the muscles of her neck corded to slow down the strangulation of the padded noose.

Carlos begins to suspect that the cowed men are former or, perhaps once again, putative forest fighters who are reliving their nostalgia for the past. From their visible extremities//their brittle hands and legs and the rather stiff way they move//he figures that these are old or older men who are angry with the new generation's general myope and short memory. He realises that any deviation from the norm expected of him//any failure to play-act relish in his task//will result in immediate discovery and his own abscission, probably in the same way that the wretched urine-stained animal swinging above them is about to suffer. He tries to view the situation with proper scientific objectivity. After all, these men and their generation were made to suffer almost to the point of madness. He reminds himself that during his former stints as a game ranger, he has had to practise surgery on living animals; as an ecologist it is important for him to survive. Nevertheless this is ritual torture and he feels a fury boil up within him about what these savages are about to do — and a sudden hatred of Jake. The man is too dollar-oriented for a scientist and he//Carlos//has a shrewd cog about what he is going to get out of this. A further paranspicion painfully occurs to him; the possibility of collusion between the sexually ambiguous Jake and the African foll exuding//deodorants are decadent/her high octane sex. After all, it is Jake who is so crazy keen to come on this dangerous journey into African arcana. ? Has she secretly whetted the American's appetite with a few juicy details of what is really going to happen? Now Carlos preauscultates the swish of
cane knives//

Jake, the detached anthropologist, watches the start of the ceremony from the safety of the crowd, enveloped in the sudden drum beats. Gripped, he's not too worried now about Carlos being out there, observing that he's doing his bit manfully. The anthropologist's lips are twitched with a spasm of deathly humour; somehow it seems right for the old sanctoethologist to have been chosen to take part in the cere-

monial abscission. That's what it's all about//he explains to the inner serious man//it's a sort of satanophobia. The beast has to suffer for having been an agent of Satan, for its willing symbiosis. ? Can you blame these people for their hatred after what they went through? In spite of the heat and excitement around him, he's able to think objectively. This unbelievably atavistic thing he is witnessing//the paws desperately fencing with the cane knives//reminds him of the Carmelite circular discipline. Except that they are not practising the flaying of the one in front, but the pig in the middle. They are carving the living joint with their cane knives//? Why do grips provoke paranomasia? // With great delicacy a severed paw flutters to the ground like a maple leaf in fall. Jake moves slowly backwards towards the door and frees the minispy at his wrist, realising that it's a case of now or never. With one hand he brings the diminutive camera up to his cowl's right eye hole, sees the whole scene in the viewfinder, clicks once, twice, moves slightly to the right to get a better angle and

a scroochy flame explodes on his forehead///

Fighting for breath and flinching, although nobody has hit him yet, Jake becomes conscious of the weight of shouting men on top of him. There is an agonising pain in his chest//? broken ribs? //and he is suddenly aware !horrors! that someone has torn off his cowl and his face is indecently exposed. He is almost smothered by the musky ousk and moving kaleidoscope of bodies. Finally, he stops struggling and is rewarded when he feels his six feet four inch frame pulled upright. His arms are pinioned on each side. The scene through his viewfinder stops juddering and he becomes aware of the priest in front of him, holding his club in a way that makes him look real mean. White foam flecks the sepia pulps of his lips.

:Ach, you're a foreigner, man. ? Who gave you those robes and told you where to come?

Jake grasps for breath and straws, plays the dumb American, lets forth a spiel that mazes him, let alone anyone else. The priest's English is good but maybe it's not that good if he throws enough polysyllabics at him.

:No foreigner is allowed in our Cathedral/the priest, shouting above Jake's verbiflam and effectively silencing him. :Pictures are strictly forbidden. For this there is only one penalty.

The priest drops the sypmaster on to the clay floor. He swings his club in a wide arc and smashes it down on the tiny camera. Jake winces.

:You're a bunch of godammed savages/Jake shouts, suddenly and tactlessly angry, so that Carlos skulking in the background wishes to God that the priest's club could gobstop the bastard.

:You've just butchered a wretched dog and now you've -----

:As a foreigner you would not understand the history of our struggle/
the priest, cuttingly. ? You came here with someone else didn't you?

It is not an accusation, but a quiet question of fact. Jake, still full of **mierda** and belligerence, opens his big mouth to deny this when Carlos, the butcher, pushes his way through the crowd, pulling off his cowl as he comes, and finally dropping the blood-stained cane knife on the floor, as if to proclaim his peaceful intentions. He hushes up the astonished Jake with a silent blaze of anger. His face looks elephant grey and bruised with shock. It is the second bravest thing he has done that morning.

The priest looks first at the American, then the Puerto Rican, disgust staining his lips and teeth like tart blackberries.

:!Augh! Another foreigner and black man.

? Has he forgotten that his own hands below the robes are//like every-one else in the hut//grape black? ? How does he **know**//J and C wonder //that they are not indigenes? ? Is our hair less like black acorn caps than theirs? ? Are subtle physical differences perceived or do we have some sort of cultural elephantiasis that grossly distinguishes us? The priest stoops down and picks up the Puerto Rican's cane knife. He spreads his arms in what looks like a benediction. The congregation draws back, isolating the two foreigners in the middle of the circle.

——? Will they be processed like the Alsatian? ? Or will they// more traditionally, like train drivers//be stoned to death?

:Kneel down, both of you.

What has the priest said? The congregation seems to understand. There is a deep warm groan of approval. Jake and Carlos, after bewildered looks at the priest, fall to their knees. Jake, the hard drinker, licks his lips and thinks what he couldn't do now with a glass of the happy waters. Carlos grimly remembers an old African proverb, he thinks it's Zulu: He who dances last gets the most attention and the longest applause.

For the first time//undeading of olfactory nerve ends//he snoogs the sweet guzzi blood of the animal. There is a gravid silence and then almost incredibly from the rafters comes a last gnu-groan - ? or is it post-auscultated by Carlos as he feels the magnetic edge of the cane knife resting conversationally on his outstretched neck? He takes a deep breath, getting distinct intimations of his own offal and ordure and meekly submits himself//Camus//as prepared client or the
baggage///

:Do you swear by God never to mention what you have witnessed here?

Attacked by psychic paracausis, Carlos wonders what the hell the old **hijo de puta** has said. It sounds like some grotesquely misplaced line from a wedding ceremony. Then, like a mountain echo, the real meaning gets through to him, and he realises that some kind of solemn assurance is expected.

:I swear///

Apparently he has made the right response. The gelid blade is lifted from his neck. ? Will it descend now or is this to be a classic Dostoievsky execution? He hears a frightening groan from the congregation and senses that part of it is in sympathy and part in deep disagreement. But he becomes aware that the light accolade//it is nothing more serious than that//is now being repeated over Jake's head.

Both of them raise their heads experimentally.

:You may go now/the priest///

His voice is contemptuous and kindly, civilised and Godlike. Carlos finds it extraordinarily humiliating, almost wishes that the mother-chinger **had** finished them off. He feels like the Alsatian bitch, dragged along with her tail between her legs. Jake is the first one to get to his feet, pushing himself upright with bandy legs. Carlos struggles upwards a moment or two later. The priest bends down to get in a parting shot at the Puerto Rican. He lowers his voice and, edged with bitter malice like a sharky aloe, he hisses:

!We can look after ourselves, man — and our own ecosystems!

Pantun

A translation from the Malay with note by Roy Keech.

Pantun is the traditional verse form of Malaysia.

The Malayan people sing them and dance to them when in the mood, stringing them together, one quatrain leading the memory on to a similar one, capping it, repeating a well-known one as a chorus and so on, making archipelagoes of sound and balance.

Malay men and women have considerable repertoires of these versicles at command : some as lullabies, a few as political quips, by far the most for mutual troubadouring, amatory, libidinous, but acutely delicate. Pantuns are easy to learn by heart because the Malay language is cram-full of rhyme-words, and word-order as well as syntax is extremely flexible.

*The boat was new, the rig was new,
the very first time it reached Malacca.*

*You were new, brother, and I was new,
when first we knew each other.*



*His way he's always wending,
leans on people's gates to haggle.
Looking for chickens he's pretending,
looking for girls – if you cut the cackle.*



*Many wear bracelets on their arms,
Anklets are worn by me.
Many forbid I yield to your charms,
I'll do just what I please.*



*I dreamt last night about a moon
and nuts in clusters fell from palms.
Sleep brought dreams of you last night
there on the pillow in sleep's arms.*



*A jackfruit wants to fall, it's gone!
Do not hit that mango branch!
I want to sleep, my eyes respond,
and distant friends are past.*



*A sunny day, no clothes to dry,
I used to spread my things on a stone.
I've spread my mat but sleepless lie,
being used to sleep on your breast alone.*



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