Staffrider

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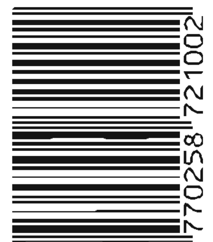
Stories

Poetry

Essays

Reviews

Nadine Gordimer: The Nobel Prize Lecture
Thengani Ngwenya: The Poetry of Mafika Gwala
Mark Beittel: Dugmore Boetie and S.A. Literature
Phaswane Mpe : Literacy and People's Language



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Volume 10 Number 2 1992

Contents

3 Comment.... A.W.Oliphant

Stories

17 An Owl on the Rooftop
Linda Colleen Saunders
37 Makoti
Makhanda Senzangakhona
53 The Rod
Richard J. Mann
77 SBs
Jiggs
89 Flags, Medals and Anthems
Gavin Mabie

Essays

5 Writing and Being
Nadine Gordimer
27 'Literary Language' and the 'Language of the People' in Contemporary SA English Poetry
Phaswane Mpe
43 The Poetry of Mafika Gwala
Thengani H. Ngwenya
57 Dugmore Boetie and South African Literature
Mark Beittel

Poetry

4 Two Poems
Ntombintombi Mabika
11 Two Poems
Abner Nyamende
13 Deep Sea Burning
Mpho Nawa
13-14 Two Poems
Ntombintombi Mabika
15 Khutsana
R.E. Moloke
16 His Excellency the Ambassador of the State of Palestine
Keith Gottschalk
16 Tunnel Vision
George Candy
23 Offers
Phil du Plessis
24 Spirits
Sue Mathieson
25 Child of Africa
Linda Colleen Saunders
26 Two Poems
Robert Siwangaza
41 Two Poems
Annemarié van Niekerk
42 Group Areas
Ebrahim Alexander
52 Three Poems
Lisa Crombrink
55 B.H.
Eli Coelho
67 Namibian Nites
Carsten Knoch
68-69 Three Poems
Deela Khan
86 Changes
Mohamed Patel
86 By Strandfontein
Leonard Koza
87 On Graduating
Mohamed Patel
87-88 Three Poems
Leonard Koza
94-95 Three Poems
B.M.C. Kayira

95 Grand Parade
Carol Edson
96 Translations of Two Poems by Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo
Stephen Gray
97-98 Three Poems
Carol Edson
98 Workers' Day (May Day 1992)
Morakabe Seakhoa
99 Excitement
Ntombintombi Mabika
102 Ba a Ntena, Ba a Tella
R.E. Moloke

Photographs

31-36 People in Creativity and Culture
Andrew Bannister
70-76 Work from the Photo Lab

Paintings and Graphics

21 Landscape
Karen Harber
38 Demoiselles de Codesa
Vincent Baloyi
40 Lovers
Vincent Baloyi
54 On the Day of the Festival
Nhlanla Xaba
56 Untitled 2
Sylvester Khosa
62 Germiston Sheds
Thomas Nkuna
81 Landscape with Silos
Walter Meyer
91 Springbok Safari IV
Karen Harber
93 Untitled 3
Sylvester Khosa

Report

100 COSAW Monthly Debate Series

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Comment

Globally speaking, we are living in rapidly changing times. Who will contest this? Observers have pointed out that the twentieth century and its preoccupations already belong to the past as the world irresistibly moves towards the next century. Strange as it appears, things seem to turn at the turn of centuries.

Home is a case in point: the hurly-burly of social and political changes are superficially registered in newspapers and the electronic based media while the deeper shifts in culture and human sensibilities remain almost completely obscured. Is this due to the fact that the communication media, monopolized by a minority, are fatally oriented towards reassuring sectors of the public that their vested interests, ossified cultural habits and assumptions are not subject to the profound local and global changes?

The 'no news is good news' frame of mind, is sadly also a feature of local literature and art. This conservative view vituperously insists that the only things of value are the things which never change. In a world where everything is touched by the ineluctable forces of change this profoundly reactionary view is understandable. It deserves our sympathy. Who would not feel compassion for those who withdraw from the vital process of contemporary life to descend into a hell of mourning the loss of a mythological paradise? Nevermind the fact that the actual loss is the impending end of racial priviledge. Indeed, who would not sympathise with the bereaved?

For others, the understanding that human beings constantly create and recreate the world they inhabit by changing it through their decisions, choices, utterances and actions is axiomatic. The recent unfreezing of rigid social systems and related views of the world, the exponents of change assure us, are the direct and indirect results of the ceaseless labour of countless individuals, groups and organizations. It seems block-headed to disagree with this.

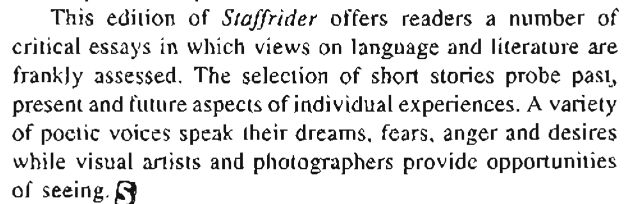
The outcome of these changes, history however reminds us, will not necessarily be in line with what many hope for. Social change is a contradictory process. It brings with it mixed possibilities for advances and regressions. Little wonder that opportunists of every hue hasten to claim that their beliefs, dogmas and illusions have been, or are soon to be vindicated.

The challenge facing writers under any circumstances is to shift the induced boundaries of consciousness and feeling as well as to reassess the meaning and value of past forms of cultural expression. This is the proper domain of creativity. Sacred and secular taboos can only partially frustrate, but never succeed in completely arresting the human procilivity for expanding the horizons of knowledge. The quest for renewal reaches optimal levels when non-conformist, critical and even iconoclastic attitudes towards every form of ideological posturing and pretense are adopted.

To reduce the multifarious nature of being to a single theory or a one-sided system of values can only serve to stunt the plenitude of experience. The endless play of desire is driven by the inextinguishable quest for freedom. Within the frame work of otherwise restrictive outlooks the censorious mind flourishes. It breeds, as in this country and elsewhere, the dangerously absurd conviction that ideas could be vanquished by destroying their proponents. This, among other far reaching implications, is spelt out to the world by Nadine Gordimer, the 1991 Noble Literary Laureatte, in her memorable lecture. It displays her profound vision of the role of writers in an age demanding courage in life and skill in art. In her finest hour Gordimer remained true to herself by underscoring the social imperatives of creativity.

Her lecture is a flash in the dark to South Africans and the rest of the world. As we begin to undertake the daunting tasks of cultural transformation, it reminds us that alternative visions must steer clear of all forms of prescription and coercion. In the drive to open all cultural institutions for democratic participation and to extend the means of cultural expression we must guard against the preservation of old forms of privilege and exclusivity as well as against the formation of new elites.

Through its recently launched monthly debates and research into international and national cultural policies, COSAW intends to play a facilitating role in the democratization of cultural institutions. This will be done by inviting the entire community of artists, regardless of their pasts, to participate in an open-ended process of discussion and debate.



This edition of *Staffrider* offers readers a number of critical essays in which views on language and literature are frankly assessed. The selection of short stories probe past, present and future aspects of individual experiences. A variety of poetic voices speak their dreams, fears, anger and desires while visual artists and photographers provide opportunities of seeing.

Andries Walter Oliphant

Ntombintombi Mabika

Two Poems

Hobos

With hope they sit and sing.
With hope one day they will enjoy life.
They are friendly, trying to hide sorrows.
They are not drinkers,
If they have nothing to do what then is to be done?

'Hallo sweetie pie,' they greeted me as I pass.
Men and women use that way of greeting.
'I came from the South, no work, no money,
I came here seven years ago,
How can I go back home?'

The story is very bad.
One was a teacher,
One was a manager,
One was Mrs so and so.
She came here for work.

She saw an advert in the newspaper.
Sorry the job has been taken.
She finished all the money.
Sorry I have no money for your transport.
She is asking for food, the rubbish bin is there.

Sleeping in the rain,
Sleeping on the road.
Wearing the same thing
Worrying about the future.
Starting to use drugs.

She's too dirty to be a prostitute.
She is not suitable for motherhood.
Some end up in hospital.
Some end up in jail.
Shivering, they are in a dilemma.

An Opening

It is an opening for the truth.
An opening to hell.
She nearly lost her right ear.
Who was shooting?

An opening.
Renamo, Frelimo and violence,
pass through that opening to fight
for nothing.
A black opening caused by a dark gun.

It is an opening to death.
The remembrance will be left behind.
The shame is written in that black opening
in black letters but
the black letters are visible even in the black night.

Writing and Being

Nadine Gordimer

Nobel Prize Lecture, 1991

In the beginning was the Word.

The Word was with God, signified God's Word, the word that was Creation. But over the centuries of human culture the word has taken on other meanings, secular as well as religious. To have the word has come to be synonymous with ultimate authority, with prestige, with awesome, sometimes dangerous persuasion, to have Prime Time, a TV talk show, to have the gift of the gab as well as that of speaking in tongues. The word flies through space, it is bounced from satellites, now nearer than it has ever been to the heaven from which it was believed to have come. But its most significant transformation occurred for me and my kind long ago, when it was first scratched on a stone tablet or traced on papyrus, when it materialised from sound to spectacle, from being heard to being read as a series of signs, and then a script; and travelled through time from parchment to Gutenberg. For this is the genesis story of the writer. It is the story that *wrote* her or him into being.

It was, strangely, a double process, creating at the same time both the writer and the very purpose of the writer as a mutation in the agency of human culture. It was both ontogenesis as the origin and development *of* an individual being, and the adaptation, in the nature of that individual, specifically *to* the exploration of ontogenesis, the origin and development of *the* individual being. For we writers are evolved for that task. Like the prisoner incarcerated with the jaguar in Borges' story, 'The God's Script', who was trying to read, in a ray of light which fell only once a day, the meaning of being from the markings on the creature's pelt.[1] We spend our lives attempting to interpret through the word the readings we take in the societies, the world of which we are part. It is in this sense, this inextricable, ineffable participation, that writing is always and at once an exploration of self and of the world; of individual and collective being.

Being here.

Humans, the only self-regarding animals, blessed or cursed with this torturing higher faculty, have always wanted to know why. And this is not just the great ontological question of why we are here at all, for which religions and philosophies have tried to answer conclusively for various peoples at various times, and science tentatively attempts dazzling bits of explanation: we are perhaps going to die out in our millennia, like dinosaurs, without having developed the necessary comprehension to understand as a whole. Since humans became self-regarding they have sought, as well, explanations for the common phenomena of procreation, death, the cycle of seasons, the earth, sea, wind and stars, sun and moon, plenty and disaster. With myth, the writer's ancestors, the oral story-tellers, began to feel out and formulate these mysteries, using the elements of daily life — observable reality — and the faculty of the imagination — the power of projection into the hidden — to make stories.

Roland Barthes asks, 'What is characteristic myth?' And answers: 'To transform a meaning into form.'[2] Myths are stories that mediate in this way between the known and the unknown. Claude Lévi-Strauss wittily demythologises myth as a genre between a fairy tale and a detective story.[3] Being here: we don't know who-dun-it. But something satisfying, if not the answer, can be invented. Myth was the mystery plus the fantasy — gods,

anthropomorphised animals and birds, chimera, phantasmagorical creatures — that posits out of the imagination some sort of explanation for the mystery. Humans and their fellow creatures were the materiality of the story, but, as Nikos Kazantzakis once wrote, 'Art is the representation not of the body but the forces which created the body'.[4]

There are many proven explanations for natural phenomena now; and there are new questions of being arising out of some of the answers. For this reason, the genre of myth has never been entirely abandoned, although we are inclined to think of it as archaic. If it dwindled to the children's bedtime tale in some societies, in parts of the world protected by forests or deserts from international megaculture it has continued, alive, to offer art as a system of mediation between the individual and being. And it has made a whirling comeback out of Space, an Icarus in the avatar of Batman and his kind, who never fall into the ocean of failure to deal with the gravity forces of life. These new myths, however, do not seek so much to enlighten and provide some sort of answers to the terrors of their existence. (Perhaps it is the positive knowledge that humans now possess the means to destroy the whole planet, the fear that they have in this way themselves become the gods, dreadfully charged with their own continued existence, that has made comic-book and movie-myth escapist.) The forces of being remain. They are what the writer, as distinct from the contemporary popular myth-maker, still engages today, as myth in its ancient form attempted to do.

There is no pure 'state of being' and it follows there is no pure text, 'real' text totally incorporating aleatory.

How writers have approached this engagement and continue to experiment with it has been and is, perhaps more than ever, the study of literary scholars. The writer in relation to the nature of perceivable reality and what is beyond — imperceivable reality — is the basis for all these studies, no matter what resulting concepts are labelled, no matter in what categorised microfilms writers are stowed away for the annals of historiography. Reality is constructed out of many elements and entities, seen and unseen, expressed, and left unexpressed for breathing-space in the mind. Yet from what is regarded as old-hat psychological analysis to modernism and post-modernism, structuralism and post-structuralism, all literary studies are aimed at the same end: to pin down a consistency (and what is consistency if not the principle hidden within the riddle?); to make definitive through methodology the writer's grasp at the forces of being. But life is aleatory in itself; being is constantly pulled and shaped this way and that by circumstances and different levels of consciousness. There is no pure 'state of being' and it follows there is no pure text, 'real' text, totally incorporating the aleatory. It surely cannot be reached by critical methodology, however interesting the attempt. To deconstruct a text is in a way a contradiction, since to deconstruct it is to make another construction out of the pieces, as Roland Barthes does so fascinatingly, and admits to, in his linguistic and semantical dissection of Balzac's story, 'Sarrasine'.[5] So the literary scholars end up being some kind of story-teller, too

Perhaps there is no other way of reaching some understanding of being than through art? Writers themselves don't analyse what they do; to analyse would be to look down while crossing a canyon on a tightrope. To say this is not to mystify the process of writing but to make an image out of the intense inner concentration the writer must have to cross the chasms of the aleatory and make them the word's own, as an explorer plants a flag. Yeats's inner 'lonely impulse of delight' in the pilot's solitary flight, and his 'terrible beauty' born of mass uprising, both opposed and conjoined; EM Forster's modest 'only connect'; Joyce's chosen, wily 'silence,

cunning and exile'; more contemporary, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's labyrinth in which power over others, in the person of Simon Bolivar, is led to the thrall of the only unassailable power, death — these are some examples of the writer's endlessly varied ways of approaching the state of being through the word. Any writer of any worth at all hopes to play only a pocket-torch of light — and rarely, through genius, a sudden flambeau — into the bloody yet beautiful labyrinth of human experience, of being.

Anthony Burgess once gave a summary definition of literature as the 'aesthetic exploration of the word'.[6] I would say that writing only begins there, for the exploration of much beyond, which nevertheless only aesthetic means can express.

Writing only begins with the aesthetic exploration of the word for the exploration of much beyond.

How does a writer become one, having been given the word? I do not know if my own beginnings have any particular interest. No doubt they have much in common with those of others, have been described too often before as a result of this yearly assembly before which a writer stands. For myself, I have said that nothing factual that I write or say will be as truthful as my fiction. The life, the opinions are not the work, for it is in the tension between standing apart and being involved that the imagination transforms both. Let me give some minimal account of myself. I am what I suppose would be called a natural writer. I did not make any decisions to become one. I did not, at the beginning, expect to earn a living by being read. I wrote as a child out of the joy of apprehending life through my senses — the look and scent and feel of things; and soon out of the emotions that puzzled me or raged within me and which took form, found some enlightenment, solace and delight, shaped in the written word. There is a little Kafka parable that goes like this. 'I have three dogs; Hold-him, Seize-him and Nevermore. Hold-him and Seize-him are ordinary little Schipperkes and nobody would notice them if they were alone. But there is Nevermore, too. Nevermore is a mongrel Great Dane and has an appearance that centuries of the most careful breeding could never have produced. Nevermore is a gypsy.'[7] In the small South African gold-mining town where I was growing up I was Nevermore the mongrel (although I could scarcely have been described as a Great Dane...) in whom the accepted characteristics of the townspeople could not be traced. I was the Gypsy, tinkering with words second-hand, mending my own efforts at writing by learning from what I read. For my school was the local library. Proust, Chekov and Dosteovsky, to name only a few to whom I owe my existence as a writer, were my professors. In that period of my life, yes, I was evidence of the theory that books are made out of other books.... But I did not remain so for long, nor did I believe any potential writer could.

With adolescence comes the first reaching out to otherness through the drive of sexuality. For most children, from then on the faculty of the imagination, manifest in play, is lost in the focus on daydreams of desire and love, but for those who are going to be artists of one kind or another the first life-crisis after that of birth does something else in addition: the imagination gains range and extends by the subjective flex of new and turbulent emotions. There are new perceptions. The writer begins to be able to enter into other lives. The process of standing apart and being involved has come.

Unknowingly, I had been addressing myself on the subject of being, whether, as in my first stories, there was a child's contemplation of death and murder and the necessity to finish off, with a death blow, a dove mauled by a cat, or whether there was wondering dismay and early consciousness of racism that came of my walk to school, when on the way I passed store keepers, themselves East European immigrants kept lowest in the ranks of the Anglo-Colonial social scale for whites in the

mining town, roughly abusing those whom colonial society ranked lowest of all, discounted less than human — the black miners who were the store's customers. Only many years later was I to realise that if I had been a child in that category — black — I might not have become a writer at all, since the library that made this possible for me was not open to any black child. For my formal schooling was sketchy, at best.

To address oneself to others begins a writer's next stage of development. To publish: to anyone who would read what I wrote. That was my natural, innocent assumption of what publication meant, and has not changed, that is what it means to me today, in spite of my awareness that most people refuse to believe that a writer does not have a particular audience in mind; and my other awareness: of the temptations, conscious or unconscious, which lure the writer into keeping a corner of the eye on who will take offense, who will approve what is on the page — a temptation that like Orpheus' straying glance, will lead the writer back into the Shades of a destroyed talent.

The alternative is not the malediction of the ivory tower, another destroyer of creativity. Borges once said he wrote for his friends and to pass the time. I think this was an irritated flippant response to the crass question — often an accusation — 'For whom do you write?', just as Sartre's admonition that there are times when a writer should cease to write, and act upon being only in an another way, was given in the frustration of an unresolved conflict between distress at injustice in the world and the knowledge that what he knew how to do best was write. Both Borges and Sartre, from their totally different extremes of denying literature a social purpose, were certainly perfectly aware that it has its implicit and unalterable social role in exploring the state of being, from which all other roles, personal among friends, public at the protest demonstration, derive.

Borges was not writing for his friends, for he published and we all have received the bounty of his work. Sartre did not stop writing, although he stood at the barricades in 1968.

The question of for whom do we write nevertheless plagues the writer, a tin can attached to the tail of every work published. Principally it jangles the inference of tendentiousness as praise or denigration. In this context, Camus dealt with the question best. He said that he liked individuals who take sides more than literatures that do.

'One either serves the whole of man or one does not serve him at all. And if man needs bread and justice, and if what has to be done must be done to serve this need, he also needs pure beauty, which is the bread of his heart.' So Camus called for 'Courage in one's life and talent in one's work'.[8]

And Marquez redefined *tendez* fiction thus: 'The best way a writer can serve a revolution is to write as well as he can'.[9]

I believe these two statements might be the credo for all of us who write. They do not resolve the conflicts that have come, and will continue to come, to contemporary writers. But they state plainly an honest possibility of doing so, they turn the face of the writer squarely to her and his existence, the reason to be, as a writer, and the reason to be, as a responsible human, acting, like any other, within a social context.

Being here: in a particular time and place. That is the existential position with particular implications for literature. Czeslaw Milosz once wrote the cry: 'What is poetry which does not serve nations or people?'[10] and Brecht wrote of a time when 'to speak of trees is almost a crime'.[11]

Many of us have had such despairing thoughts while living and writing through such times, in such places, and Sartre's solution makes no sense in a world where writers were — and still are — censored and forbidden to write, where, far from abandoning the word, lives were and are at risk in smuggling it, on scraps of paper, out of prisons. The state of being whose ontogenesis we explore has overwhelmingly included such experiences. Our approaches, in Nikos Kazantzakis's words, have to 'make the decision which harmonises with the fearsome rhythm of our time'.[12]

Some of us have seen our books lie for years unread in our own countries, banned, and we have gone on writing.

Many writers have been imprisoned. Looking at Africa alone — Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Jack Mapanje, in their countries, and in my own country, South Africa, Jeremy Cronin, Mongane Wally Serote,

Breyten Breytenbach, Dennis Brutus, Jaki Seroke: all these went to prison for the courage shown in their lives, and have continued to take the right, as poets, to speak of trees. Many of the greats, from Thomas Mann to Chinua Achebe, cast out by political conflict and oppression in different countries, have endured the trauma of exile, from which some never recover as writers, and some do not survive at all. I think of the South Africans, Can Themba, Alex la Guma, Nat Nakasa, Todd Matshikiza, and some writers, over half a century from Joseph Roth to Milan Kundera, have had to publish new works first in the word that is not their own, a foreign language.

Then in 1988 the fearsome rhythm of our time quickened in an unprecedented frenzy to which the writer was summoned to submit the word. In the broad span of modern times since the Enlightenment writers have suffered opprobrium, bannings and even exile for other than political reasons. Flaubert dragged into court for indecency, over *Madame Bovary*, Strindberg arraigned for blasphemy, over *Marrying*, Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* banned — there have been many examples of so-called offense against hypocritical bourgeois mores, just as there have been of treason against political dictatorships. But in a period when it would be unheard of for countries such as France, Sweden and Britain to bring such charges against freedom of expression, there has risen a force that takes its appalling authority from something far more widespread than social mores, and far more powerful than power of any single political regime. The edict of a world religion has sentenced a writer to death.

For more than three years, now, wherever he is hidden, wherever he might go, Salman Rushdie has existed under the Muslim pronouncement upon him of the *fatwa*. There is no asylum for him anywhere. Every morning when this writer sits down to write, he does not know if he will live through the day; he does not know if the page will ever be filled. Salman Rushdie happens to be a brilliant writer, and the novel for which he is being pilloried, *The Satanic Verses*, is an innovative exploration of one of the most intense experiences of being in our era, the individual personality in transition between two cultures brought together in a post-colonial world. All is re-examined through the refraction of the imagination; the meaning of sexual and filial love, the rituals of social acceptance, the meaning of a formative religious faith for individuals removed from its subjectivity by circumstance opposing different systems of belief, religious and secular, in a different context of living. His novel is a true mythology. But although he has done for the post-colonial consciousness in Europe what Gunther Grass did for the post-Nazi one with *The Tin Drum* and *Dog Years*, perhaps even has tried to approach what Beckett did for our existential anguish in *Waiting for Godot*, the level of his achievement should not matter. Even if he were a mediocre writer, his situation is the terrible concern of every fellow writer for, apart from his personal plight, what implications, what new threat against the carrier of the word does it bring?

Salman Rashdie's plight and its implications should be the concern of all individuals, governments and human rights organisations

It should be the concern of individuals and above all, of governments and human rights organisations all over the world. With dictatorships apparently vanquished, this murderous new dictate invoking the power of international terrorism in the name of a great and respected religion should and can only be dealt with by democratic governments and the United Nations, as an offense against humanity.

To return from the horrific singular threat to those who have been general for writers of this century now in its final, summing-up decade. In repressive regimes everywhere, whether in what was the Soviet bloc, Latin America, Africa, China — most imprisoned writers have been shut away for their activities as citizens striving for

liberation against the oppression of the general society to which they belong.

Others have been condemned by repressive regimes for serving society by writing as well as they can; for this aesthetic venture of ours becomes subversive when the shameful secrets of our times are explored deeply, with the artist's rebellious integrity to the state of being manifest in life around her or him, then the writer's themes and characters inevitably are formed by the pressures and distortions of that society as the life of the fisherman is determined by the power of the sea.

There is a paradox. In retaining this integrity, the writer sometimes must risk both the state's indictment of treason, and the liberation forces' complaint of lack of blind commitment. As a human being, no writer can stoop to the lie of Manichean 'balance'. The devil always has lead in his shoes, when placed on his side of the scale. Yet, to paraphrase coarsely Marquez's dictum given by him both as a writer and a fighter for justice, the writer must take the right to explore, warts and all, both the enemy and the beloved comrade in arms, since only a try for the truth makes sense of being, only a try for the truth edges towards justice just ahead of Yeats's beast slouching to be born. In literature, from life:

> we page through each other's faces
> we read each looking eye
> ...It has taken lives to be able to do so.[13]

These are the words of the South African poet and fighter for justice and peace in our country, Mongane Serote.

The writer is of service to humankind only insofar as the writer uses the word even against his or her own loyalties, trusts the state of being, as it is revealed, to hold somewhere in its complexity filaments of the cord of truth, able to be bound together, here and there, in art; trusts the state of being to yield somewhere fragmentary phrases of truth, which is the final word of words, never changed by our stumbling efforts to spell it out and write it down, never changed by lies, semantic sophistry, by the dirtying of the word for the purpose of racism, sexism, prejudice, domination, the glorification of destruction, the curses and the praise-songs. S

Notes

1. 'The God's Script' from *Labyrinths and Other Writings* by Jorge Luis Borges. Edited by Donald Y Yates & James E Kirby. Penguin Modern Classics, p.71.
2. *Mythologies* by Ronald Barthes. Translated by Annette Lavers. Hill and Wang, p.131.
3. *Histoire De Lynx* by Claude Lévi-Strauss. '...je les situais a mi-chemin entre le conte de fées et le roman policier'. Plon, p.13.
4. *Report to Greco* by Nikos Kazantzakis. Translation anonymous. Faber and Faber, p.150.
5. S/Z by Ronald Barthes. Translated by Richard Miller. Jonathan Cape.
6. *Observer*. 19/4/81. Anthony Burgess.
7. The Third Octavo Notebook from *Wedding Preparations in the Country* by Franz Kafka. Definitive Edition. Secker & Warburg.
8. *Carnets* 1942-5 by Albert Camus.
9. Gabriel García Marquez. In interview; my notes do not give the journal or date.
10. 'Dedication' from *Selected Poems* by Czeslaw Milosz. The Ecco Press.
11. 'To Posterity' from *Selected Poems* by Bertolt Brecht. Translated by H.R. Hays. Grove Press, p.173.
12. *Report to Greco* by Nikos Kazantzakis. Faber and Faber.
13. *A Tough Tale* by Mongane Wally Serote. Kliptown Books.

For the record

The poem 'Why Lahlumlenze' published in *Staffrider* Volume 10 Number 1 was incorrectly attributed to Mboneni Wanga Ike Muila. It was in fact written by Johannes 'John John' Mkhoza.

Abner Nyamende
Two Poems

Watching a Dying Footpath

Slowly it disappears
in the autumn grass,
like a drying stream in winter
It looks so
much like the decaying body
of a snake whose head was chopped off.

Only a week ago
this path ran like an artery
across the open landscape.
People walked here,
strolled, romped, travelled or trod along.

Then a surveyor came,
rested his tools on a bare patch,
broke the first snack ever on this way,
and when he moved again
his notebook jammed with figures,
a drink can rolled away.

Soon, someone rejoiced
over a heap of brick-and-mortar.

But still outworn boots keep treading the path,
and timid feet quicken their pace
where soon a garden flower will bloom.

Until, annoyed, the owner pulls
a wireline to strangle the path
and, as he pulls and tugs at its back,
it snaps at the very bone.

Now tired feet seek the tarred streets,
and wary eyes look out
for vicious dogs, or purring motor cars.

Its death now bothers like a living thing,
and everyone on the path
is now a man in the street.

Where Are The Children

For 16 June 1990

Where are the children?
Are they in the streets again?
Where are these children....
They are in the backyard, love.
The children play with old beef tins
on the stoep by the toilet.
Will these kids ever stop playing with tins!
No, love.
The kids have no toys to play.
And the cold winds kept blowing
down the avenues of time.
Blowing, blowing...that never ends....

Where are the children?
Are they in the street again?
Where are these children....
They are at the gate, love.
Watching the madman do funny things.
The children watch the madman
masturbating down the street.
Will these kids ever stop courting danger!
No, love.
It is true he draws them closer to him
with his mad tune.
And the tides kept rising
from the bottomless pit.
Rising, rising...never to subside....

Where are the children?
Are they in the street again?
Where are these children....
Yes, they play in the street now, love.
The children play ball
with the neighbour's girl.
She cycles blindly through them
as through a storm cloud,
and they bounce the ball hard on her head.

Next these children will be hit
 by a speeding car.
Why, the Chinese jalopy goes slow
 in the streets, love.
The Indian cart is a tortoise,
 and the taximan only comes home to sleep.
And the raging currents of blood
 raced through the pressured canals.
Raging, raging...to the end of time.

Love, where are the children now?
The children are off to school, love.
All the children followed Hector Petersen
 to school,
 the grounds where Freedom lies buried.
They hold a meeting at the field.
They plan to unearth the great giant
 and give him life — the boogeyman
 whose fury, when provoked
 is seen in the white man's courts
 and prison yards.
They have gone to exhume Freedom,
 killed in his infancy by those
 who think they own the land.

And, indeed, as the little voices rang through
 the eternal vault of buried history:
As supplications rang from the lips so danger prone
 and hearts so young;
and little hands ravaged the ancient grave,
 where Freedom, the giant lay buried —
 the earth shuddered and grown ups
 hid their eyes,
 locked themselves up in township boxes —
 perpetual cells of our servitude;
 and South Africa paused
 in the morning breeze....
A twist changed the land
never again to be the same.

Wailing lamentations of tortured sirens
 filled the air
 as the earth stirred
 beneath the running feet.

Police mongrels yelped
As strange military machines crowded
 the nameless streets.
On that day, as on others before it,
South Africa declared her ill-fated war
 on the youngest
 of her legitimate children,
Who, since the day, have grown fourteen —
 fourteen years more bitter and colder,
 if older they have become.

Fourteen years — and other voices have joined
 in their millions the once solitary cry,
 as Freedom rises from a grave of decades
 and straddles the land.
And the world in concert joins —
 Where are the children?
 the children of the soil?

Now grown ups trudge at the heels of their sons
 as in crisis do the bees
 overfeed themselves of the season's honey
 gathered in prosperity for the unborn.
But still on the horizon, the signboard looms:
June 16,
When children's blood flowed
 to buy back the land
 that forebears tried to purchase in vain,
 their delicate lips
 shaping the long-buried message —
'Power! Power!'
That was a door in the labyrinth of time.
That was a door they opened and fell
 or fell to open.
Did they not hope, as today we do,
to see the future with their own eyes?

Die and be buried, expendable generation.
Never complain for the deed is better
 and nobler than we who live can try.
Freedom does on the horizon loom —
 not for those who have seen the sun today,
 but for them that are not yet born.

It is a tree that will dare to grow
upon our decadent forms:
We, who were dirtied by our own slavery,
bloodied by our toil.
Our share of Freedom departed with
those we knew, who sacrificed and died.

Abner Nyamende

Deep Sea Burning

A wheel-barrow bumps along a long
rocky road to a well where a
solitary figure is engaged in a
toing and froing movement of drawing
water and filling up drums.

A mirage forms a pool of water,
into which three figures wobble unawares.
Their hands form caps extended from
their foreheads. Like chameleons they
pace out of a burning deep sea.
School is out. Infants cry out.
Mothers shout back. A boy passes
while whistling a fragmented tune,
on his happy way home.
A bootlegger slowly drives to his
next delivery.

Birds are singing as usual;
a distant sort of music.
I am sweating. Everything else is
still. The place turns into an
uninviting landscape which is soon
to be filled with smoke.

Life goes on. Everyone is contented
with the mere fact of being alive.

Mpho Nawa

Mama

Wawuphathwa ngezinhlobonhlobo zezinhlupheko.
Izinhlungu, zikusokolisa, zikushikilisa ubusuku nemini.
Izinsekwa zixoxa nawe,
Phakathi kwamabili, uwedwa
Wafika umhelo ungasadle nkobe.

Sengifikile emhlabeni ngiyinkinga.
Nezinkinga, wangikhulisa.
Ubamba uyeka, udla amathambo.
Imikhuhlane ithatha iyeka.
Wehla wenyuka koGqayinyanga.

Emasimini ngeklewula,
Ngingafuna kwehla emhlane.
Likhipha umkhovu etsheni,
Ngiyinsakavukela umchilo wesidwaba.
Ebusuku yiso leso, wafa MaShandu.

Abasokoci bekusokolisa.
Ingqwayinane ithi ngilapha.
Nenkemane ithi ngilapha.
Akabhala ubaba!
Umfowethu uyelusa.

Imvulasikhwama yindaba yakho.
Wawumane ubamba uyeka.
Ngethemba elikhulu, wathi ngiyokubonga.
Ngikhulile ngathathwa yiGoli,
Ngalenza umama, wena ngakulahla, ngakulibala.

Sengimdala ngiyazisola.
Ngizibona ubuwula bami.
Sesidlulile isikhathi.
Emva kwendaba ayikho ingqondo.
Mhlawumbe ngifana nobaba, oseGoli.

Mama mufazi ongemama,
Ngenxa yokweswela abantwana,
Kodwa wazala okwenhlanzi.
Basolwandle olumbovu, bayazisola.

Mama ngiyazi uzongishiya,
Ungaphinde ubuye.
Ngiyosidinda esikaNandi,
Ngizisola ngobuwula bami.
Nginethemba siyohlangana kweliphezulu.

Ntombintombi Mabika

I Will Tell You

My uncle was killed.
There in Zitundo.
Renamo, Frelimo there in Maputo.
I will tell you.
Viva kamarado, they all said.

Everybody was confused in the house.
No one could speak Portuguese.
'Sinta que' they ordered him to sit.
'Dinher' what was the money for?
I will tell you.

'Kas bahla yi?'
My confused mother asked.
'No fazer barullo,' no noise.
I didn't understand the meaning.
But I will tell you.

That was the beginning of violence in Mocambique.
Still now.
What did Eduardo Mondlane do?
What did Samora Machel do?
What did Joachim Chissano do and what is he doing now?

Rice was staple food.
But now cassava.
Monkey-oranges are breakfast, lunch and supper.
No education.
Salamanga Primere Eskola, no students in there.

Dozwora, standing, waiting for food.
Kumer, no kumer, there is hunger.
Soldiers, Renamo and Frelimo.
The killings, raping and kidnapping.
I will tell you.

Saying viva kamarado to Frelimo does not help.
Saying viva amigo to Renamo does not help.
You ask for water from them, they say moreu.
No one wants to die,
I will tell you.

Our chicken were taken away
My older sister was taken away,
Away in the bush, to be their wife.
'No fazer barullo.'
They wanted no word.

She escaped
Leaving her arm to them.
You can imagine what was
happening in the bush.

What was she eating?
I will tell you.
But if they catch me.
There, just there in Mocambique,
What will happen?
But I will tell you.

Ntombintombi Mabika

Khutsana

Tshotlego ke lewelana o tsetswe le kgora,
Tshotlego ke moitsa-kutlo, motlhokisa thuto.
Masiela le dikhutsana ke bapa-sediba-mmogo,
Ba tlhoka mogomotsi, ba rongwa fifing le sisimosang.
Ke boMmamolatlhwa-a-molebalwa nageng.
Khutsana sia koo, didimala o boloke keledi,
Mmago o go itatotse, ga o na baeno!
O gaiswa ke molatlhwa-le-boa re mo ruile
Methla le methla, khutsana e tobetswa phatla,
Ga twe e a bo e tsenngwa tlhaloganyo.

Gangwe le gape khutsana e lelala legodimo theregong,
E lelala a boa a leba diphuphu.
E eletsa, e kgolwa fa e ka bona mmaayo le rraayo
Moya wa yona o labalabela go bona difatlhego tse,
Dipounama tsa lesiela ga di farologane le tsa khutsana
Bobedi jo, bo phele ka go fegelwa
Ba tlhokile rato la motsadi bogolo thata bothitho.
Ba bokoa moweng mme gantsi ba itopela loso.
Ba lela, gatwe: 'Ba tlogeleng ba matepe ...
Bommaabo ba tswetse melomo, ba ikhuditse.'

Nna khutsana ke a lopa tswee-tswee,
A ko e re re sule, lo re thathe ka kgetse,
Lo itshoke tlhe bahumi ba bophelo, thoko ga lebitla,
Bo tla ntshebela bojang; tlhokwa-la-tsela le tla ntshebela.
E tlaare lo hulara, pula ya katisetsa; ka Modimo Ona o se tshele!
Sesite se tla sira fathlego sa mohutsana
Ka boitumelo ke tla goa, ka leboga diphiri tsoorre —
Ka motlhaope ke tla kopana le batsadi ba me botebong
Ke sinoge le go tlogela go tlhaeletsa bana ba motlotlegi.

R.E. Moloke

His Excellency the Ambassador of the State of Palestine

She asked: Where lives the Prince?
Then I stood silenced
For I had no address.
I am a man in transit
Twenty years in transit
A man who was even deprived
The right of having an address.
— Rashid Hussein: 'An Address'

His Excellency the Ambassador of
the State of Palestine
carries his country in his diplomatic pouch;
his sister cups it in her hands.
you unfurl your flag in Embassy garden
you unfurl your heart in your birthplace. Acre,
you unfurl your country in your mind.

a fax machine taunted:
what is your address?
where are your borders?
are you viable?

H.E. Ali Halimeh, Ambassador,
the State of Palestine, answered:

'my country's address?
— every detention cell of Shin Bet;
on the envelope of every Mossad letter bomb,
& in every Zahal gunsight....

'my land borders
graveyards of Chatilla
& the sabras' friends at Sabra.
& our borders

border on the impossible;
on Acre,
& my heart....

'my country's viability
takes root from an olive,
arises from a dream.'

Keith Gottschalk

Tunnel Vision

We have crawled through the darkness
all these years,
hoping to see a light
at the end of the tunnel.
Behind the sloughed skins and rachitic bones
of those who no longer crawl,
and we who survive are suffering
from a wasting disease,
having the eyes of moles, the pallor of worms
and the hearts of mice.
But now our tiny hearts are pulsing
with excitement, and the tunnel is filled
with the blood-driving beat of hope,
for we have turned a corner and there ahead
is the longed-for circle of light.

But some have stopped crawling
and others are turning back.
They have heard the wind in the mountains
and seen the loneliness of the sky.
No, brothers, it isn't pleasant in the tunnel,
sucking each other's blood
and licking each other's sores,
but at least it is warm.

George Candy

An Owl on the Rooftop

Linda Colleen Saunders

Mrs Petersen's niece said she saw an owl on our roof last night. She said it means death. But there's no death here, only me.

I am home, and home is where the heart is, except it's not — not mine. My heart has been splintered and scattered and is balanced somewhere between memories of past fears and dreams and future thoughts of home and freedom. I have been recalled, but I cannot recall why I thought that things would be any different, or where I thought the difference would be. I cannot even think what I envisaged by 'home' or by 'freedom'.

Freedom is like the golden ball in the pond, which the princess couldn't reach, and instead she found a frog prince. The question no one has answered yet, and which some have not even asked yet (which I hadn't until my brother raised it), is what happened to the golden ball. Or the frog prince. So the frog turns out to be a toad and the princess is lured away from her initial objective, which turns out to be an illusion. That's where freedom is; in the land of the golden balls.

Home. Memories of the past still hang like dusty cobwebs from the ceiling. (I smile. Mom always missed that corner) as I walk through the house which is not my house, where I don't belong. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad I'm home, happy to be back, thankful that I made it, ecstatic! It's just that — the first few days were happy and wild like a birthday. The next — friends, welcomes, speeches, happy, happy, happy, and now I'm alone today. The house is empty. And I've just realised that I don't live here anymore.

There's an old Christmas decoration left hanging up, from which Christmas, I wonder. I wander into the kitchen, its tiled floor still as cold beneath my feet as it always used to be. Same stove. So it lasted after all. Good old Uncle Bill. New fridge, but already covered with stickers and animals and alphabet magnets. The same. Plants — African Violets, Ferns, of course, the creeper on top of the fridge still forgotten to be watered.

My bedroom. My bed. My pictures still on the wall. (Five years!) My childhood, adolescence, dreams, frustration. This isn't what I came back for. They've let nothing change, everything is just as it was. 'Welcome Home Colleen' in multi-coloured crayon above my bed, written by Hayley. That child was two when I left, and couldn't even say welcome. She refused to even say goodbye, if I remembered her correctly. Oh, why am I hating it so; the cousins, sisters, aunties and uncles, with their TVs, CDs and babies and Weigh-Less clubs.

'Sis Colleen, look at that dress you're wearing. You look like an orphan. Come, I'll take you to Edgars tomorrow, they're having a sale.'

'Can you believe that Moira actually told Mrs Petersen that I was the one who told her child not to come and swim in the pool — I mean, did you ever?'

Frankly, no, I never, nor do I intend to. Where have these people been?

'And I hope you'll forget all your ANC nonsense now. Mandela should be thankful for what de Klerk's done for him. Does he think we want him for president? If we give this country to the blacks, we'll go to rack and ruin.'

Don't they know how it hurts? Don't they know how sick I was when I heard that Brian had been killed, shot through the head, and that it still hurts and sickens me now, six months later? That even when I see a car like his, I see his blood and brains spattered all over the front seat, and I can't look? Don't they see on their precious SABC TV that there are still bomb blasts, even now, by whites on schools? Didn't they read my letters about the poverty, the pain, the absolute destruction caused by our dear leaders and their loyal defence force through their destabilisation schemes? Didn't they read about the drought, the dead cattle decorating the sand like fishbones

And I must have written about Mamdupe, the day I went to the post office and stopped to chat to the women selling their peanuts and bananas, and Mamdupe was holding her baby in her arms, rocking, rocking, almost in desperation. Everyone was shouting and gesticulating. And then Dr Montso from the hospital came up to her and put his hand on her shoulder and told her there was nothing he or any of the nurses could have done, that the child was already dead, had been dead for hours, and how she screamed and screamed. I remember reading a similar event in Mphahlele's book, but to see it, to hear it. I've never heard such a wail, never felt such a sound go through me so, from my guts to my shins and feet.

She said this child was her last born, she couldn't have any more. He was her last hope of provision, a gift in her old age. Two sons, she cried, killed by the army. My girl, she cried, died of measles. This one can't be dead, she kept crying, and she was shaking the baby, holding it to her chest, then at arm's length, then shaking it, and she was on her knees in the sand, rocking back and forth, and her hand kept going to the sand, then to her face and to the baby, until she and the child were covered in mud and spit and she was screaming, everything was screaming and I turned because I couldn't watch anymore, and I started walking home, faster and faster until I was running, but I couldn't get the sound out of my head or the sight out of my eyes, or the pain from my head and chest and legs.

And do you know why the baby died? Malnutrition. And who knows how many others. I lived there. I lived in the filth and poverty caused by the system I was fighting, while the people who lived there died from the system which was fighting them, fighting babies, and preening themselves as they displayed their military might back home. Give them their independence. Let them live in their homelands, where they belong. Where I didn't belong, I hated having to be there, and dreamt of home and of freedom.

Suddenly things started happening. We heard of releases, unbannings, of marches in the streets, of flags and banners, music and joy, hopes of hope of sights of freedom. And there too we rejoiced, we laughed and wept, we heard that we could go home. I went home. And now I'm home.

I walk from my room into the passage, wandering if things would have been different if I'd stayed, if we'd all stayed. I know I'm being unreasonable, but I did expect things to be different. I couldn't see people being just as apathetic as they were five years ago, ten years ago, two thousand and one years ago. I couldn't see them still being so totally unaware of what's been happening, and unconcerned too. How can you be so wrapped up in your own world that you can't even see the rest of the world. I didn't expect people to still be so racist, so selfish. I didn't expect my friends to be so yuppy. I didn't expect there still to be murders, bomb blasts, and visits in the night. And I expected to feel part of my family.

I go to the toilet and closing the door, see the (same old) poster pasted there. 'Each life needs it own quiet place'. I swallow as I acknowledge that in fact that for the past five years I have never had my own quiet place, nor during the years preceding that, when all my life was done on the run, and that was one of the things I was looking for as I looked home.

Gabalahlwa was all right, the people were friendly and kind, helpful and supportive, but I did not belong.

anywhere, nor to anyone.

Much of it I suppose, was my own fault. I always wanted to maintain something of my culture, my values, myself, wanting to cling to something I'd had and would go back to, so I'd never allowed myself to become fully immersed in their culture. I was like a bird, fluttering here, flittering there, landing, pecking, leaving, flying. Always flying. I distanced myself from the other exiles too. Since my leaving was more by choice than necessity, I'd felt I didn't qualify as one of 'them' whom I revered and held in high esteem. Thus, feeling not quite good enough nor sufficiently worthy of the status, I exiled myself from my comrades as well, and set myself apart, always the bird on the rooftop.

Throughout those years, I thought of home as the place where I belonged, my refuge and strength, my quiet place, and I held that thought as my standard, my Northern light, the one thread keeping me hanging on to sanity. And now that I'm here it's as if I'm going from room to room, knocking at each door, only to be told I'm in the wrong house. It reminds me of a dream I had as a child. I dreamed I was a ghost, and I was floating around at school, going from classroom to classroom. I could see all the teachers and all my school friends but they couldn't see me. And when I tried to touch them and speak to them, they couldn't hear or feel me. I woke up weeping because I'd never felt so lonely in my life.

I rinse my hands in the bathroom and marvel that they've still not had the broken tiles fixed. I feel like Rip van Winkel in reverse. I have lived and moved and grown old and the rest of the world has been asleep. Back in the passage, I make my way to the telephone. Perhaps I should phone somebody, take my mind off these morbid thoughts. At the phone I pause to read the wealth of messages pasted up on the wall.

'Anne, phone Michael before seven.'

'Dad — a lady phoned for you and said I mustn't tell Mom.'

'Gone to the shop. Back by four. M.' (Oh, that's today's.)

'Someone called John or Joe or Joan phoned and said you must phone back urgently but I can't remember the number.' (That can only be Hayley.)

'I've gone to a meeting. If I haven't phoned by five, phone Frank. If no one's there, —

I realise with a shock that that's one of mine from '86.

Hands shaking, I begin to peel away more of the new ones to find the old ones underneath. There — contact numbers — The Crisis Centre, 'What to do in case of detention'. Forgetting my phone call I start pulling them off and reading them, and it comes flowing back. The years '84, '85, '86, UDF, WECTU, meetings, SRC, rallies, workshops, my first encounter with the ANC and MK, ex-Robben Island comrades, discussions through the night, late-night visits, late-night fear. I realise I'm trembling, but it's not with fear, it's excitement. Those days, those meetings, those plans of action. Then I belonged. Then we all belonged. And we were free, too — like the wind. 'The wind blows where it will and nobody knows from whence it comes or it goes.' The art of disappearing and re-appearing at another place — we had it mastered then.

I remember I hardly ate in those days, hardly slept, living on adrenalin and fresh air, empowered by our principles, spurred by the struggle. During the height of the State of Emergency we were free — free to sleep at any time, or to rise at any time (or not to sleep at all for that matter), free to move about from house to house, to sleep from house to house, to move about in the few cars that were owned by somebody, anybody, everybody, free to meet in homes and garages, parks and gardens. Braais and picnics when all meetings were banned! Until the police got nose of that as well. I remember the excitement of distributing pamphlets at night, running, house to house, tree to tree, round the corner, gone. And the pleasure and pride of successful action. Like the day our car was stopped at a roadblock, stacked with June 16 pamphlets and posters we'd just printed. Hearts stopped and knees turned to spaghetti. Keep calm, relax, smile. Pretend you know nothing at all.

'Het julle enige vuurwapens?'

'Pardon?'

'Hev you gott weppons?'

'Weapons! (What a thought) No.' (People on the back seat pass a packet of chips around. Munching. Silly concept, roadblocks. Wastes a person's time.)

'Okay. You can go.'

The car almost stalls as I try to attach my shaking foot

to the accelerator pedal, and push it down very gently, while at the same time trying to lift my other foot (which has died) equally gently off the clutch pedal, where it has by now become rooted. An almost impossible task, made worse by the fact that I am no longer breathing and my heart is not beating. I wait until we are down at the bridge and beyond the robot before I turn and grin at my passengers, breathe, and then have to park for two full minutes as we all cry with laughter, almost wetting ourselves. But that was only the beginning.

Tragedy followed the madness, excitement and daring were replaced by fear, detention, arrests, torture, murders and sabotages, the police seeming to know your plans before you did, your ranks thinning out, and you not knowing whether people had left, had gone into hiding, or were captured or killed, and your hours and days and weeks of work seeming to have gotten nowhere, to have achieved nothing, except deaths of more children, and the mothers blaming you, and doors which had previously been open to you, to all of you, being shut in your face. As more and more people came back with worse and worse stories, as more and more people did not come back, as dedicated comrades suddenly opted out and would have no more, or opted out and crossed to the other side, and as the endless nights began to take their toll, the rain of doubt began to seep into our souls. It's very brave and daring to brave the soldiers, but one can only take it for so long.

I remember clearly when my day came. There was no specific reason for it, nothing exceptional happened. I just woke up feeling very tired, very near to tears, and wanting to hear nothing, see nothing and do nothing that had anything to do with South Africa or The Struggle or police or youth or school or anything else to do with anything.

For about two weeks I felt like that — tired, tired all day, but not being able to sleep at night. My senses were super sharp and constantly alert. I heard every footstep outside, every car stopping, every 'pip' of the telephone, and each time my heart would go into a spasm. The possibility of detention hung over everyone like an icicle-cloud, and you dreaded it, prayed it would not happen, but at that time I almost wished it would come quickly and be over with. After that came the anger. I hated the police and the army. When face to face with them, I'd stare at their faces, trying to read what was behind those masks of stone, trying to get some reaction, some blink that would betray a vestige of humanity inside, and getting none, I'd hate them all the more. The energy which had previously spurred and empowered me now churned and tortured my insides, driving me to seek and enjoy stories of violence and death. I laughed when a Casspir overturned, sneered when a policeman was injured, cheered at the deaths of soldiers. I found myself keeping tally: Police: 455, Us: 17

I wanted to make it 18, 19, 20, 50, 50 thousand, and I longed to hold a gun in my hand, to feel it come alive at the touch of my finger as the bullets ripped out and ripped the flesh of those hateful bodies. I heard of grenade attacks in other parts of the country and silently saluted those unknown comrades, wishing for my own, wishing to light every fire, lay every landmine, and to see South Africa exploding into a thousand tiny fragments of shattered night.

Three things broke me out of that mood:

1. Suraya
2. My run
3. Brian

1. Suraya: Suraya was a friend of mine, a Moslem, and we were reading the *Cape Times* together. The news of the death of another soldier had me jumping in triumph. Ha! That's 18 to us. 18 down, 499 thousand to go! Suraya studied me for a moment, then asked: 'Is it right for a Christian to laugh at the death of another human being?' I stared at her. Her words struck me hard, because I had not realised what I was becoming. I thanked her.

2. My run: I had a phone call about two days after this in which I was told that Peter, Connie and Faizel had been picked up the previous night. To me this meant one thing. I would be next. The four of us were the only members of our regional executive who had avoided detention up till then. Now it was only me. The initial shock — standing in front of the telephone with the receiver in my hand, while the voice on the other side said hello? hello? — was followed by panic. Two seconds of it, in which my mind raced through the possibilities of where to hide, where to sleep that night, the next night, the next week,

Landscape • Karen Harber • Pen and ink

the rest of my life? And that was that. The next second I decided that I would not run, I would not hide. I was not a criminal, I was good. I had waited long enough, which had been bad enough, and now they could come. Filled with strong resolve, yet trembling at the seams, I went to check if the bag I had packed in readiness weeks ago was all in order. I first replaced the receiver. I would have to warn my mother. I would have to prepare myself. I would have to remain calm. I decide I needed a run on the beach.

I can see it so clearly. I am back on the beach. There's a strong South-Easter and the sea is choppy. The sand is warm, as I always liked it. I pick my way across the soft sand towards the sea, wondering if there'll ever be any freedom, if anything was ever meant to be free. I am hit by a sudden realisation Even the sea is not free. It beats relentlessly against the shore, surging upwards, pushing forwards, yet each time the tide pulls it back, pulls it back. The sea is confined to the space between the shore.

The water is cold and I draw back my feet a few times before submitting my ankles to its wetness. I decide to run. I start off in the water, splashing myself, then onto the sand. I run faster and faster, my legs taking me, my fears driving me, my tears making it hard for me to see where I'm going. I cry for Peter and Connie and Faizel, for me, and for the thousands of others being detained and tortured, especially the young kids, and for their mothers, and for my mother. My mother just could not understand how I felt, could not accept my reasoning, my need to be involved, yet she was always supportive, even putting herself at risk to protect me. Oh, mummy I'm scared! Oh South Africa, will there never be a time when your children can be free? I run up to the canal, do a U-turn, and make my way back home. The wind is against me now, the going is harder and I battle. I tell myself that the wind is nothing but air. Nothing but a lot of air. I stop, because something has struck me.

The sea is not free, but it keeps coming back, it never stops.

The wind is strong and powerful, but it is NOTHING BUT AIR.

The shore is so vast and powerful, but it consists of tiny single grains, TINY, TINY, pieces of broken shells and rocks and calcium.

And I realise that I AM FREE. Because I am bone and flesh and spirit and they can break my bones, wound my flesh, pierce my flesh and spill my blood, but they can never, never break my spirit. Because that is the part of me that belongs to God. I realise that whatever happens to me, I have no need to fear because Jesus has been there, he has been through it all and he has made a way through for me.

As I process these thoughts I am filled with a sense of almost careless joy. Lifting my hands to the sky I sing:

'Woza Moya
Woza Moya
Woza Moya Oyingcwele!'

The sun is fast going down as I make for home, threading my way through the rubble and debris, past the blackened shells of burnt out cars and shops and other unidentifiable objects. Although it is still early the barricades are already being set up, the children's faces dark — dark eyes, dark faces, dark anger. But I'm feeling light. Some of my hope, energy and determination have returned and I feel ready, ready to face whatever may come.

3. Brian: What did come that night was Brian.

'Come with me,' he said. 'Get into the car. Don't ask any questions, just come.'

Who am I to ask questions. I went.

We went to the Luxurama (I can't even remember what we saw) and afterwards to his flat, where he told me that he was leaving. He said there was some work for him to do, back here, but that he first had to go for further training, further instruction. The rest of his words were lost in a buzz in my head, because I knew that even as he spoke I had already made a decision, and I sensed that he had too. I was going with him. We both knew it was a silly decision, that it would be frowned upon. We both knew that I would not be able to go with him all the way, nor be able to stay with him, that I'd hardly even see him, but we both knew we were going. We held each other in silence, in celebration, in fear. I clung to him, clung to a future which had just become our past, clung to all the possibilities which might no longer be possible and to dreams, to hopes, to joys. We clung to each other to blot out the cloud of fear which threatened to come between us and force us apart. It was a storm cloud, black with danger, but we clung in defiance, and in our silence gave each other strength. I spent the night with him and phoned my mom in the morning. The police hadn't come. Whether they'd seen me leaving, or whether they hadn't intended to come in the first place, I did not know.

I pull the five-year-old messages off the wall, crumpling them in my hand. One by one, all of them, off, and drop them to the floor. There's a whirlwind inside my head, spinning, roaring. I lean back against the wall to steady myself but my knees buckle beneath me and I slide to the floor. I hadn't wanted to think of Brian. I close my eyes against the pain — the pain of our inevitable parting, of my years alone, exiled from my home, my love and from myself, the pain of not hearing where he was or where he'd been sent to, and the pain of a thousand bullets crashing into my skull, shooting my blood and brains and fragments of bone all over Brian's car.

Suddenly I'm crying and I can't stop myself. I cry for the rain of years which has never fallen on the land where

I've been in exile. I cry tears for the children which might have been mine and Brian's, but never happened, and all the children which might have been anybody's, but never were, because their parents died before they were conceived. My tears are for all the people I've met and not met, whose funerals were in a foreign land, with no one to cry for them, and for their mothers who still wait at home, anxious knuckles knotting soggy handkerchiefs. I cannot stop myself and I don't try. I only hope that no one comes to the door.

Eventually, I'm OK and I go and wash my face, change my T-shirt, throw my papers into the bin and pour myself a glass of milk. I'm sitting like this, at the table, when I hear a footstep on the stoep and the door handle turning. I jump. I actually get a fright. It's my mom returned from shopping, armed with carrier bags.

'Oh there you are. I thought you were sleeping, it's so quiet in here. How was your day. You haven't got the TV on, it's Santa Barbara. Won't you please unpack the groceries for me? Thanks.'

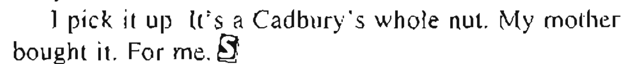
I rise from the table, rinse my glass at the sink, then return to the table to start unpacking margarine, milk, tinned peas, chocolate, beans, tuna..., I gaze out the window and I can see thick grey clouds spreading across the mountain blown by the South-easter. 'Wind clouds' my mother calls them. I call them sea clouds: clouds of evaporated sea, pouring across the mountain, coming to call me. I missed the sea while I was away.

I know that my memories of '84, '85, '86 will never leave me, nor will the memories of Gabalahlwa and of Brian. But I know that in time the sharp edges will become blunt and soften, the too bright or too dark areas will merge into greyness, touchable greyness. And I know that even before then I'll get a job and probably continue to work for peace, probably continue....

There's an owl on our rooftop. With its wide round eyes it gazes at the rising moon. But the owl is wise, and it doesn't yearn for the moon, doesn't try to reach it or attain or bring it down. It simply does nothing, because it knows the moon is unreachable — just a golden ball in the sky.

'What are you doing, dreaming? You've only half-finished unpacking. Did you find the chocolate I bought for you?

I pick it up It's a Cadbury's whole nut. My mother bought it. For me. S



Offers

1

Die man was weerstandig
wóú nie op vrae, sonder respek gerig,
antwoord nie.
Die gesprek raak rof.
Houe rëen, teen sy kop,
tot die skedel krakend vloer tref.
Hy raak stil, onsamehangend,
weier nou éérs
om saam to praat.
Hy sit aan, dokter,
sê die konstabel,
wil nie saamwerk nie.
Toe hy lê, in eie vuil, karwei 'n bakkie
sy lyf hospitaal toe,
té laat.
Hy is, byna terloops,
dood.

2

Ver noord
ry 'n wit bakkie
kris-kras deur bos —
met kinders agterop.
Toe die landmyn omplof,
vlieg hul reguit,
in offerrook, die niet in.

Phil du Plessis

Staffrider Vol. 10 No. 2 1992

Spirits

This land is a land of ghosts.

How I long for you now

Phineas, you could make us laugh
with your playfulness now,
maybe even now.
Your impish grin
your perpetual boyishness.

It was the first shock.
They shoved you in the boot of the car
and drove you to Lions River
(I can never pass that place without a shudder)
They smashed your face
and shot you.

Jabu, Jabu,
how we stumbled around in shock.
But you were still as full and round and bright
you could still laugh
and give it all to a dance.
You still cared enough for the mothers
to find their missing children
And you still believed enough in people to say:
Thank you.
I was so used to the ones who thought
because I'm white
I owed it anyway.

They burnt your house.
You, your husband, your children.
Only one survived.
He was thirteen.
In the end he couldn't bear it.
He tried to kill those thugs,
so they shot him too.

Eh, Sikhumbuzo —
You never gave in, not you.
They came for your house too once
but you chased them away with a stick.
You were as solid and deep as the brown Natal earth
we were not even aware how much you sustained us.
You always had time, not just for politicians
and all that time you never got bitter or lost
like the rest of us.
It was as if you could see some place we were going,
it was just a matter of finding the best way there
and the only reason the obstacles were put there
was to challenge us to find a way around them.

We felt you'd be around forever.

They waited for you outside the Maharaj Hotel
and shot you.
And that was it.

The air was thick
Time refused to move forward
It hung back, lowering and angry
Refusing to leave you behind.

Then like an angry beast
it bellowed up at the night sky:
'Take all my sons
take my bravest, take my best.
A curse be on you for your
stupid, reckless, wanton greed.'

And we shuddered at what had been unleashed.

Now Mazwi is gone.
Maa-zwi
I still call that sweet name
and expect to see you loping along in your overalls
covered in clay
stooping down a little to reach my level:
'Hello sissie,' you'd say,
and I'd shyly smile back.

What would you have created with those great, gentle hands?

The boat is full of holes now.
The sail is too short of silken weave
to catch the wind.
The sea is growing choppy.

How we long for you now to gentle the time.

Long live the spirit of Sikhumbuzo Ngwenya
Long live
Long live the spirit of Jabu Ndlovu
Long live
Long live the spirit of Phineas Mazwi
Long live, long live.

Sue Mathieson

Child of Africa

Child,
Before your wide brown eyes become narrow
with bitterness and pain,
Before your round moon-face is tightened
with fear and anger,
Before your tiny fist is raised in a power salute,
And your lamb-bleat cries become cries for your freedom
— Our freedom,
Let me hold you,
Let me rock you gently to sleep.

Child of Africa,
Before I release you into the arms of a nation,
— Our nation,
Be mine for a while.
Nestle at my breast, drink of my milk.
And let me know that I have nursed you,
And nourished you.

Then, when you feel you have to leave,
Go.
But until then, child of my people,
Sleep in my arms
And I will keep you safe.

Linda Colleen Saunders

Robert Siwangaza

Two Poems

Township Jazzman

He carried an acoustic
Guitar in his hand
And passed by the
Door of a certain house
Saw a beautiful
Young girl
Saw her with tears on her face
He passed the house
And went to his home
As the time went by
Started his jazz songs
Blues, Kwela, Mbaqanga
He played melodies
Harmonised intensely
He hurt the girl
Inside her spirit
And he saw the
Girl come shyly
He could see her
Standing beside him
He talked to her
As he played
But the talk was no longer short
He heard about the
Boyfriend's disappointment
He was invited to
Play at her home
And he knew that
Tomorrow is Sunday
And he would play
In the backyard
In the garden
The following day he
Played lovely
Under that beautiful tree
With the lunch
Arranged beside
Him on the table
Glanced at her
As he played
Watched the
Lovely smile
He played unbelievable
'Magical' tunes
Ended up kissing her
He knew their friendship
Affair no longer
Existed: it was
A love affair.

Just a Glass of Beer

In the dark
A house is lit
I stepped towards it
A dog barked
Knocked at the door
Was welcomed
With warmness
It was a girl
I entered
Bought a bottle of beer
I started to drink
And slept
I woke up
Early in the morning
With my wallet gone
No shoes, no trousers
No customers around.

'Literary Language' and the 'Language of the People' in Contemporary South African English Poetry

Phaswane Mpe

This article is a reply to the interview, 'Mafika Gwala: Towards a National Culture' (*Staffrider*, Volume 8 Number 1, 1989). Generally, I agree with what Gwala has to say in the interview, especially on the following points. Firstly, I support his rejection of the highly misleading labels, 'Soweto poets', and 'Soweto poetry'. Secondly, I agree with his view that poetry, seen in the political context of his time, cannot be neutral. As such, the role of a poet, I concur, is to make people aware of the injustices they are subjected to, and to criticise and protest against such injustices and the general false sense of values in the country. Thirdly, as one of the proponents of Black Consciousness, Gwala sees the need for a common identity and understanding amongst all the oppressed people of South Africa.

Given the role of a poet, it should be clear that he or she can be instrumental in forging this common identity and understanding. It is this point that leads to Gwala's assertion:

> It is the responsibility of the present-day writer to remould language in such a way that it becomes African but remains English. Once freed of dogmatic meanings, language becomes dynamic. 'Literary' means different things to different people. The task is to criticise all that is false in our sense of values...'literary' language included. A writer cannot throw strain on this country's controversial ideas, its centres of culture, its institutions of learning and yet use 'literary' language, as opposed to the language of the people. (p.72)

It is here that I disagree with him.

Gwala's assertion presents four problems. Firstly, it imposes upon the modern writer the responsibility of remoulding language. Secondly, it raises the problem as to how African English can be established. Thirdly, it is not clear what 'the language of the people' is. Fourthly, it is untrue that a writer cannot criticise all that is false in this country's sense of values if he or she does not use 'the language of the people'. It is these four problems that I propose to discuss in this article. Where appropriate I will use some poems (since the thrust of the interview is, mainly, poetry) as examples of the points I will be establishing.

A closer look at contemporary South African English poetry reveals a common trend of dissatisfaction with, and anger towards, the white man on both political and economic levels, and even on the level of individual relationships. Kunene's 'The Gold-miners' (p.244 — all poetry references are to Michael Chapman's *A Century of South African Poetry*, 1981, unless otherwise stated) starts off by creating an aura of abundance with ideas such as echoed 'music', ringing 'bells', 'feast' and piling 'wealth'. But the atmosphere is to be shattered by a single question: But where are the people?

What then follows is the depiction of exclusion from,

and deprivation of, what 'the people' have produced:

> We stand by watching parades
> Walking the deserted halls
> We who are locked in the pits of gold.

The word 'we' refers to 'the people', and the gold-miners. The tone conveys the bitterness involved in being deprived of what one produces at great risk, as 'We who are locked in the pits of gold' suggests. While 'gold' literally and symbolically refers to the white man's economic well-being, 'pits' reflects the (mostly black) miners' dangerous position. The word 'locked' reinforces 'the pits', suggesting not only the mine shafts, but also the possibility of being killed and buried in those shafts. This poem clearly offers a bitter criticism against the unjust distribution of wealth in this country.

One of the most comprehensive contemporary protest poems is Christopher van Wyk's 'About Graffiti'. (pp.363-65) In it politics, economics, and various conflicts are fused. These conflicts are depicted by words such as 'adrenalin and blood in the township', disgusting images of 'the gang who burnt a nice-time cherrie / and left her behind the shops / for dogs to eat off her left leg' and others. On the political level one has restricting laws, such as 'the tourniquet of influx control', and the imposition of the white man's values on the black man, as in 'I don't like Vorsta and Kruga / because they want us / to speak Afrikaans'.

One cannot overlook the contrast between 'a dirt child / who scratches for sweets / ...in rubbish dumps' and the wealth suggested by the very name, 'Jo'burg', and 'share certificates / ...billboards / ...cheques / ...managers, clerks, executives'. Extreme poverty and wealth are directly contrasted to elicit a reader's disapproval.

A similar analysis of other poems will show the point made earlier concerning a common trend of dissatisfaction with, and anger towards, the white man who imposes his will upon the majority of the people. This point seems to me to support Gwala's view of himself as a poet: 'I see my role as being that of awakening consciousness, and opening the negative reality of lies and complacency'. (p.70)

However, the poems are written in such diverse language forms that they in many ways defy Gwala's imposition of responsibility upon poets, namely that of 'remould(ing) language in such a way that it becomes African but remains English'. Whether or not a poet should undertake to do this should be left to that poet for two reasons I now turn to.

The first reason is obvious. It involves the exclusion of any poet not familiar with an African language from writing contemporary South African English poetry. For, clearly, such a poet cannot remould English into African English. Gwala suggests that a failure to employ African English makes it impossible to criticise the falsity of the country's sense of values, implying that such poets are incapable of such criticism. Gwala's assertion is clearly untrue and I will return to it later. The second reason why a poet should be free to choose which language to use is that this will not curb his or her creativity. Poetry is art. As such, it has to do with creativity, originality, innovation, in short, all the features of art. To demand that a poet use this or that language is to suggest that he or she is not free, and therefore cannot exercise his or her potential to the fullest. It is to deny him or her an essential feature of poetry, poetic licence.

For those poets who have some knowledge of African languages, the problem arises : how does one bring into being a language that is 'African but remains English'? It seems from the interview that Gwala takes African English to be that form of English which is 'the metaphorical language of the ghetto and rural blacks'. (p.74) In this case one may classify as similar the two apparently different poems, 'About Graffiti' and Gwala's 'From the Outside'. (p.351) And one may add Mtshali's 'The Master of the House' (Soyinka, 1975: 209). 'From the Outside' has the black township as its setting, as is suggested by:

> big crowd hangarounds, churchgoers,
> drunks and goofs
> ...the mourning song
> pitched fistedly high
> ...(and) the cops...

Such an atmosphere is very rare in the rural site, and is very unlikely in the suburbs, but is typical of the black

townships. The 'fistedly' high pitch of the mourning song symbolises the courage and power of the mourners, who are presumably black, burying their fellow black man, Madaza. A sense of triumph over the oppressive system is unmistakable in the words:

> — What got my brow itching though
> is that none
> of the cops present
> dared to stand out
> and say
> Madaza was a 'Wanted'.

Although the setting of Mtshali's 'The Master of the House', is a suburb, one still finds the common metaphor of dehumanisation so prevalent among urban black poets. To illustrate my point, I will quote the poem at length:

> So nightly I run the gauntlet,
> Wrestle with your mastiff, Caesar,
> for a bone pregnant with meat
> and wash it down with Pussy's milk.
> I am the nocturnal animal
> that steals through the fenced lair
> to meet my mate,
> and flees at the break of dawn
> before the hunter and his hounds
> run me to the ground.

I draw attention to the metaphor of the animal that occurs throughout the two stanzas, a metaphor suggesting dehumanisation and inferiority, like that of some hunted creature.

'About Graffiti' is different from 'Master of the House' and 'From the Outside'. It is a mixture of street language ('Heroes die young', 'ek sal jou klap / dan cross ek die border'), popular culture ('Bob Marley shouts reggae / from township cafes'), and some elevated diction, ('adrenalin', 'plethora', tourniquet of influx control').

The language of commerce is represented by such words as 'share certificates', 'billboards' and others. Should the diction of these three poems be referred to us as African English simply because of their 'metaphorical language of the ghetto...blacks'?

If one chooses to call it so, yet another problem arises: that is, the subtlety of the poems. They require of the reader a fairly good command of English. Therefore most of 'the people', lacking such a requirement will have difficulty understanding them. Also 'About Graffiti' defies easy classifications.

Its scholarly pieces of diction will disqualify it from the 'African English' category, while its lively use of street language and popular culture moves it away from 'literary' language.

So the subtleties which characterise these poems (and many more), and their simultaneous use of popular culture, African metaphor and literary diction defy anything Gwala might call African English.

And one even wonders if such a language does exist, or can be established. Gwala must be challenged for presuming that such a thing as 'the language of the people' does exist. Firstly, as we have seen, no such language can be defined in satisfactory terms. Secondly, Gwala seems to forget, or ignore, that most of 'the people' he is referring to do not, in reality, have the time or the means to take an interest in written English poetry. Poetry involves certain technicalities with which most of 'the people' are not acquainted. Hence understanding it adequately would, presumably, be a very difficult task for them. One here is bound to agree with Kunene (1986: p.39) when he writes: 'The claim that a book written in English is addressed to blacks makes no sense unless one specifies that it is for those who have acquired enough English to be able to read and understand it'.

And, as already stated, many people in the country have not yet acquired such a basic requirement. Thus, South African English poetry is written for those who can read and understand English. Even oral poetry, such as that of Mzwakhe Mbuli, presupposes a basic knowledge and understanding of English. As such, there is no need to remould language as Gwala demands. The poet who chooses to remould language may do so to enrich the English language, or as an innovative contribution to literature. Certainly, it is not to benefit the masses. For, even if remoulded, it remains English, and, as such, presupposes a knowledge of that language in order to be read and understood. The language of 'the people', it must be clear, is the African languages. There is no way

English, be it Africanised or not, can be the language of the people until the majority have learnt to read and understand it.

Following from the above conclusion, it becomes evident that Gwala's assertion — 'A writer cannot throw a strain on this country's controversial ideas, its centres of culture, its institution of learning and yet use 'literary' language, as opposed to the 'language of the people' is untrue. Starting with his own poems, it would be wrong to say, despite their 'literariness', that they do not throw strain on this country's false values.

The poem, 'From the Outside', clearly celebrates human unity — 'big crowd: hangarounds, churchgoers, / drunks and goofs', and the cops failure to speak out that 'Mazada was a Wanted'.

The poem criticises, though subtly, the unwanted presence of the cops on the scene. Mtshali's 'Master of the House' directs criticism to the unwelcome reception the speaker gets from his wife's master. Kunene's criticism in 'The Gold-miners' is levelled at the wealthy white men who feast on their wealth 'gold', 'we stand by watching the parades / Walking the deserted hall / We who are locked in the pits of gold'. One also sees, in earlier poets such as H.I.E. Dhlomo, the criticism of the gross dishonesty and ingratitude of the white man, who does not reward a black man who helped him to emerge victorious in a war that did not really concern the black man. In the poem 'Not for Me' Dhlomo writes:

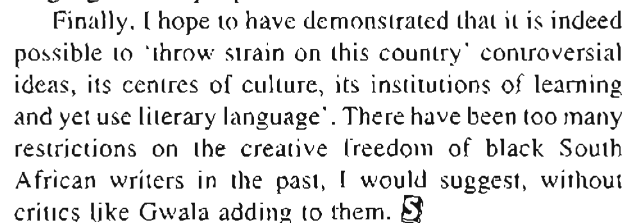
Not for me,
Ah! not for me.
The celebration,
The peace orations.
Not for me,
Yes, not for me
Are victory
And liberty!

Clearly, all these poems do criticise, very effectively, all that is false in this country's sense of values. But their language is literary. Even in 'About Graffiti' one cannot mistake, in spite of the 'literary' language, the criticism levelled at the government and its institutions:

Graffiti is children playing
around broken live wires from lampposts
and the Electricity Department fixing it
after somebody has burnt to death
has been shocked through the conduits
of his slum ignorance.
And later we read:
Soon graffiti will wade into Jo'burg
unhampered by the tourniquet of influx control.

Arguably, then, a writer can criticise this country's false values 'and yet use literary language'. As to 'the language of the people', one is bound to argue that, as long as most of 'the people' cannot read and understand English, there is no way it can ever be their language. Thus far a language that one can call 'the language of the people' is non-existent, unless one is speaking of an ethnic group, in which the group's language is 'the langauge of the people'. But even then, 'the people' will be restricted to that group.

In conclusion, therefore, a poet or any other writer should decide for himself or herself as to which language he or she will use in his or her literary work. He or she has no responsibility to remould language — after all, English remains English even if one uses African idiom. Also, such an imposition of responsibility upon a writer will curb his or her artistic capabilities. Furthermore, with many people unable to read or understand English it is very naive to see the possibility of its being 'the language of the people' at the moment.



Finally, I hope to have demonstrated that it is indeed possible to 'throw strain on this country' controversial ideas, its centres of culture, its institutions of learning and yet use literary language'. There have been too many restrictions on the creative freedom of black South African writers in the past, I would suggest, without critics like Gwala adding to them.

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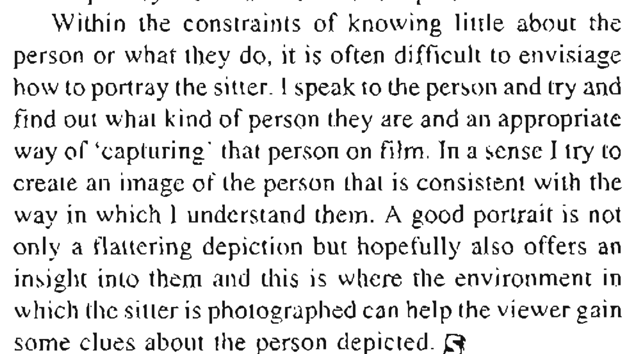
People in Creativity and Culture

Photographs by Andrew Bannister

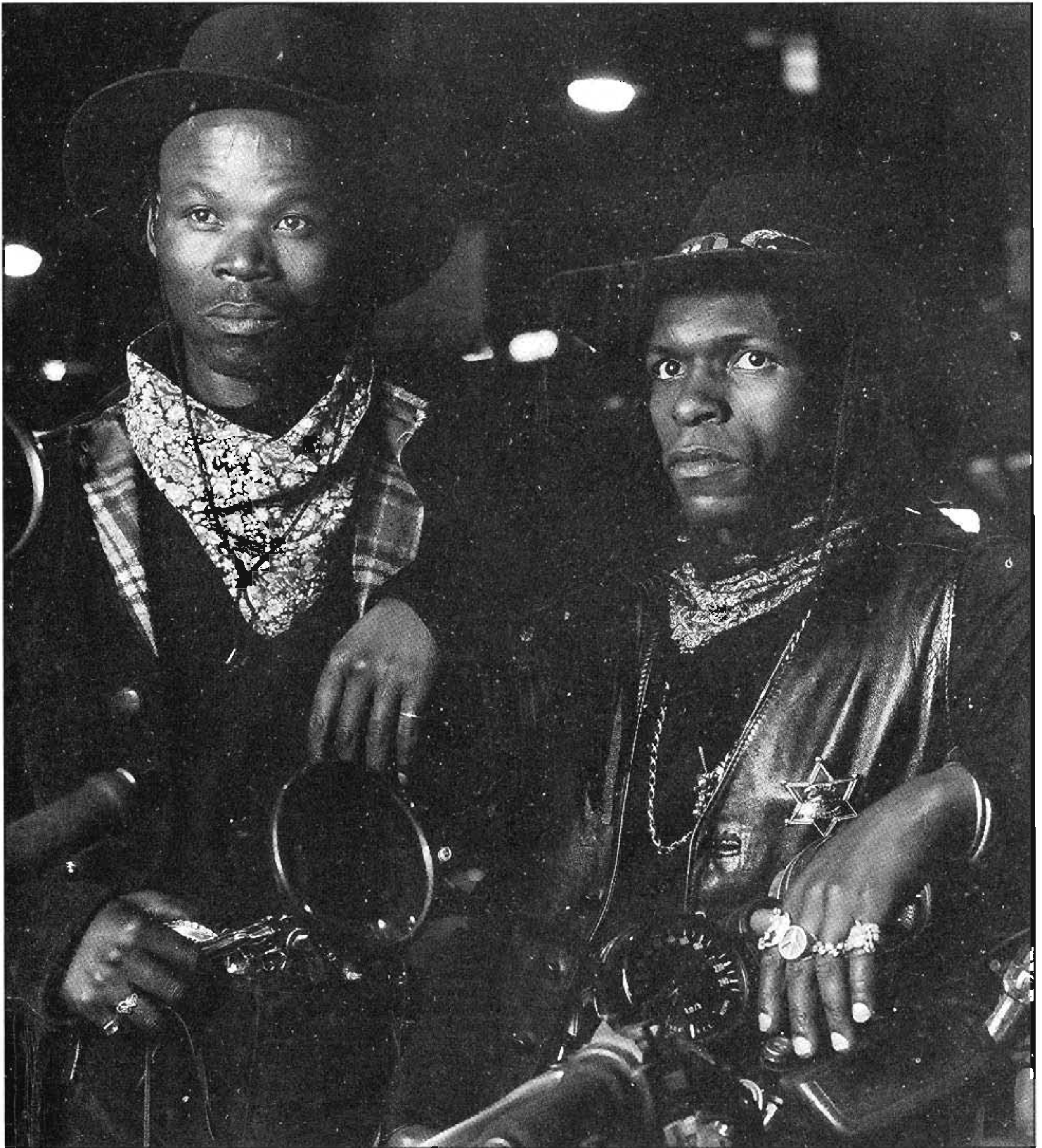
Robert Coleman, Performer, 1991

This series of portraits represents some of the work I have been commisioned over the last year. My interest in portraiture goes back to when I studyed photgraphy at technicon and university, though it was only since I commenced freelancing in the last year that I started taking portraits regularly. My style varies continually and these photographs represent an 'environmental portraiture' approach, where the sitter is photographed within an environment familiar or hopefully representative of some aspect of the subject. 'Patrick Shai' for example was commissioned by the *Vrye Weekblad* for a story about him starring in *Taxi to Soweto*. Pushed for time, we went to a nearby taxi rank where I photographed him reflected in a taxi mirror. This refers to the movie and hopefully also reflects him as a person.

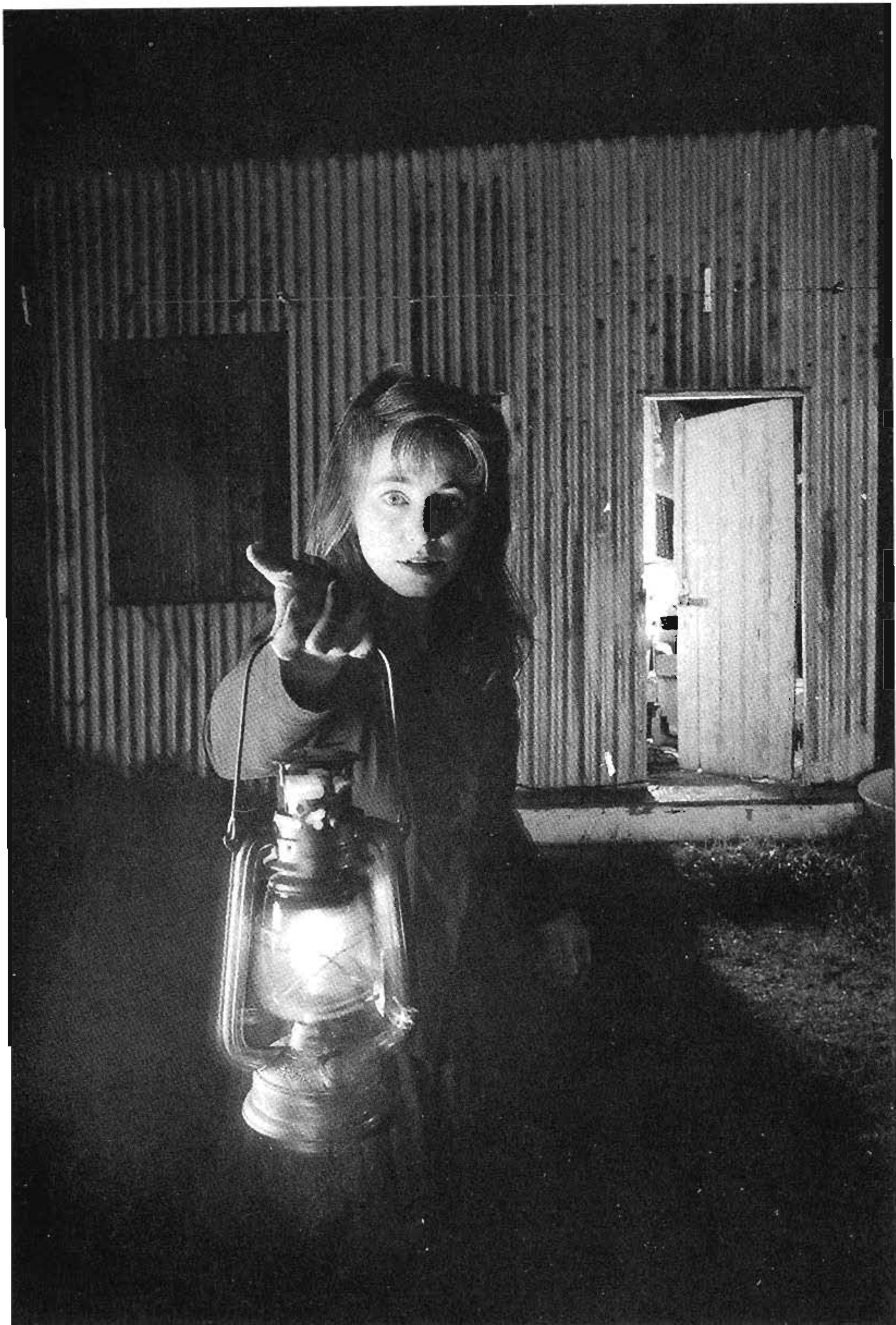
Within the constraints of knowing little about the person or what they do, it is often difficult to envisiage how to portray the sitter. I speak to the person and try and find out what kind of person they are and an appropriate way of 'capturing' that person on film. In a sense I try to create an image of the person that is consistent with the way in which I understand them. A good portrait is not only a flattering depiction but hopefully also offers an insight into them and this is where the environment in which the sitter is photographed can help the viewer gain some clues about the person depicted.



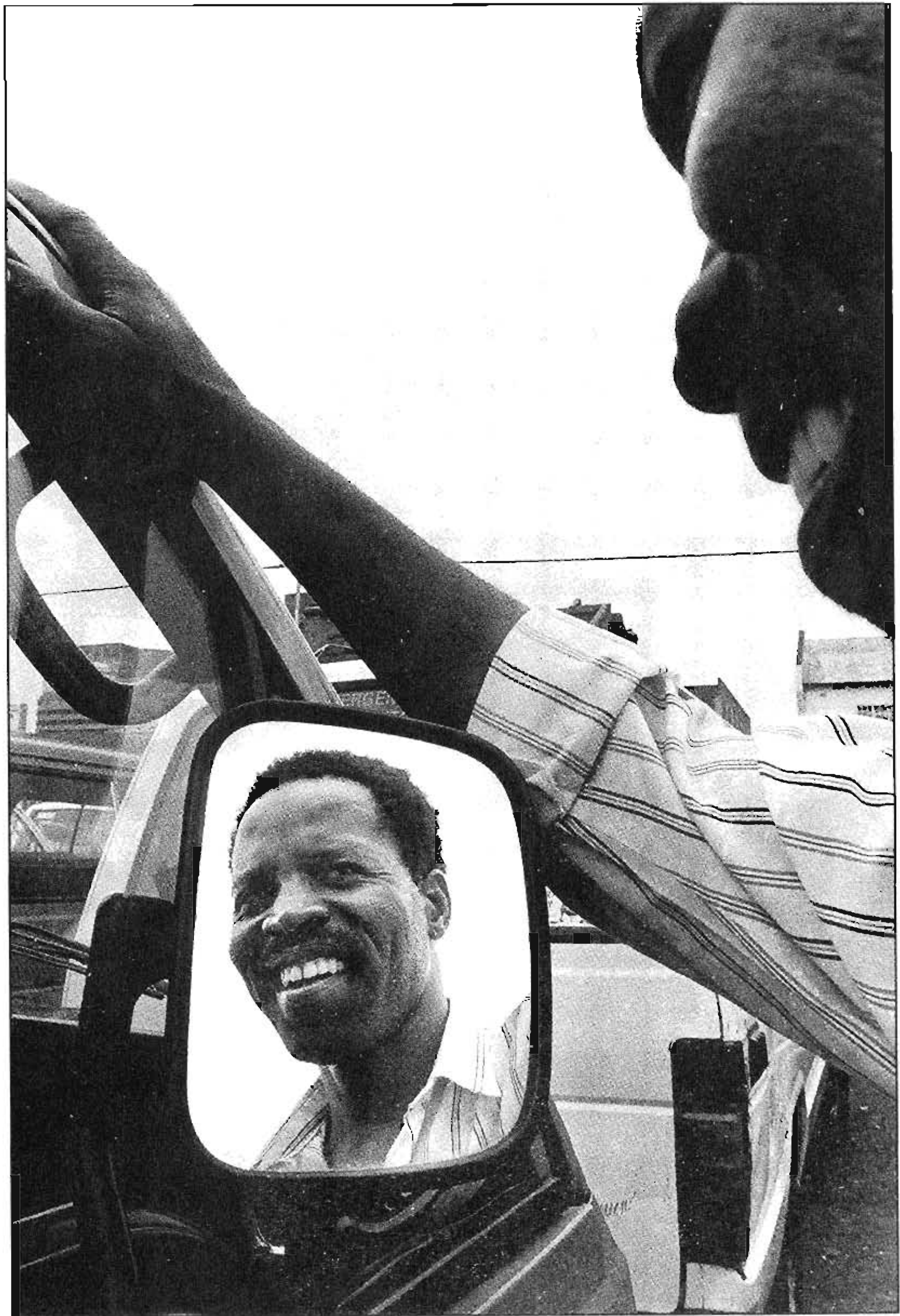
Elasbé Zietsman, Award winning cabaret artist, February 1992



Quiet and Mike, Urban cowboy fashion designers from 'Kingdom Clothes'



Ilse van Hemert, November 1992



Patrick Shai, Actor

James Phillips, Musician known as Bernoldus Niemand

Makoti

Makhanda Senzangakhona

The suburb streets were empty, the shutters still on in the windows as Motsumi jogged past. Only lone souls on their way to work occasionally crossed the street. It would be some minutes before the residents awoke to the new day, he thought. Now and then a solitary vehicle with headlamps on sped past emitting vapours through its exhaust.

Motsumi ran along absorbing the morning impressions while intervening lines of thought criss-crossed in his head. He always reflected better during and even after exercise. It seemed to cleanse his head of the debris of the past.

Soon the sweat welled, gathering into globules which formed streams that washed down his face and into his sweater. It kept on, indifferent to the discomfort and burning oven buried in his chest. He had lived too long on a diet of alcohol and nicotine, he told himself. No wonder his belly stuck out before him like an insistent visitor in another's womb. Friends had reproached him saying he had deteriorated since the days when his physique was fantastic. But he felt they were envious since they could not put one on themselves.

'How can one grow a mkhaba-paunch with all the problems and headaches about livelihood!' he justified his newly acquired possession.

But going uphill Motsumi found his recently acquired investment a disadvantage if not a curse. He huffed and panted and was next to biliousness by the time he was over the hill. It was with relief that he reached the top and changed to a steady jog until his heart resumed its lazy beat. Just then he could even afford a few jumps, squats and pressups. That was when he saw her.

She was huddled in the midst of a load of baggage like that seen accompanying people on the move. It was remarkable that Motsumi even noticed her buried as she was within that heap and mound of belongings. They cupped her figure, overshadowed and almost entombed her out of sight. She was on the verandah of a shop at a four-way stop and he had almost passed without noticing her.

At first glance she appeared no different from the tramps and hobos plying the streets. Yet she could be another old lady caught in the homeless inheritance of a system that cared little for its citizens. Or she could be waiting to go somewhere, he reckoned. What if she needed help and he was zooming past without a second thought for her plight?

'Sawubona magogo — I see you gran!' he hailed coming to stand in front of her.

The first thing that struck him was her stare. It slapped him square in the face and neither moved nor shifted. It seemed to hold him in its gaze as though boring holes at the back of his head. The whites of her eyes were as white as eyes could be, while

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Demoiselles de Codesa • **Vincent Baloyi • Woodcut**

the black held a meaning he could not unravel. Something lurked there which he could not put his finger on. The rest about her was grime and filth that coated her skin imparting on it another colour than its original one. Her clothes were a mesh and mixture of knots, loops, and skews of an unimaginable artist. Such mastery could only have come as a result of unconscious labour. At that range, Motsumi's second impression of her was summed up in the word: MAD! Perhaps I'm wrong, he thought. After all, extreme poverty can turn a person into resembling a lunatic. Could it be that her senses had taken leave of her? He could not tell.

'How are you mama?'

'Well, what about you?' she responded without a hitch and for the first time Motsumi noticed a mark akin to a map on her throat. It was like the one the boys in their light mood termed the 'Gorbachev map' after the birthmark on the man's head. He had no way of knowing if it came with the woman at birth or if it was the legacy of a hot instrument.

His mind was drawn to other things. He kept pondering the contents of the sealed baggage crowding her. It reminded him of amagoduka or migrants after a long stay in the mines. But then he knew that mentally disturbed people had a tendency to lug about all their earthly belongings. They were no different to a snail shouldering its house everywhere. He had also seen a few tenants make home on pavements because the landlord preferred his rent rather than entertain human plight. This array of possible explanations of her being there beset his head without reprieve.

'Why you here mum...so early in the morning?' he ventured the question.

'Why I'm waiting. Waiting for the bus of course! It passes here. don't you know?'

Motsumi could not respond because he was not sure. He had just moved into that neighbourhood.

'A bus to where mum?'

'Orange Grove, of course — where else?' The response was just flat and came with no anger or surprise. It seemed it was the natural thing that ought not even raise a query. 'You know Orange Grove — do you?'

Who doesn't know it. Of course he knew the place but why she chose to wait for the bus in the opposite direction sent the grains of doubt fermenting again in his head. For the first time he hesitated.

'When did you come here mum?'

'Come — when! I'm here a month. Waiting for that bus. Why it takes so long I don't know. It used not to take so much time.' Then she launched into a long complaint and at one point Motsumi thought she had forgotten about his presence.

'If they change why are we not told? Sies, they think only of themselves. We think of them, but they! Augh!'

The more she kept at it the more intrigued Motsumi became.

'You mean you've been waiting that long?'

'Every day of the month. I will be late for my wedding. See, today is my wedding. My husband is waiting for me. I'm makoti, the bride.'

Slowly, meaning began to dawn on Motsumi and he sought to escape before a passersby mistook his stop there. But she would not let him go.

'Ke makoti nna. I'm meeting my husband-to-be today and together we'll build our home. You know Lesley Motors don't you?'

He didn't know it. but he dared not contradict her. So he found himself nodding in agreement in addition to saying: 'Yes. yes.' hard-pressed to move.

'Yes, that one, it belongs to us! The very one by the road. It came from our family, my father and my grandfather. They gave us. It is our wealth.'

'Yes, yes,' said Motsumi unconvinced.

'It's our money I tell you. Our money. Our gran owned it, our father owned it and our mother too!'

He was getting bewildered by her claims and to cover his dawning awareness he echoed her.

'Really?'

'Yes, I tell you. It was our treasure.'

'Okay mum,' he said, already pacing away.

That shook her out of her reverie like one just waking. And she was no less bewildered.

'You going?'

'Yes.'

'Tell them to send a car to fetch me. I'll be here waiting. I'm ready. Tell them.'

'I will. I will,' he said, eager in his flight.

'Another thing!' she called out, stalling Motsumi in his tracks.

'Tell them there....'

'Them! Where now?'

'There, behind you.'

'Oh.' She meant the adjacent cafe.

'Tell them to send remains.'

'Remains?'

'Yes. Food they leave after eating.'

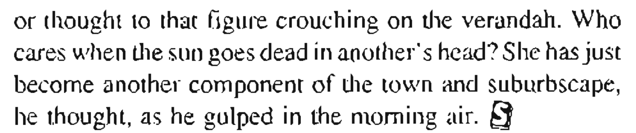
'Okay.'

'And milk.' she called after him. 'I'll pay. I have money,' she declared, opening her palm triumphantly to reveal a bundle of soiled and crumpled papers picked off the wind.

'Okay, okay,' Motsumi said, fleeing. He dared not tarry longer. The flight was more in him, it pursued him with vengeance. He carried it within him in his flight. He wished he could be the wind and lose himself faster than the breath could carry. Yet the more he ran, the more his belly seemed to weigh him down. It appeared to be in conspiracy with the forces that sought to tie him through

guilt to the creature he wished to escape.

Was this another case of troubled marriage or poverty that ended going to the head? Motumi doubted if any of the smartly dressed, sleek-car-drivers spared a second glance or thought to that figure crouching on the verandah. Who cares when the sun goes dead in another's head? She has just become another component of the town and suburbscape, he thought, as he gulped in the morning air.



COURTESY OF BERMAN GALLERY

Lovers • Vincent Baloyi • Woodcut

Annemarié van Niekerk

Two Poems

Life and Death

I hear your limping tread
on the garden path.
The sounds of evening.
the encroaching night
swiftly moving in.

Plants and trees and walls
become bleak hearses for the day.
I hear the screeching sound of steel.
Are you at the gate?

Or could it be the movement
Of shadows in a bleb in the imagination?

It recalls chains
and shivers. Whipbeats of memories
disarrange my thoughts,
and in the sky grey clouds
depress the last traces
of the day's colours.
Fearlessly silent
I simply wait.

Your steps are far off now,
but still I hear the crunching sound
of the brittle dry leaves
trampled in your wake.
The crevices in the cement
enlarge with distortions.
You go into the dusk and disappear
behind the screen of night.
Another departure is announced.

Left behind. I search for
possibilities of movement,
that will rearrange my life.
I find nothing
but the frame of a house,
heaving asthmatically.

Woman

I saw a woman with wounds
who tried to write words with her flesh.

I saw a woman with large breasts and a soft heavy stomach
comforting babies, and men.

I saw a woman with an echoing tongue
cursing history and teaching her children.

I saw a woman with a pale face and bruised legs
a nervous cigarette, twitched between cheekbones.

I saw a woman kissing a bird
and praying for flight

I saw a woman sitting in another's corner
concealed lips, listening to others.

I saw a woman bent over her washing
balancing a child on the back.

I saw a woman holding out
her hands to a priest,

I saw a blood-beaked woman, like a vulture
tearing the flesh from a dying animal.

I saw a woman quietly making love
to the heavy limbs of a man.

I saw a woman holding her breath
in anticipation of the sorrows she has sown.

I saw a woman in labour
with more children and more duties.

I saw a woman scantily clothed
with half hidden bitter eyes and inviting gestures.

I saw a wet-eyed woman receiving a gift
from a child, smiling.

I saw a woman in love,
laughing, in a sun covered flowerbed.

I saw an old woman
born too lonely and too tired.

I saw a woman from a distance
so many times
so many images.
The shadow of a woman, watching:
It was me.

Annemarie van Niekerk

Group Areas

Nineteen sixty nine ôs beweeg na Mannenberg
As kinnes is als normal
Ons is bly ôs is weg van die rotte
Hie is ôs nuwe joint
Dit lyk erger as grotte

Almal is excited
Die goevernment provide hyse met kombyse
Nou kan ôs koekies bak
Hie op die Kaapse vlak
Daar is nog niks trein en skole ve 'n coupla years.

My pa staan four o'clock om eight o'clock
by die job te kom
Weg van die kakkerlakke maa niks binne
osse sakke
Die paaie is baie rou
Want die council is nog biesag om te bou.

Hie is dit elkeen ve syself
Ôs dink nie mee om te share
Because nobody seems to care
Dit was die begin van die groot sin.

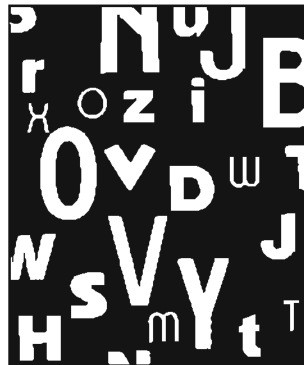
Nou al die jare se gesikkel
Die townships begin te wikkel
ôs is groot en vra mee brood
Niemand kan verstaan

ôs voel different oo mekaa
Die trust is gone
Nou begin die stront
Die mense velang en weet no hulle was gevang.

Ebrahim Alexander

The Poetry of Mafika Gwala

Thengani H. Ngwenya



Gwala came to prominence in 1977 when his first collection *Jol'iinkomo* was published by Ad Donker (Johannesburg). His second collection, *No More Lullabies*, appeared in 1982. Gwala belongs to the group of black poets of the seventies who have earned themselves the name Soweto Poets. In identifying Gwala with the spirit of Soweto, we can quote Michael Chapman's description in 1982 of the black poets of the 1970s:

> To be a Soweto Poet, whether one lives in Soweto or in any of the large townships, is to be involved firsthand in a people's struggle. And Soweto itself stands as the metaphor of this new post-Sharpeville mood. That Soweto poetry's black assertiveness has jolted and continues to jolt, a complacent South African literary scene is, to say the least, an understatement.[1]

The militant stance adopted by the Soweto Poets, however, is not, as some critics have suggested, entirely new in black writing. Rather, it is presaged in the poetry of Peter Abrahams and H.I.E. Dhlomo, who were both writing in the early 1940s. As evidenced in the following stanza from Abraham's poem 'For Laughter', the desire to become 'the challenger rather than the challenged', was manifest many years before the emergence of Soweto Poetry.[2]

> I have learnt to love
> Burningly
> With fiercest fire
> And I have discarded my humility
> And the 'Will of God'
> And the stories of my wise teacher.
> Arming myself with the
> wretchedness
> In every plain man's life
> And the tomorrows, my soldiers
> In battle on behalf of that freedom
> That will restore the laughter of man![3]

These lines from Abraham's pamphlet-volume *A Blackman Speaks of Freedom!* could have been written by Gwala or Serote. They display almost all the tendencies that have come to be associated with Soweto Poets — self-assertion, challenge, militancy, anger and the eschewal of appeals, supplications and compromise. By writing in such a direct language Abrahams was establishing an approach to black experience which can be seen, in retrospect, to be appropriate to the polarisations of the 1970s. Almost three decades after the publication of Abraham's poem, Gwala was to write 'Getting off the Ride'. In this poem Gwala angrily rejects what he sees as the bogus values that have been imposed on him by white South African culture, as he asserts the value of his blackness:

> They say the Black Ghost is weak
> That it is feeble
> and cannot go the distance.
> ....
> No. I know the Black Ghost
> It has led to many victories
> In the pitch darkness of dispossession;
> I can sit back and watch the screen
> of Black Thoughts
> In which Black success is focused.
>
> (*Jol'iinkomo*, pp.64-65)

That the poetry of Gwala is basically informed by the philosophy of Black Consciousness cannot be overemphasised. Steve Biko, the founder of Black Consciousness in South Africa, defines its philosophy in the following terms:

> Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world in a long time. Its essence is the realisation by the Blackman of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of his skin — and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude.[4]

Biko goes on to say that 'Black Consciousness makes the black man see himself as a being complete in himself'.[5] It is this awareness of independence and completeness that should inspire the black man with a feeling of pride and imbue him with determination to 'oppose all attempts to dwarf the significance of his manhood'.[6]

It is thus in keeping with the philosophy of Black Consciousness to regard writing as a 'cultural weapon', and blackness as a symbolic as well as a literal state of being. Gwala sees the role of his poetry as that of a potent cultural weapon in the struggle for psychological liberation which is commonly held to be an essential precondition for physical liberation. To acquire the requisite positive self-awareness, black people must actively oppose all attempts to undervalue their culture and assert their worth as people:

> Here we rest
> facing the sea
> As children of Blackness;
> Bringing together Black Mother Africa
> onto the shore,
> To find out Blackness
> which has been mysticated
> by drear distortions
> in dull books
> bound in the essence of breaking
> our proud ancestry.
>
> (*Jol'iinkomo*, p.51)

These lines from 'Soul Afternoon' reinforce Chapman's description of the poetry of Black Consciousness as a 'mobilising rhetoric imparting to a black audience as message of consciousness-raising and race pride'[7] as well as reinforcing Gwala's own comment on the resurgence of black writing in the seventies:

> Black writers and artists had decided TO TRACE THEIR LOST STEPS INTO THEIR BLACKNESS so as to plod better armed with ideas into the future. This tracing of steps unavoidably meant change in cultural beliefs and political perspectives. The change was being imposed by the situation prevailing in the country. It had come down on us, more markedly this time, that only the black man can liberate himself, psychologically and physically.[8]

In spite of the emphasis in Gwala's poetry on Black Consciousness ideas, the range and complexity of his work defies neat categorisation. Gwala does not conceive of the South African society as composed of monolithic racial groupings, but also explores class divisions in the black community. He is unsparing in his condemnation of the black middle class that aspires to the material values of white society:

> To say bullshit! to you all
> with the gusto of Mongane
> is not meated bone for y'all.
> Maybe this jive is not for bluessing;
> But then who's to lament?
> You all know it,
> you
> blacks with so called class
> you
> You non-whites, you.
>
> (*Jol'iinkomo*, p.33)

Black people who do not identify themselves with the majority of working class blacks are derogatively referred to as 'non-whites'. In applying white society's

words of negative presence and value to blacks, Gwala criticises the pretensions to 'whiteness' of those black people who have been brainwashed by the trappings of commercial capitalism.

Gwala thus sees racial exploitation as inextricably linked to its economic counterpart, and he is sceptical of technological advances which result in concomitant degeneration:

> Man has been to the moon
> spreading umbilical concepts
> of electronics and space radiation
> fast breeding robot me;
> Computers have given man
> a faded character
> — all part of cancer identity;
> In ugly mirth we rejoice
> Over every technological success
> and call it progress
> Thus welcoming
> the Age of the Plastic Man.
>
> (*No More Lullabies*, p.78)

In contrast to plastic technology we have the inspirational life of traditional Africa. Addressing the symbolic figure of Mother Africa Gwala says:

> Your beauty is nourished by the salts of the earth
> In a world bedized by plastic parks
> Crowded by plastic festivals
> Cheered by plastic wonderlands.
>
> (*No More Lullabies*, p.15)

The imported culture of the colonisers is depicted as lacking authenticity; it is sham and bogus. Gwala goes on, in 'Word to a Mother', to enumerate some of the social evils that he sees as the inevitable consequences of 'plastic' culture:

> How can I say I'm one of your sons?
> Your sons who sink themselves
> into the comforts of lounge furniture
> in posh shebeens
> — and drown
> Your sons smiting themselves with dagga
> behind toilets in Warwick Avenue.
>
> (*No More Lullabies*, p.15)

Gwala's evocation of the myth of Mother Africa is never unduly nostalgic, as is usually the case with African poetry that advocates a 'return to the glorious past'. Instead, he uses the ethical attributes associated with Mother Africa to expose the moral perversion that he sees as the inherent quality of Western culture:

> Mother,
> the feed-in of the blues has saved us:
> Your Afrika blues blows truth
> Your blues are not addicted
> to lies and prejudice
> Mother,
> they lied to me about Jesus
> about brotherly love and salvation
> They lied to me about the biblical piece.
>
> (*No More Lullabies*, p.14)

Here, Gwala stops short of advocating a return to any 'glorious' past; he is sufficiently realistic to be aware of the futility and inappropriateness of such a gesture. Rather he is a twentieth-century poet who articulates the experiences of contemporary black South Africans, and he invokes the virtues of traditional African society — its communalism and sharing — as a symbolic ideal which can be of assistance in the task of consciousness-raising.

Unlike the poets of Negritude, Gwala does not simply romanticise traditional beliefs and customs, but points to the indomitable qualities of the African people, particularly their ability to adapt to difficult conditions of living. In 'There is ...' the black man's will to survive despite the odds, is described in images that associate it with nature's powerful forces which can neither be completely tamed nor destroyed by human beings:

Undeniably there is.
There is a truth
with rings wider than a poet's eye
There is a battling nature
Now threatened by pollution
and sprawling cities
There is, continually
nature's freedom
despite the moon landings
despite the heart transplants
There is, with all the odds against
a will to watch a child grow
Even if it is in a littered street
Or in a shack where rain pours
as water through a sieve.

(*No More Lullabies*, p.1)

'The Children of Nonti' also explores relationships of the past to the present. The African community, which was once peaceful and highly cohesive, is portrayed as being devastated by the values of a Europeanised culture. However, Gwala does not focus so much on the matter of cultural disintegration as on the capacity of the children of Nonti to weld the sustaining examples of the past on to intractable present-day circumstances:

Nonti Nzimande died long, long ago
Yet his children still live.
Generation after generation, they live on;
....
Sometimes a son rises above the others
of the children of Nonti. He explains the
workings
and the trappings of white thinking.
The elders debate;
And add to their abounding knowledge
of black experience.
The son is still one of the black children of
Nonti
For there is oneness in the children of Nonti.

(*Jol'iinkomo*, pp.46-7)

In spite of almost insurmountable odds, the children of Nonti (black people) have succeeded in safeguarding those virtues which are peculiarly African, notably the attribute of African humanism such as sincerity, honesty, sympathy and communalism:

There are no sixes and nines be one
with the children of Nonti. Truth is truth
and lies are lies amongst the children of Nonti.
For when summer takes its place after the
winter
The children of Nonti rejoice
and call it proof of Truth
Truth reigns amongst the children of Nonti.

(*Jol'iinkomo*, p.47)

In place of a 'plastic culture' we have an idea; which is worth trying to sustain: *ubuntu*, or the truth of one's humanity.

Gwala may be a militant poet, but he is never bitter. Nor is he ever pessimistic about the future of South Africa. In the poems where he comments on the socio-political situation, he usually paints a graphic picture of suffering. Nevertheless, there are always undertones of optimism and hope, which remind us of our humanity. As he says in 'There is....':

There is laughter
brimful with turbulence of man
There is hope fanned by endless zeal
decisive against the spectre of Sharpeville
hardened by the tears of Soweto.

(*No More Lullabies*, p.1)

His optimism derives from his firm belief in the ultimate invincibility of black people. Suffering has not engendered apathy and resignation, but has fostered determination to fight 'with the tightened grip of the cornered pard'. (*Jol'iinkomo*, p.48)

When Gwala turns to the Black Consciousness ideal of a future Azania, we might encounter a utopian temptation:

Mother,
this Azania, your Azania
will one day be a liberated Azania
will one day be the people's Azania;
There'll be enough to share
There'll be plenty to build on;
We shall till and mine the land
(Not feed on fat profits)
We shall share of efforts
We shall honour the machines
We shall honour the rain
To retrieve lost dreams.

(*No More Lullabies*, pp.15-18)

Nevertheless, as in his images of traditional African examples, the idealising thrust is always checked and returned to a consideration of the difficulties of living in the here and now of history. As he rather diffidently asks in the last four lines of 'Words to a Mother':

Mother,
am I going too far?
am I pushing too fast?
Mother,
do you hear me?

(*No More Lullabies*, p.16)

It is because of its realism that Gwala's poetry, which takes its impetus from the climate of Soweto in the seventies, has not become irrelevant to the socio-political situation in the 1990s. The popularity of Black Consciousness as a political ideology may have diminished, but Gwala's interpretation of social reality in which race and class factors were always present, has retained both its literary and political significance. Poems like 'Black Status Seekers', 'Gumba, Gumba', 'Election Pincer', and 'My House is Bugged' are still as interesting and socially pertinent as they were two decades ago.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Gwala's poetry is its almost quixotic use of language. Gwala succeeds admirably in modifying the English language in order to make it express his views in a memorable way. There are times when he creates his own idiom: but his meaning is always clear and immediately communicable to a wide readership.

The following stanza from 'Mother Courage on the Train Carriage' illustrates something of Gwala's linguistic inventiveness:

Bi-bosomed
Pinafore-cushioned
On the hardbenched Third Class
Poloneck-jerseyed
Pushing i-Juba cartons
on the 1009
— the half past five Cato Ridge to Durban
Mother Courage rides on
with defiant grit
Towards her sorghum beer customers.

(*No More Lullabies*, p.22)

The adjectives give vivid localised life to the Brechtian figure of Mother Courage, as a representative of black struggle and survival.

Because Gwala has perhaps always seen himself as a cultural worker rather than a poet in any conventional literary sense, he utilises a high degree of everyday common language in his poetry. However, it would be an injustice to describe his poetry as mere social commentary.

Besides his vibrant use of language registers, Gwala relies on oral devices of repetition and parallelism in order to enhance the force of his poetry, so that 'technique' serves the functional purpose of reinforcing the urgency of his 'social' message. His use of repetition in order to emphasise a particular point which he wants to impress on his audience, is perhaps best exemplified in 'Soul Afternoon':

We count the virtues wherein;
Blackness cuts no tongues
Blackness spills no foreign blood
— no blood for gold
— blood for paper money

Blackness mixes no tequila
for foreign investors
Blackness pegs no claim
for expropriation of property
— no claim for people's property
Blackness black talents
Blackness echoes the real Blues.

(*Jol'iinkomo*, pp.51-52)

Apart from being a description of skin pigmentation, the term Blackness is also here an embodiment of the concept of African humanism, as its constant repetition results in mental reverberations of significance. The recurrence of the word 'struggle', in 'Gumba, Gumba, Gumba' and the word mother in 'Words to a Mother' serve a similar purpose — that of dramatising and focusing the various socio-political contexts in which any word may be used. There are instances, however, when Gwala's repetition of a particular word in any one poem fails to yield resonance, as in 'Grey Street':

Grey Street, your coughs spells TB.
the same as Tea Bee
are your hums as good as the bees?
Grey Street, samoosas no different
in Ghandinagar
Grey Street, some of your sons
scratch their balls in public
Grey Street, your hell drivers
aren't paid to be watched
rudeness is the language of your
corners
Grey Street,....

(*Jol'iinkomo*, p.57)

'Grey Street' as used in this poem, is a symbolic name which the poet feels justified in associating with the suffering and humiliating experiences that urban black people have had to endure. But its constant repetition makes it monotonous to the point of being meaningless.

It is chiefly because of his perceived role as a 'people's poet' and 'cultural worker' that Gwala prefers direct and unadorned language to the highly metaphorical and nuanced diction often associated with the 'high art' of poetry. When it suits him, however, Gwala can write intensely lyrical verse, as in 'We Lie Under Tall Gum Trees':

We lie under tall gum-trees
hidden from the moonlight,
the stars and the silvery summer clouds.
In the thick shadows of tall gum-trees.
Mosquitoes hover round
and above us.
Swarming from the black swamps
of a pulp factory nearby
— like jetbombers blackening the Vietnam skies.
And as we spiralled towards awareness
They bit us.
First you.
Then me.
Now, no more a virgin
You have tasted
the painful joy of love.

(*Jol'iinkomo*, p.35)

Here, the poet gives a detailed account of an intimate occasion involving his lover and himself. The situation is described in terms to suggest the broader milieu of the two lovers. Like any human relationship it has negative and painful aspects; but there is a sense of foreboding suggested by the sombre 'historical' background. There is an implied threat to the relationship of the two lovers in a world of swampy 'pulp factories' and 'Vietnam' war.

Gwala's poetry, therefore, incorporates lyricism and didacticism, colloquial language and imagist intensifications. While serving the important social function of consciousness-raising, his poetry is also artistically interesting in terms of its verbal resources and stylistic range. In 'We Move On', for instance, Gwala uses powerful images and highly metaphorical language to describe the black man's determination to resist racist oppression and exploitation:

Black as frostbitten leaves
we shaft cold fear...
into the hearts of the sunbaked
we puff dry powder...
into the faces of the orangefed
Black as the shiny spine
of a powder-keg. .
we fuse black truth
into the tunnels of the night
We are the Blackmasked ones
We are the Warrior profiles
We are the Black passions.

(*Jol'iinkomo*, p.27)

Yet, in the closing lines, Gwala makes no attempt to avoid the directness of statements, as he seeks his desired effects on his audience by means of intelligibility and simplicity. As a poet who is also a social critic, he must not only be accessible to 'his people', but must also address their immediate social environment. In 'Let's Take Heed' Gwala assumes the role of a community counsellor:

Take heed, father
in your wobbles through the night
so piss drunk
you don't know your name
Take heed, son
the bag you just snatched
from the black mama
down in Cross Street
is all she had in this world
all she had to feed your own
black brothers & sisters
who narrowly missed
abortion, the seweragepipe
& the pill.

(*No More Lullabies*, p.51)

Finally, the character of Gwala's language is the product of a multiplicity of socio-political factors, and the tasks of his poetry are always closely related to contexts of black experience.

It is hardly surprising that critical assessments of black literature tend to involve arguments about preferred social values and about literature qua literature. Douglas Livingstone's observations on the criteria for evaluating black poetry raised some controversial issues which cannot be resolved by any appeal to established literary values:

> Poetry in English, in Africa, must be judged fairly, I think, by internationally established yardsticks. If the poetry is powerful enough and causes the same yardsticks to change — so much the better! But we have some distance still to go in this direction. Perhaps the toughest definition of a poet is: a man who has been dead for 100 years, and one of his works is still read.[9]

Black poetry's preoccupation with immediate and historically specific socio-political issues, however, make it increasingly difficult to judge it 'by internationally established yardsticks'. The new black poets in particular seek neither international recognition nor immortality. Rather, they perceive their role as that of the spokespersons of their community. It is therefore important to acknowledge the highly contextualised character of black poetry, and to judge it on its own terms. As Gwala, in writing about the work of Black Consciousness poets, has observed:

> They did not start from the imagined - the abstract. They began with the concrete, with what they had seen of the post-Sharpeville period until the 1976 upheavals. They produced not some idealism of a mythified literary tradition, but a stretching of the English language so that it would accommodate their African background and ghetto ordeals.[3]

Another reason why it is neither desirable nor practicable to judge black poetry by internationally established yardsticks is that behind these ostensibly impartial yardsticks lurk unexamined assumptions and preferences about the value and function of poetry as a highly crafted.

often ironic, semi-autonomous utterance. Black Consciousness poets, on the other hand, have been candid enough to express what they hope to achieve through their poetry: 'to impart to a communal black audience, often in a context of a performance, a message of consciousness-raising and race-pride'.[11]

We can thus recognise Vanessa Read's comments on the lack of the 'poetic seriousness' in black poetry as a representative of the thinking of critics who subscribe to the view that literature is about 'eternal verities':

> We must look beyond the blood, sweat and tears of our poetic realities. They lie in the core of our humanity. That, at least, we all have in common. A woman crying at a broken wall, a child with its leg torn off by a mine, a man starving and unemployed are images found all over the world. Yet the cataloguing of suffering does not automatically make it poetry.[12]

Matthew Arnold's influence notwithstanding, poetic seriousness will always remain relative to particular social conditions and opportunities. Nevertheless, Read is right in saying that 'the cataloguing of suffering does not automatically make poetry'. As I have been arguing, it is the exploration of the 'blood, sweat and tears', as in Gwala's response, that makes good poetry. The question of 'literariness' is not unimportant, but should be seen in relation to the utilitarian base concerning the way in which language and rhythms are used to achieve particular social effects. (These do not necessarily exclude aesthetic functions.) Gwala's own conception of the role of the English language is particularly illuminating:

> The English language itself thrives on the adoption of foreign words and coinages. Besides, colonisation and the imposed separation of races has taken care of what happens here. In our ghetto language there can be no fixity. The words we use belong to certain periods of our history. They can assume new meanings, they step aside.[13]

The poetry of Gwala and his contemporaries should be seen, therefore, as both a literary and social phenomenon, which has to be evaluated according to the socio-political exigencies of our time and place.

Stephen Watson made the following generalisations about what he sees as the shortcomings of 'Black Poetry':

> With its obsession with the category of colour rather than class, its failure to demystify the former and emphasise the latter; with its tendency towards introspection and self-realisation as much as to the creation of a certain type of political consciousness; and with the ambiguities it has inherited because of the largely petit-bourgeois status of most of the poets who have created it — in all these respects it, too, warrants the charge of being apolitical.[14]

As I have tried to demonstrate, however, not all Black Consciousness poets are obsessed with the category of colour. Gwala is acutely aware of the class struggle, which is an intrinsic component of racial capitalism, while he has succeeded in demystifying the concept of the blackness and relating it to a politicised reality.

In his essay, provocatively entitled 'Shock of the Old! What's become of Black Poetry?' Watson continues to condemn 'Black Poetry' for its supposed 'intellectual poverty':

> Behind the slight and mostly withered flowerings of this poetry can be discerned the deprivations of Bantu Education, the destruction of continuities through the bannings of writers and their works, every conceivable cultural dislocation, appalling living conditions, and a desperation and despair that is inimical to the production of a literature as in any form of anguish grown too extreme, too persistent.[15]

The point of the argument seems to be that black poets of the seventies had not acquired the requisite linguistic skills which would have allowed them to use language in a particular way. They had not mastered the conventions, styles and idioms that would have enhanced the 'poetic quality' of their utterances. Watson, it would appear, has an ideal of what good poetry should be and expects

'Black Poetry' to conform to that ideal. Watson would probably like to see 'Black Poetry' developing along the lines of the contemporary Eastern European tradition which, in the work of Milosz and Herbert, has reasserted private conscience against socialist conformity. But one should not expect a similar reaction from black South African poets, who need to encourage group solidarity in order to oppose an oppressive white racial capitalist hegemony. Watson's comments which follow, at least admit that black poetry might be regarded as the conditions of particular processes. Yet his comments are motivated by an aggressive and mean spirit:

> One becomes convinced that however useful it might be to look at the poetry in terms of the Black Consciousness ideology that largely informs it, a far more illuminating approach would be to examine it in terms of the hugely confused ways in which traditions are received and not received, assimilated and not assimilated in this country. One comes straight to the largely colonial character of the culture.[16]

Indeed, it is a sad historical fact that black writers in South Africa, and elsewhere in Africa, have been buffeted by alien traditions, and have had to adapt to foreign languages, and to internalise European value systems in seeking to speak with a voice that was unmistakably their own. But rather than reduce any 'hybrid' influences to the epithet 'colonial' (as Watson does), we should be prepared to see in black South African poetry a vital miscellany of African demands and English expressiveness. Gwala is not vitiated by subscribing to the inspirations of Afro-American Jazz, for example, nor by utilising the projective verse technique of American writers like Allen Ginsberg (there are marked stylistic similarities between 'Getting of the Ride' and 'Howl!').

Gwala's two volumes of poetry to date, *Jol'iinkomo* (1977) and *No More Lullabies* (1982), have much in common, and it is sometimes difficult to trace shifts of development. The main distinguishing feature is that *No More Lullabies* reflects the poet's experiences in an urban environment while *Jol'iinkomo* is, in the words of Gwala himself, 'an attempt to handle the rural context'.[17]

In both volumes the poetry of Gwala can be judged fairly and realistically only against Black Consciousness philosophy and the socio-political conditions which it seeks to address. As Gwala justifies both his art and his socio-political preoccupation in 'Defence of Poetry':

> As long as
> this land, my country
> is unpoetic in its doings
> it'll be poetic to disagree.
>
> (*No More Lullabies*, p.10)

Notes

1. Michael Chapman, *Soweto Poetry*, p.3.
2. Nadine Gordimer, *The Black Interpreters*, p.55
3. Michael Chapman and Achmat Dangor, eds., *Voices from Within, Black Poetry from Southern Africa*, p.51.
4. 'Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity', *Frank Talk*, Volume 2 (Sept 1987), p.44.
5. Ibid., p.44.
6. Ibid., p.44.
7. Soweto Poetry, p 3.
8. 'Writing as a Cultural Weapon,' in *Momentum*, MJ Daymond, J U Jacobs and Margaret Lenta, eds., p.58.
9. 'The Poetry of Mtshali, Serote, Sepamla and others in English: notes towards a Critical Evaluation', in *Soweto Poetry*, Michael Chapman, ed., p 157.
10. 'Writing as a Cultural Weapon', in *Momentum*, p.48.
11. Michael Chapman, *Soweto Poetry*, p.12
12. 'Poetic Seriousness', *Upstream*, Volume 5, Number 4 (1988), p 30
13. 'Writing as Cultural Weapon', in *Momentum*, p48.
14. Stephen Watson, 'Poetry and History, Contradictions in Black Consciousness Poetry'. Paper delivered at the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown (1985), p.13.
15. Stephen Watson, 'Shock of the Old : What's Become of Black Poetry?', Upstream, Volume 5, Number 2 (1987), p.23.
16. Ibid., p23.
17. Mafika Gwala interviewed by Thengani H Ngwenya see *Staffrider*, Volume 8, Number 1 (1989), pp.69-74

Staffrider Vol. 10 No. 2 1992

Poetry

Lisa Combrinck

Three Poems

Sculpted love

For Camille Claudel

Blot out the starlight.
Extinguish the fires.
Draw the curtains.
Bolt the door.

Break open the baked mould.
Cut loose our sculpted selves,
cast in the same clay,
grafted into one.

Shapes of momentary embrace
Soulful limbs stretching towards the sun

living on the edge of forever

engrossed in our craft
engulfed by love.

When at Last We Love

when at last we love
all existing texts will fall away

like blank sheets we'll meet

create a new world
invent the first day

like children we'll scrawl
give birth to wondrous words

paint rainstorms and rainbows

scratch and etch our skin dreams

rise and fall time and again

pattern our new page of life.

A lullabye

I make you a hut
made from my hair

when you are tired
you discover the doorway to my heart
and enter the hut.

rest your weary head
on the pillows of my breasts

and you sleep
lulled by the rhythm of my heartbeat

my body
is your abundant bed

and you sleep
and you dream

floating on the surface
of my skin

warmed by the hearth
of our desire

and you will sleep
secure in this dream

initiated into the arcane language
of love

the ancient music
of our movement

that now spreads its song
to outer-space
and the far-flung stars.

The Rod

Richard J. Mann

It was that magic hour on a Friday night when the world is a good place to be in. Sanjay looked around the crowded Long Bar, sipping his drink.

The two dart boards were busy. Shouts went up from time to time. A group crowded around the pool table, giving the earnest players more advice than they would ever use. The television set was ignored. Animated conversations all round made it superfluous.

Sanjay was kept busy returning greetings as fellow mill workers and visitors kept trickling in.

'Your glass is half full, Mr Pillay, you're slipping,' Ravi joked.

'No, it's half empty,' Sanjay quipped, finishing his drink.

Ravi looked around for the barman. Siva was serving a customer at the hatch connecting bar and lounge. Sanjay recognised the man, a labourer at the mill. The man raised a friendly greeting. Sanjay returned the greeting.

Prem, a fitter at the mill also went by just then and greeted. Sanjay, a conscientious Personnel Officer, was well known and generally well liked. He had the rare gift of being able to get on with all sorts of people.

Their drinks came at the same time as Praveen walked in. Sanjay motioned him to come over and ordered a rum and coke. Praveen greeted them with the exuberance that he bestowed on everything he did.

'Aren't you going fishing tonight?' Ravi asked Praveen.

'After two of these to warm me,' Praveen laughed, lifting his glass.

His passion for fishing was well known in the village. They looked out to where the sea rolled somewhere beyond the blur of trees.

'I must go down to the sea again,' Praveen intoned and he glanced at Sanjay, smiling.

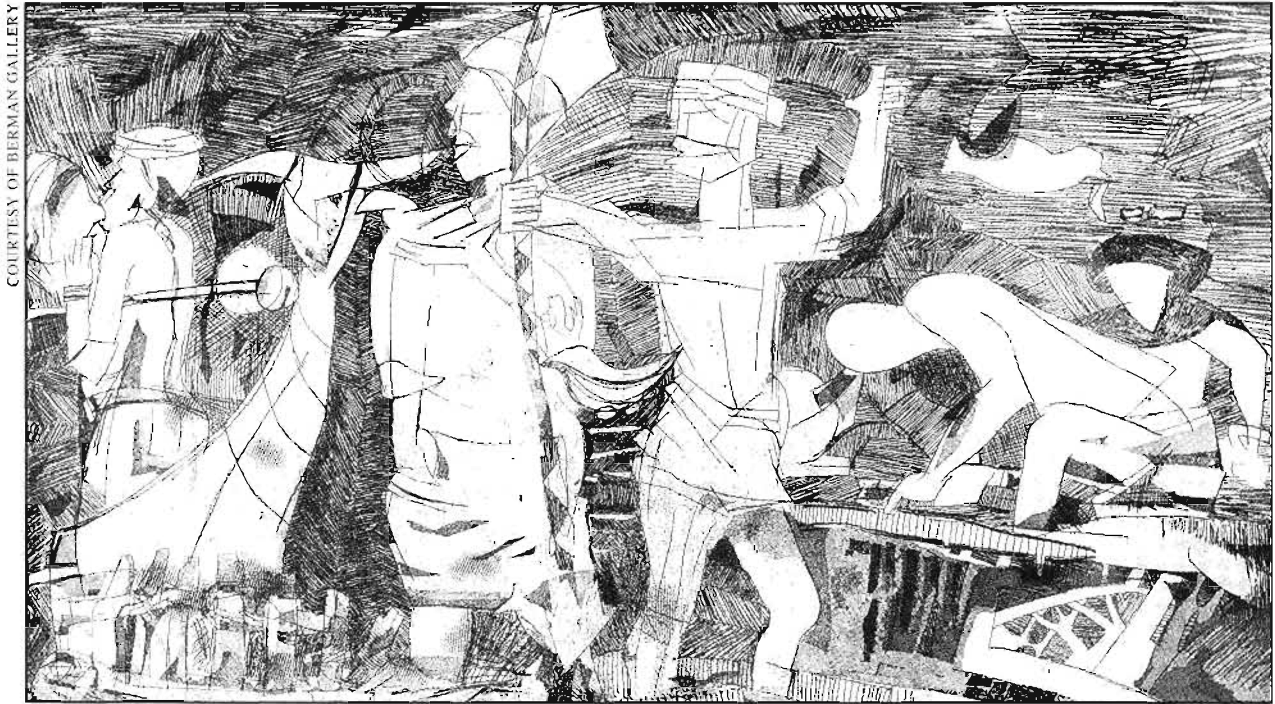
'To the lonely sea and the sky,' Sanjay took up the challenge.

They went on for as many lines as they could manage, then stopped, laughing. Ravi rolled his eyes in mock amazement. Praveen slapped him on the back and laughed. It was a game Praveen and Sanjay had played ever since they discovered their mutual love for poetry. Sanjay thought it highly unusual that a lab chemist should have an interest in poetry but he enjoyed Praveen's company tremendously. They ordered more drinks and they talked about fishing.

Praveen finished his drink and left. They watched him weaving his way through the packed bar, then went back to their desultory conversation.

Ravi looked out at the blackness, beyond which the restless sighing of the surf came through faintly from time to time.

COURTESY OF BERMAN GALLERY



On the Day of the Festival (After Tose) • **Nhlanla Xaba • Etching**

'This is the life,' he said, lifting his glass. Sanjay lifted his own glass and was about to reply when suddenly Praveen came rushing back in.

'My rod,' he blurted out, as if in shock. 'It's gone!'

The word spread round the bar rapidly and the noise subsided as all eyes turned on Praveen. Everyone who knew him, knew how great the loss was. Questions and comments were thrown around. The rod had been in Praveen's car, outside the bar, as always. There had never been a great need to lock things up in the small, closed mill community.

'It must have been that *pekkie ou* that was there just now,' a loud voice said.

'Ja, ja,' there were murmurs of assent.

Ravi spoke evenly, but there was an edge of anger in his voice: 'Do only black people steal?'

'Who else could have done it? He was the only stranger here.' Prem the fitter was quick to jump in.

'Nonsense!' Ravi retorted.

'Dozens of people pass through here. It could just as easily have been any Indian guy. The trouble with you people is that every black man you see is a thief or a criminal.'

There were angry murmurs.

'That's just like you, Ravi,' Prem said. 'You have to make a political issue of it.'

There were murmurs of assent.

'The issue,' Ravi said, 'is fairness and unfairness. You don't seem to know the difference.'

Prem turned to Sanjay, as if appealing to someone more reasonable.

'Sanjay, you know nobody here would do a thing like that. It can only be that *pek*...that black ou.'

Here we are again, Sanjay thought, hating to be

caught up in the middle. He wished that he could be as forthright as Ravi but he knew that he could never be. He had always felt so awkward about holding different views from just about everybody in the village. He felt almost ashamed, almost like a freak — just the way he felt at school about being good at languages and poetry.

'I think we'd better contact security,' Sanjay suggested, deftly avoiding the issue, as he had learned to do so often and so well.

There was a chorus of agreement. Prem and three of his friends left for the Security Office.

'I suppose it's too late now, anyway.' Praveen said disconsolately.

'Don't give up yet,' Sanjay said.

'It's a small place. Someone must have seen something.'

Praveen sighed. Sanjay ordered drinks. They sipped in silence and waited.

Excited voices in the passage caught everyone's attention. Prem and his friends walked in. They were flushed and dishevelled, breathing hard and talking excitedly.

'What happened?' Ravi asked.

'We got that *pekkie ou*,' one of the group blurted out. 'We smashed him up.'

'Ja, we caught him near the...,' another chipped in.

'You did what?' Ravi was stunned.

The reply was cut short by another commotion. Jaya from the company garage had walked in. He was grinning rather foolishly but all eyes were focused on the rod in his hands.

'I caught you, hey, Praveen,' he called out. 'I wanted to teach you a lesson not to leave your rod in your car.'

He laughed nervously at the tense atmosphere that seemed to say that something was badly wrong.

Ravi swung round on Prem.

'You bunch of gutless bastards,' he spat out. 'You brainless, spineless bastards!'

Stung, Prem took a step forward.

'Listen here, Ravi,' he stabbed a finger in Ravi's face. 'Don't think....'

'I'll think what I like and say what I like,' Ravi said coldly. 'What are you going to do about it?'

'Fuck you Ravi,' Prem said.

Ravi wrestled the rod from Jaya. It swung a vicious arc. Prem staggered back. There was a loud crack as the second blow connected his temple. Pieces of the rod lay on the floor. Ravi raised the rod again and again. Prem cowered against the bar, shielding his face. At last, Prem flung the broken rod from him.

'Now you know,' he said tonelessly into the silence. 'Now you know how it feels.' He walked out without a backward glance.

The silence was unbroken. No one had stirred. Prem moaned. Sanjay looked at his drink, now flat and lukewarm. All he was aware of was the rod and the gigantic shadow on the wall as it rose and fell, rose and fell. S

B.H.

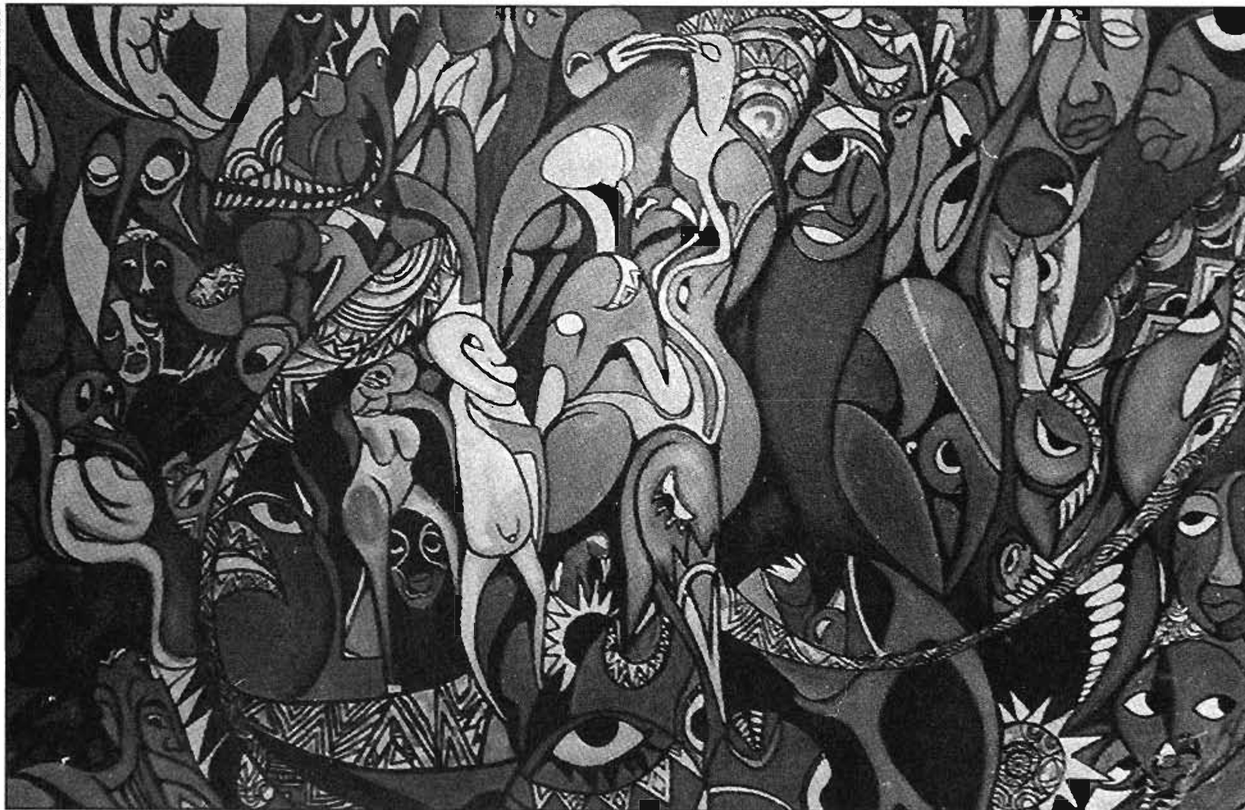
I thought I saw Billie Holliday
in a nightclub off the main street
singing songs with all her heart.

Singing like a savage just set free
Singing like a siren in a purple sea
Singing like a nightingale in the park

I thought I saw Billie Holliday
shooting it up in a hotel room.
I thought I heard into her heart.

Eli Coelho

COURTESY OF NEWTOWN GALLERIES



Untitled 2 • Sylvester Khosa • Oil pastel on board

Dugmore Boetie and South African Literature

Mark Beittel

Dugmore Boetie's *Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost* opens with the following scene:

> 'Say mother! Go on, say mother, you son of a bitch,' Wham! Wham! went the leather strap.
>
> 'Say mother, damn you! Louder, you little bastard, louder!' she shrieked.
>
> The strap went wild all over my face, head, and neck. It was as if she was suffering more than me.
>
> My mouth opened, and instead of the word 'mother' a clot of blood rolled out. It was followed by a distinct 'futsek'! She shrieked and swung a frying pan, cracking four of my ribs. I pushed and her skinny body fell to the greedy flames of a healthy fire-galley.
>
> Maybe I had broken her back, or maybe she was just too exhausted to lift herself. Anyway, my mother just fried and fried and fried....[1]

The final words of this passage provide a jolting twist to an otherwise gruesome description of violence: the person who is calling the narrator a 'little bastard' and a 'son of a bitch' is none other than his own mother. This episode again surprises us when we read in the Epilogue by Barney Simon a description of how Simon met Boetie's mother as an old woman, tired and exasperated by nursing the cantankerous, middle-aged Boetie as he lay dying of cancer. The paradoxical juxtaposition of the opening scene and the Epilogue is emblematic of the whole book, which is structured upon the figure of irony.

Dugmore Boetie died in 1966; his 'true, hot book' — as he himself described it — was first published in London in 1969 and then in New York in 1970.[2] *Familiarity* has been re-issued in both Britain (1984) and the United States (1989), but there has never been a South African edition.[3] The book, however, has been intermittently available in South Africa: when it first came out it was reviewed in the *Sunday Tribune*, and in 1986 I first stumbled upon it as an expensive import in a bookshop in Hillbrow.[4] *Familiarity* is apparently the sum total of Boetie's literary output, although parts of it originally appeared in *The Classic* and in *London Magazine*.[5]

Given the intense level of critical interest in black literature during the past decade, Boetie has been strangely neglected. He has never been anthologized, though even his first published piece, 'The Last Leg', compares favourably to many of the stories that appeared in *Drum* magazine in the 1950s. Moreover, Boetie was a working writer during the mid-1960s, a difficult period when repression had driven most of the black writers of the *Drum* decade into exile, death or silence.[6] *Familiarity* is sometimes mentioned in passing in histories of black South African literature, as an unsuccessful and shallow literary work.[7] For example, in *A Vision of Order* Ursula Barnett concludes that *Familiarity* is interesting because 'it was symptomatic of the black urban viewpoint which was soon to be expressed in other literature' and that it 'points forward to later and more serious works'. (p.129) In one of the few reviews of the book that appeared in an academic journal, David Rabkin predicted that 'critical obduracy...is...likely to label it a freak'. (p.124) To date, R.S. Edgecombe's essay is the only published scholarly article devoted exclusively to Boetie.

This neglect is all the more surprising when one considers that *Familiarity* was positively reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement* and in the *New York Times Book Review*, where Joe Lelyveld described it as a 'flight

of wild comic exaggeration and invention that is not only vibrantly funny but a more honest expression of the despair of black South Africans than any number of moralizing exhortations'. Myrna Blumberg of the *Guardian Weekly* was delighted by the book's 'incomparable spasms of enraged humour', and Barton Midwood of *Esquire* magazine declared '*Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost* belongs in the company of Hasek's *The Good Soldier Schweik*, Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night*. However *Familiarity* is more concise than *Schweik*, wiser and more intense than *Huckleberry Finn*, and more humane than the *Journey*'.

The neglect *Familiarity* has suffered in South Africa is not due to state censorship or banning. Three reasons, I suspect, have concurred to silence Dugmore Boetie: doubts about authorship, discomfort with its form and suspicions about its politics.

Authorship

Ever since the publication of *Familiarity*, there have been questions raised about who actually wrote it. In his review, for example, Lelyveld notes 'a certain ambiguity ...attache(d) to its authorship — for Boetie probably could not, and certainly would not, have produced this book on his own'. In *A Vision of Order*, published thirteen years after Lelyveld's review, Ursula Barnett describes Simon as 'co-author' and asserts that *Familiarity* is 'the combined effort of a black and a white writer, and it is difficult to tell what contribution was made by each'. The only textual evidence Barnett offers to support this claim is that the title 'seems to presuppose a conscious awareness of Boetie's condition over and above the narrative, and this contradicts the direct technique of the author/narrator'. (p.129)

But the title comes directly out of the text, when the protagonist, still a boy, escapes from a reformatory in Cape Town and steals a ride on the refrigerated 'fish-train' back to Johannesburg. Caught by the police, because his hands had frozen onto the wire cage where he was riding, he observes: 'I didn't care what they were going to do with me as long as I was back home. Familiarity is the kingdom of the lost'. (p.16) Perhaps this is not the observation of an eleven-year old boy, but it is entirely credible from a mature story teller and writer like the author Boetie, who often uses aphorisms along the lines of 'the home of the timid is the grave'. (p.17) I have no idea how the title of the book was finally chosen — it was published several years after Boetie's death — but Barnett's sole piece of textual evidence for joint authorship does not convince.

The doubts about the authorship must rather be traced to the actions of Simon and the publishers of the book. The first British edition says on the cover 'Dugmore Boetie with Barney Simon'. The unprepossessing 'with' is commonly used in texts written for celebrities by ghost writers: does this suggest that Simon is the white ghost behind this text? This possibility is reinforced by the jacket notes telling us that Barney Simon 'helped and encouraged Boetie to write this autobiography, and was closely associated with all stages of its development'. However, turning to the title page we read: 'Dugmore Boetie edited by Barney Simon'.

By comparison, the first U.S. edition of the book published several months later includes a Preface by Nadine Gordimer, which begins: 'Although I, a white woman, introduce this book, and Barney Simon, a white man, provides the epilogue, the writer was nobody's tame black crow'. (p.3) Moreover, the Epilogue has a new lead sentence: 'This book was written by Dugmore Boetie and finally edited by me'. (p. 179) Though both Gordimer's Preface and this added sentence were dropped from later versions of the book, the current U.S. edition uses a typographical variant, printing Dugmore Boetie in large letters, and 'edited and with an afterward by Barney Simon' in much smaller ones. What is important is that Simon's description of his relationship to Boetie in all the versions of the Epilogue clears up any uncertainty concerning authorship, making plain that the writing itself is Boetie's, and that Simon served as the patron, editor, and promoter of the book.[8]

Persistent doubts about the authorship of *Familiarity* have certainly had a negative effect on the fortunes of this text. By cavilling about authorship — an activity which the current theoretical debate dismisses altogether — literary critics have obscured the textual significance

of *Familiarity*, and contributed to its exclusion from the canon of South African literature. Of course in South Africa, as anywhere else, the political identity — defined in terms of gender, class, race, nationality, religion — of the author matters in so far as this becomes readable in the text that s/he produces, and it follows that the form of the text expresses its political meaning.

Form

Though I'm not sure who 'meant' the book to be Boetie's autobiography, Simon is certainly correct. But the difficulty of classifying *Familiarity* should not be seen as a problem with the text itself; rather it is intrinsic to the rigidities of traditional genre definitions. Now that literary theory has caught up with this text, we can speak of Boetie's narrative as experimental autobiography or post modern fiction.[9] Rather than fuss over whether this or that episode actually happened or is even plausible, I think we must assume that Boetie, the author, is unknowable, and that the text is at least partly an imaginative work. Boetie's textual insistence that his story is 'real' confirms my view. Early in the book and shortly after the young Boetie has been initiated into a life of crime, he observes: 'I was looking at the cavern of Ali Baba and the forty thieves. Only that was fiction and this was real'. (p.9) And later on, in a metafictional passage, he explains:

> This part which I am about to relate is the only part of my life which I can't seem to believe myself, because history doesn't repeat itself so soon.... But if the truth has to come out, then I have no alternative but to set down on paper all the events that took place, even if there might be a ring of fantasy in them. (pp.47-8)

The voice of *Familiarity* is autobiographical, but the book is written in a picaresque mode. Since its publication, this narrative has been labelled picaresque — the jacket of the first British edition calls Boetie a 'picaresque hero', and Lelyveld describes the book as a 'racy, picaresque novel'. More recently, R.S. Edgecombe has written that 'Dugmore Boetie, despite a limited literary culture that probably excluded acquaintance with the Spanish picaresque, has produced a work that in many ways conforms to this genre'.[10]

It is not difficult to identify picaresque elements in *Familiarity*. Boetie is the perfect picaro: orphaned and denied even an institutional home because of his colour, he is doomed to a life underground. While he lays in a hospital bed recovering from the injuries inflicted by his mother, a social worker defines his condition as an outcast in unequivocal terms: 'he's too young to be sent to a reformatory and too old to be placed in a crèche. Children of the gods above and the gutters below'. (pp.7-8) Boetie literally fits this definition when he runs away from hospital to sink into a life of crime under the influence of his 'gutter father', an accomplished criminal who lives in the sewer system of Sophiatown. But as a picaresque hero, Boetie is also doomed to an eternal journey of encounters; accordingly, he soon breaks off this relationship and leaves 'the tunnel for good to wander again in a world of uncertainty'.[11] The permanent uncertainty of his condition is reflected also in his name, which he explains as follows:

> I got the name through the circus elephant that I once looked after. The elephant's name was Duggie. Every time the circus population called that name, me and the elephant would turn our heads in unison. That's how the name got stuck on me. My second name, which I am using as a surname, was supplied by the Tokai reformatory authorities. They called me Kaffir Boetie. In the Africaans (sic) language it means 'little kaffir brother'. (p.28)

Later, referring to his social identity, he extends the casual origin of his name also to its meaning: 'Boetie means anything; mostly it means nothing'. (p.79)

The uncertainty of the picaro's life entails a continuous fight for existence — a fight which takes Boetie so often to prison that he comments, it is 'as if I had a share in them'. (p.74) He is spared yet another stint of imprisonment when a magistrate sends him off to the army during the Second World War, an adventure that ends

when Boetie loses his leg. He returns to Johannesburg as a crippled black man — an outsider among outsiders — and experiences a dramatic tightening of the pass laws after the electoral victory of the Nationalist Party in 1948.

Since Boetie's passbook is invariably out of order, he is eventually caught and sent to work for three months on a potato farm as his sentence. 'Pass laws are tough,' he observes, 'but pass laws combined with one leg add up to sheer hell,'(p.139) and at the beginning of the last chapter he finds himself 'homeless, passless and legless'. (p.158)

But, as Ulrich Wicks observes, the picaro is 'alternately both victim of (the) world and its exploiter'. (p.54) Boetie particularly delights in taking advantage of the racial pride of whites, which he describes as their 'handicap', not physical but mental:

> The white man of South Africa suffers from a defect which can be easily termed limited intelligence. The cause of this mental handicap can be safely attributed to a frustrated background of poor beginnings. I say this because no man, no matter how dense, will allow himself to be taken in twice by the same trick. They don't learn by mistakes, for the simple reason that they'd rather die than talk about their mistakes. Me, I learn by mistakes because human beings make mistakes, and I'm a human being. Their pride is based on colour, and it's on this pride that we blacks feed ourselves. Call him 'Baas' and he'll break an arm to help you. He takes advantage of his white skin, we take advantage of his crownless kingdom. (pp.55-6)

Boetie then described how one of his accomplices would give an illiterate white truck driver a written address asking him to read it, while the rest of the gang removed the goods from the trailer, unnoticed by the white driver, who was too full of self-importance and patronising good-will to acknowledge his lack of literacy to a black man.

The picaresque mode is well-suited to exploring the subtle effects of prejudice, and not only in seventeenth-century Spain where *conversos* — Jews forcefully converted to Catholicism — were ethnically defined as outsiders and treated with contempt. In this century, the narrator of *Invisible Man*, for example, eats at a white cafe and, after a scene charged by racial tension, pays for his breakfast. 'It was fifteen cents and as I felt for a nickel I took out another dime, thinking, is it an insult when one of us tips one of them?' (p.147) Boetie, too, cleverly dissects an aspect of racism in a story about the first job he had ever found and liked.

One day a white woman in his office offers him her packet of sandwiches, since she is going to eat lunch out. He isn't hungry but decides it would be rude to refuse the woman's offer. Boetie then goes out of the office, stopping on the way to leave the sandwiches on the desk of Mr Groenewald. Later that afternoon, Boetie is called in to see the head of the department, Colonel Pringle:

> What I saw when I entered his office made me uneasy. There, sitting like stone marble, was Mr Groenewald. My eyes travelled from him to the large desk.
>
> Then I saw them. I was reminded of old times in court rooms. The exhibit, I mean the packet of sandwiches. There was black anger on Mr Groenewald's face.
>
> Then someone coughed, or rather cleared his throat. It was the colonel.
>
> 'Duggie.'
>
> 'Yes, sir,' I stammered.
>
> Again he coughed. 'Eh...' he started. 'Well — again he coughed. He gave the impression that he didn't know where to start. 'Well, damn it!' he exploded. 'Why did you give Mr Groenewald a packet of sandwiches?'
>
> 'Did I do wrong?'
>
> 'Well, damn it, no, but ...' he coughed again as if his throat wasn't already cleared. 'You are not supposed to give a white man your food.'
>
> 'But...,' I started. With a wave of his hand he shut me up.
>
> 'You should have taken the sandwiches upstairs to the building boys instead of giving them to Mr Groenewald. You have made him feel small.'

'Doesn't Mr Groenewald eat sandwiches?' I asked innocently. Hell, at war we used to eat out of the same dixie.

'No, I mean, yes, he does eat sandwiches, but not when they come from a....'

'Kaffir!' put in Mr Groenewald.

Indignantly I said, 'The sandwiches did not come from me, they came from Mrs Surge. I didn't feel like eating either, so I passed them to Mr Groenewald. What is wrong in that, sir?'

'Plenty,' growled Mr Groenewald. 'Who the hell do you think you are that you should come to my office and give me sandwiches? Do I look hungry to you?'

'No, I merely looked upon it as a gesture of humanity.'

Soothingly the colonel said, 'You should know, my boy, that it is not correct for a black man to give....'

'Not correct, sir?' I asked aghast.

'All right, damn you, get out of here.'

'God! What a race! Unlike the black man, they are supposed to have had the advantage of a civilised environment, yet their barbarism is as thinly veiled as the prison lash strokes on my buttocks. I should have resigned on the spot, but I determinedly kept on. Then Mr Groenewald took it upon himself to make my life so miserable, that I was forced to resign two weeks after my misplaced kindness. (pp.84-5)

And so the picaro is again ejected into the chaotic and hostile world. At the very end of the narrative, the 'homeless', passless and legless' Boetie escapes the clutches of the pass system by getting a coloured identity card — something which he is only able to do by humiliating another black man in front of the white authorities. Boetie is jubilant about his new identity:

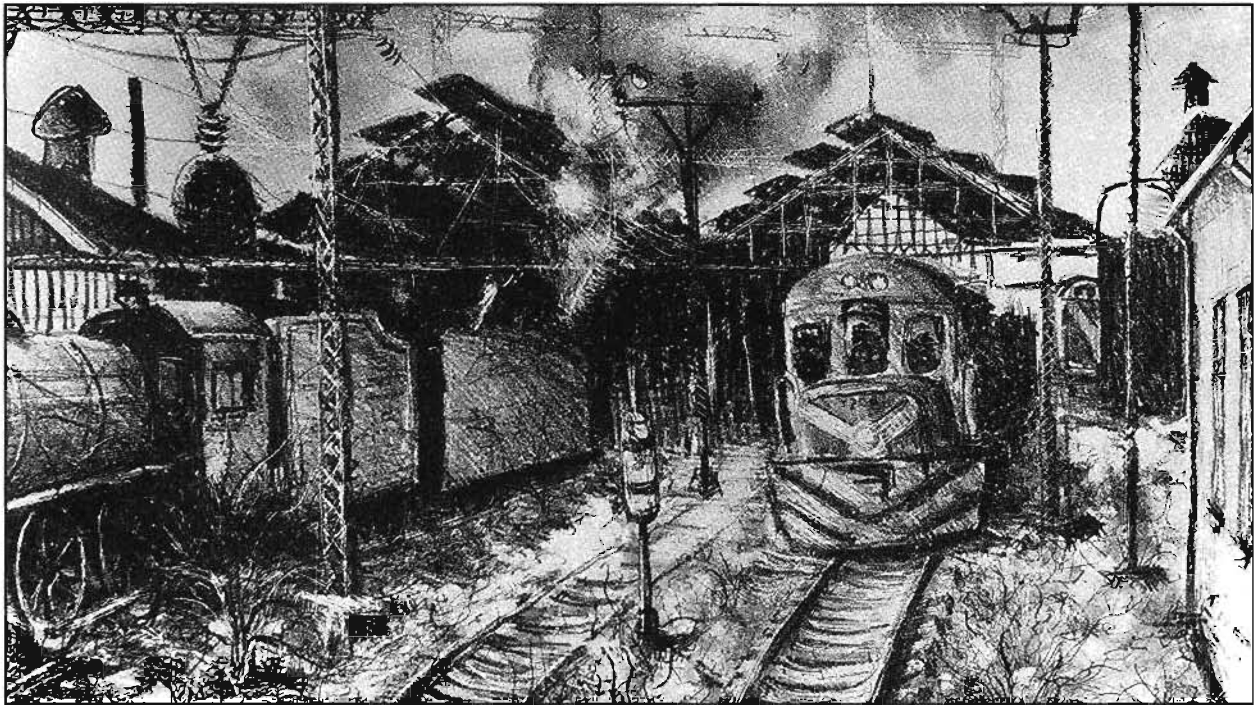
> No more pass! No more Influx Control! No more sit here, not there, no more shut up, take your hands out of your pockets, no more where the hell do you think you're going, no more you are a liar, do you know who you're talking to, no more move, wait, line up, fall in, no more can't you see I'm busy — No more! No more! It was now somebody else's shit — everybody else's — not mine! I wanted to start shaking hands, banging everybody on the back, buying booze for the whole of bloody Joburg! I looked around wildly.
>
> Standing around forlornly at the building's entrance was the unfortunate black man.
>
> My hand fished into my pocket and came out with a shilling. I went to him and placed the shilling in his hand, then quickly walked away. I was a few hundred yards from him, when something flew with terrific force past my head. It went zinnnnnng, narrowly missing the tip of my ear. It clinked once and fell into the gutter. It was the shilling piece. I bent down, picked it up and walked on without looking back. (pp.161-62)

After his long journey, the child 'of the gods above and the gutters below' is still living out of the gutter. It is this ending that has led some reviewers to comment along the following lines:

> In spite of his charm and panache, Boetie's career is not inspiring. He is no Robin Hood, no black patriot warring against white society. On the contrary, he consorts with unscrupulous racketeers who prey upon their fellow-oppressed, is a racist who denigrates other non-whites. One wonders whether Mr Simon might have better served the cause of an indigenous African literature by sponsoring the work of a less flawed personality. ('Cape Con Man' p.836)

This patronising interpretation appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* — the reviewer doesn't understand that the picaro is not a romantic hero. But even reviewers who identify the text as picaresque may read it simply as the tale of an individualistic underdog, as does Stephen Gray. 'The Dugmore Boetie story is of a pathetic raconteur spinning out the episodes for his next meal'.

Other critics have specifically excluded Boetie from the realm of the political. Complaining that black writers of the 1950s and 1960s were generally producing homo-



Germiston Sheds • **Thomas Nkuna • Oil pastel on paper**

geneous works that were 'moral and sociological rather than artistic,' Tony Morphet writes: 'Dugmore Boetie, by an ironic quirk, has escaped this uniform stamp. His vision of the township is nothing other than personal — not because he has transcended the partisan social — political attitudes, but because he has never heard of them.' In an article on 'protest fiction', Gareth Cornwell maintains that *Familiarity*:

> is not...devoid of social criticism, but that such criticism is contingent rather than crucial. Boetie's struggle with the system takes place on a personal and not a political level.... Boetie is not a propagandist but an entertainer, a raconteur, who holds reality at arm's length and sniggers.[11]

The feminist slogan that 'the personal is political' provides a useful starting point for another reading of *Familiarity*. One of the discrepancies between the main text and the Epilogue concerns the amputated leg: Boetie says it happened when he was serving in the army, while Simon reports that it occurred when Boetie was a child and that he had never been in North Africa. What is important about this divergence is not whether Boetie is telling the truth, but rather that his version serves a clear purpose in the narrative by allowing him to comment on the effects of the war on blacks:

> The white men were desperately in need of soldiers. They were recruiting black men foul or fair — mostly foul — forcing them to go and put out a fire that they didn't help kindle. Unemployment flourished on purpose; not that I wanted to be employed. It became a matter of join the army or

> starve. Every morning men would go looking for work, only to come back carrying long faces. Homes went to pieces. Women had to leave them to go and whore in order to maintain their off-spring. (p.76)

And he further expands his criticism of the war by complaining that blacks 'were not allowed the use of rifles. Not even to clean. They armed us with assegais. There's nothing wrong with the assegai provided that the nation we were going to fight — they referred to them as Germans — were also going to use spears. Bringing down an aeroplane with the aid of a spear, was something I was going to live for'. (p.76)

In addition, he forcefully comments on the discriminatory treatment of black ex-servicemen by observing that: 'The white man issues us blacks with wooden peg-legs. Only Europeans get legs that can be fitted with shoes'. (p.106) Later, when he is accused of being lazy and compared unfavourably to a famous flying ace who had lost both legs, Boetie protests:

> Sir, in the first place, Lieutenant Bader has expensive legs. Not legs that weigh fifteen to twenty pounds and produce blisters every second week. Secondly, he is well off, and last of all, he doesn't have to walk up and down the streets trying to fix a pass. I'll change places with him any time! (p.158)

There is indeed 'social criticism' in *Familiarity*, and the social is surely political. In his adult life, Boetie's chaotic and hostile world has been created by the pass laws, which have turned South African society into a giant prison. 'In this country,' Boetie observes, 'it's not a disgrace for a black man to have been to prison; prison to us is just a break from monotony'. (p.128)

And the pass office is politically identified as 'Liberty Control', a place where 'father was made to stand naked in the presence of son. The last layer of human dignity was being peeled off'. (p.89) Elsewhere, Boetie denounces the State's destruction of Sophiatown and the forced relocation of black people.

At these moments, Boetie is a choral voice for blacks, as has been suggested by several commentators who have interpreted the text as an autobiography. For example, in the second edition of *The African Image* Ezekiel (now Es'kia) Mphahlele identifies Boetie as a 'representative of the vital, almost unbeatable youth'.[12] I would expand this observation by pointing out how the choral aspect of Boetie's voice is cleverly reflected in the rhetoric of the text. One exemplary passage is that where Boetie is describing the long queue at Influx Control:

> The Africans were moving in pairs at a snail's pace. Misery was written on every face, as if they were walking the last mile. Maybe we were, who knew. Most of us were either going to be given twenty-four hours to leave the urban area of Johannesburg, or sold to potato farmers for failing to renew work-seeking permits in time. (p.86)

Here our individualistic underdog assumes a politicised voice: the speaking-I first looks at a specific social group — Africans — as something other from himself; but then, after reflecting on their condition, he becomes 'them' and the narrative shifts from 'I', through 'they', to 'us'.

Though Boetie is with full rights a plural voice, because he suffers from the marginalisation of being black under apartheid, these choral flashes are mediated by the individual voice of his double marginalisation, which is clearly and politically identified as having social origins: he is an orphan who is uncared for by both the South African State and the urban black community; he is also crippled and as such is ostracised by both whites and blacks. Not surprisingly, he becomes a criminal.

In addition, his satiric style is certainly political. As Lewis Nkosi observed in *Home and Exile*,

> For a black man to live in South Africa in the second half of the twentieth century and at the same time preserve his sanity, he requires an enormous sense of humour and a surrealistic kind of brutal wit, for without a suicidal attack on Dr Verwoerd's armed forces, these qualities seem to provide the only means of defence against a

> spiritual chaos and confusion which would rob any man of his mental health. (p.35)

As a man who lives by his wits, Boetie's greatest worry is that he will lose his mind. He may be in and out of jail, but he still fears Fort Glamorgan, ' a prison where they confuse you for life in less than a year'. (p.105)

Boetie saves himself by telling stories; he is indeed a raconteur in the true sense of being a person who is skilled in relating stories and anecdotes interestingly. And this ability unquestionably extends to the written page, as David Rabkin observes: 'Boetie's prose is fluent and startling, abounding in unlikely similes and taking an expert delight in detailing the bizarre or plainly horrific'. (p.122) Boetie's stories often confront white domination directly. An exemplary passage is where he is explaining how he passed himself off as an employee of a large department store and was thus able to cart goods out of the shop unmolested:

> I took advantage of two facts. One: to all whites a black man's features don't count. Only his colour does. To them, we are all alike; when you're black, you're just another black man. They don't even bother about your real name. To them, you're just John, Jim, or Boy. Your Daddy spends nine months thumbing through a dictionary for a fancy name to bestow on you and then some white trash comes and calls you what he feels like without bothering to think or look at you. If that isn't contempt, then what is?
>
> The second fact — and I like it best — is that they have a total disregard for our mental efficiency. That's why they couldn't dream that anyone, especially a black man, could be capable of doing what I did in this big bazaar. (p.61)

Boetie survives in the hostile world of white domination by virtue of the 'cleverness that oozes from a brain that gets its stimulants from the vitamins of an empty stomach'. (p.60) In her Preface to the first U.S. edition of the book, Gordimer correctly identifies the core of Boetie's narrative by reminding us that: 'A feast dreamt of on a hungry stomach is more wildly sumptuous than any actual feast; yet it conveys better than any objective description the actual pains of hunger'.[13] This approach allows us to see more clearly the meaning of Boetie's narrative, which Chapter 14 well illustrates.

Boetie is serving a three-year sentence in Fort Glamorgan, which he describes as 'a prison within a prison. Home of the lost. Inmates have a name for it. They tag it the Shit House. The Afrikaners call it a *Straf Tronk*, jail of punishment'. (p.105) Boetie suffers terrible beatings, solitary confinement and reduced rations because he insists that his artificial leg be treated like his clothes, wrist-watch and wallet — as personal property to be returned to him only when he is released. One sadistic prison guard is particularly enraged since without his leg Boetie will not be able to perform the hard labour required of the convicts. But Boetie is determined:

> I had to try to preserve my energy. To try by all means to stay fit so as to be able to absorb the man's punishment. Because me, I'm not prepared to use my artificial leg in a prison. If it gets damaged, nobody is going to give me another one. I need it, it's my life. Without it, I might even sink lower in the outside world. (p.106)

Boetie is grotesquely forced to hop through the daily prison routine and is repeatedly humiliated by the guards. He is finally brought before the prison board:

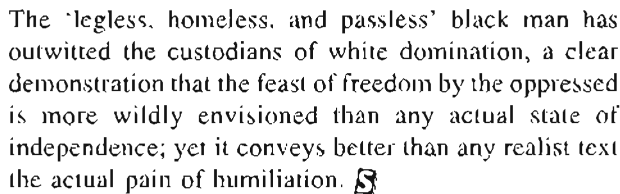
> When I entered the warden's office, the starch went out of my knee. It buckled, causing me to go down on all fours, I mean all threes. I had reason to. For sitting on a long bench directly facing me, were the six biggest Afrikaners I had ever seen.
>
> I wondered if they were real. When I last saw such big people it was out at the Church Square of Pretoria. They were standing around good old Paul Kruger, the father of Afrikaans history. Still, they were only statues. Now here I was seeing the same old bearded men. Only these were not statues, they were real flesh and blood.
>
> Boers don't grow that big anymore.... These were the originals. The true illegitimate children of Africa. Men who could haul a covered wagon

> from a muddy river without consulting any cows. Christ! I was due for some real trouble.

The end of the story has a fantastic bent to it: the prison board declares Boetie to be 'a worthless embarrassment to the authorities and a bad example to the convicts' (p.116), and throws him out of prison. And yet Boetie is not satisfied by what may seem a most lucky turn: by threatening to go out and steal the money he needs for a railway ticket, he forces the prison board to grant him also a free ticket back to Sophiatown.

This resolution is simply Boetie's crowning glory, as he defiantly declares:

> I might have lost a lot of weight, but I certainly didn't lose my pride which was very important if you were going to be a successful cripple all your life. Besides, I'd won the Battle of the Leg. (p.114)



The 'legless, homeless, and passless' black man has outwitted the custodians of white domination, a clear demonstration that the feast of freedom by the oppressed is more wildly envisioned than any actual state of independence; yet it conveys better than any realist text the actual pain of humiliation.

Notes

1. All textual references are to the 1989 edition of *Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost*; this passage appears on p.7.
2. Quoted in Simon's Epilogue, 1989, p. 163.
3. Though the main text seems to be unchanged, the editions are different: the first U.S. edition contains a Preface that is not included in the others, and some alterations have been made in Barney Simon's Epilogue. These points are further discussed below. There are some minor errors in the publication data in some of the editions: the title page of the first U.S. edition says 1969 but the copyright page says 1970 — the latter seems to be correct; the 1989 edition — it was originally issued in paperback by Fawcett in 1970. The only edition presently in print is Four Walls Eight Windows (P.O. Box 548, Village Station, New York, NY 10014).
4. In 1988, Percy Baneshik wrote an article in the *Star* about Boetie which was inspired by a classified ad offering a used copy of *Familiarity* for sale. Baneshik claims that he was unable to locate a new copy of the book in Johannesburg book shops. For a copy of this article, and general assistance with checking South African sources, I wish to express my thanks to the staff of the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown. Copies of the non-South African materials I have collected on *Familiarity* have been deposited at the NELM
5. Chapter 14 is an elaborated version of 'The Last Leg', which was published originally by Nat Nakasa in *The Classic* in 1963. Chapter 1 (minus the first page, including the passage quoted above) appeared under the title of the book in *London Magazine* in 1966. Excerpts from Chapters 6, 7 and 15 were posthumously published as 'Three Cons' in *The Classic* in 1968, when the journal was under the editorship of Barney Simon.
6. In a recent article, Paul Gready counts Boetie among the 'Sophiatown writers of the 1950s,' which is odd since there is no evidence that Boetie published anything during this decade and he never contributed to *Drum* Magazine. In his essay on the *Drum* Decade', Michael Chapman doesn't mention Boetie.
7. Piniel Shava, for instance, ignores Boetie completely in his recent study of Black South African writing.
8. After describing him as 'co-author', Barnett contradicts herself by writing 'Barney Simon, when interviewed, said that the writing was Dugmore Boetie's own. He saw himself in the position of a producer of a play, directing changes here and there but not altering the action or dialogue' (p.129).
9. Though she describes it as a 'straightforward autobiography', Jane Watts provides a good treatment of *Familiarity* as experimental autobiography (pp.108, 122 - 28).
10. Edgecombe, p. 129. This critic, who discusses the text from the formal definition of the genre picaresque novel, insists both upon Boetie's 'limited literary culture' and that *Familiarity* is in at least one respect 'picaresque *manqué*'. (p.136) On the contrary, following Ulrich Wick's modal approach to the picaresque, I don't think it is important whether the Boetie's text conforms to the historic Spanish picaresque. It doesn't seem unlikely that Boetie might have seen movies or read books — Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, for example — that are picaresque in structure. But then I suppose it is possible that the author Boetie worked without much 'literary culture', and then we must assume that he is brilliant or that Simon is a magician. Interestingly, the text allows us to believe that the hero progresses to literacy: Boetie is unable to read in the first chapter when living with his 'gutter father', while in the second chapter he is appointed to the role of reader under the tutorship of the grotesque criminal Nine.
11. Cornwell, p.55. This critic goes on to suggest that: 'the dusk jacket of *Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost* attempts to bait the would-be reader with an excerpt from the only incident in the book in which Boetie (or his editor!) allows himself to comment directly on the political implications of his life of crime'. (p.55) He is referring here to the incident where the theft of a white woman's handbag is facilitated by the fact that she requires her Black servant to sit in the back of her car. As Boetie and his accomplice walk away with the bag, the latter comments 'Serves her right for not letting him sit next to her'. (p.42) What Cornwell cites as the only political passage in the book, is shaded by the more sophisticated political critique that my reading tries to highlight.

12. Mphahlele, p. 231; see also Rabkin, pp. 121 - 22; Clingman; Watts, pp. 122 - 28.
13. Gordimer, p. 3. It is unfortunate that Gordimer's Preface has not been included in other editions of the book. When I inquired about it to the publisher of the current U.S. edition, he said that he had bought the rights from the British publisher and was unaware of the existence of the Preface. He added that Barney Simon had never mentioned it to him (Oakes).

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Namibian Nites

With apologies to Hugh Masekela and Technotronic

Right the first night
What does one do what does one do
To Khomasdal to the club
Namibia Nite oh Namibian Nites my love
Deafening Noise nubile bodies
It is always surprising who can pay the cover —
Unemployment, even hunger?
— not here, definitely not here.
From hand to mouth

Endless plateaus of rhythm beating beating
Get up get up before the night is over
not before three never before three
Free Nelson Mandela bring him back home to Soweto
Everybody dancing bouncing
Politics and political conscience inside the music
Rhythms are more important than messages
But they're all conscientised now they can dance
Right message right mood
Home to Winnie Mandela
I wanna see him walking down the streets of Soweto

Screaming lights nubile bodies
And some middle-aged
White men from the better suburbs
They all want one particular thing
They all want — they are cheap
(You need a car you need a house)
And they are willing —
At least they suppose that
They dance alone
The men are missing
They prefer the bar
Good old Windhoek Lager or Draught
And they wait
Until later

Pump up the jam
Pump up the jam
Pump it up
Flickering strobe lights shaking
The next cigarette and the next
Namibia Nite at full price much too much
And yet: international flair in the new metropolis
Pay good attention to the political: it's not here
It's gone missing
They drink they are happy
But
It's a sell-out
Three four get your butt on the floor
Let's party before the night is over
Hopefully not too soon
Outside lurk the night and the day the day
The morning patiently waiting for its victims
The cover and the money for the drinks
Would have come in handy

Move this come on move this
Shake that body shake that body
The fingers with the tenth cigarette are also shaking
Shaking beer beer and tobacco
Nubile bodies
Well protected boer morals
They are looking for a husband not a fast night
The night is fast the limbs are loose
They shake:
You got to move this
Ooh yeah yeah yeah

Later then going home
Long ride empty street completely empty
Windhoek is dead
Outside knives are lurking morals going wild
The other day someone got shot three shots
In his back
Namibia Nite oh Namibian Nites my love
You'd better park the car safely
Alarm systems are recommended
Remember: In the back
Should you need to

Carsten Knoch

Deela Khan

Three Poems

Love Song

I carried your face with me like a talisman
It seasoned my life with herbs I'd never
Tasted, with spice it sorely lacked.
It coloured bird-song, trees & grasses,
Animals, flowers & mountain ranges
With colours that rocked my soul.
And I thought we were initiated
Into magic that would outlast
The sphinxes. But such luck is a
Dream that eludes us all.

Now, your face is overgrown with rambling
Roses. All I can see is a thorn-tattered
Mask. But the lights of eyes still
Haunt dismal hours and the rhythm
Of spinning with love
Still reels the head.

And the love that sprouted so many wonders
Is a mangy mongrel trapped in a minefield —
Cursed with eternal life, it totters the
Death-strip, skipping the fatal blast to
Stardom with every tread.

18 March 1992

So Hard to Heal in a Hard Age

What Gods preserve you Analyst
as you storm through
private lives.
Imbued with the clamour
of your day...where
do you find the airy
words to say?

You've seen the rains of ice-tears
crystallised on the sunken cheek
blast the psyche
and gnaw at the eye.
You walk with the young man
who cut his throat as
the orange glare lifted the
mists of his acquired patriotism
and screened the murders he'd fallen for.

Etched on your heart are the eyes
of droves of lonely people you
just cannot appease as you brave
the ravages of forced separations...
of lives blown forever apart.

You've come to know that soothing words
can split facades and open graves...
and burst healed scars....
You bank on a distant hope and
emit your healing rays in hope
they find the tortuous path
to the heart.

You're forced to rack your brain
in pursuit of eternal resourcefulness....
But do not despair....
Stride on   for
it's so hard to heal
in a hard age.

Ghazal on Universal Dislocation

One doesn't know why they're so pleasured by masochism, so
stimulated by voyeurism; they hurt to love & love to hurt.

They marched elephants across the mountains of the mind
only to crash-land in the volcanic eye of life —

Played by their games, the games gamed the players; swallowed
by their roles, they grew tired of searching for faces.

In the Salvadorean wars the trees bore ears & heads & faces;
Gut trimmed the scar-lit streets with gaudy decorations.

Spring burgeons in the pitch of holocaust: Sphinxes have long awakened
& bred mutants; as one see-saws the blade-edge of the epiphanic abyss.

25 August 1990

★ *The nineteenth-century Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib, wrote his poems in the Ghazal form. While the structure and the metrics used by Ghalib are much stricter than mine, his employment of a minimum of five couplets to ghazal, each couplet being autonomous and independent of the others, has been adopted. The continuity and unity flow from the associations and images playing back and forth among the couplets comprising the Ghazal.*

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Above: Sylvia Moresche, Alexandra, 1992

Right: • *Detail of Robben Island Prison Cell* •
Sylvia Moresche, 1992

The Market Photography Workshop is a non-profit organisation which was established in 1990 by Gillian Cargill and David Goldblatt with the aim of offering a low-cost course to those wishing to acquire skills and understanding in photography as communication rather than as a hobby.

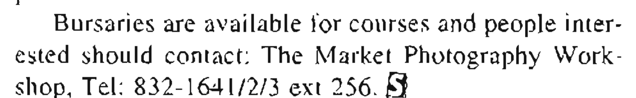
To this end, the workshop offers three courses:

— A Beginners Course teaching camera operation and picture taking.

— An Intermediate Course teaching darkroom skills, an introduction to photojournalism and documentary photography as well as assignments in training the photographic eye.

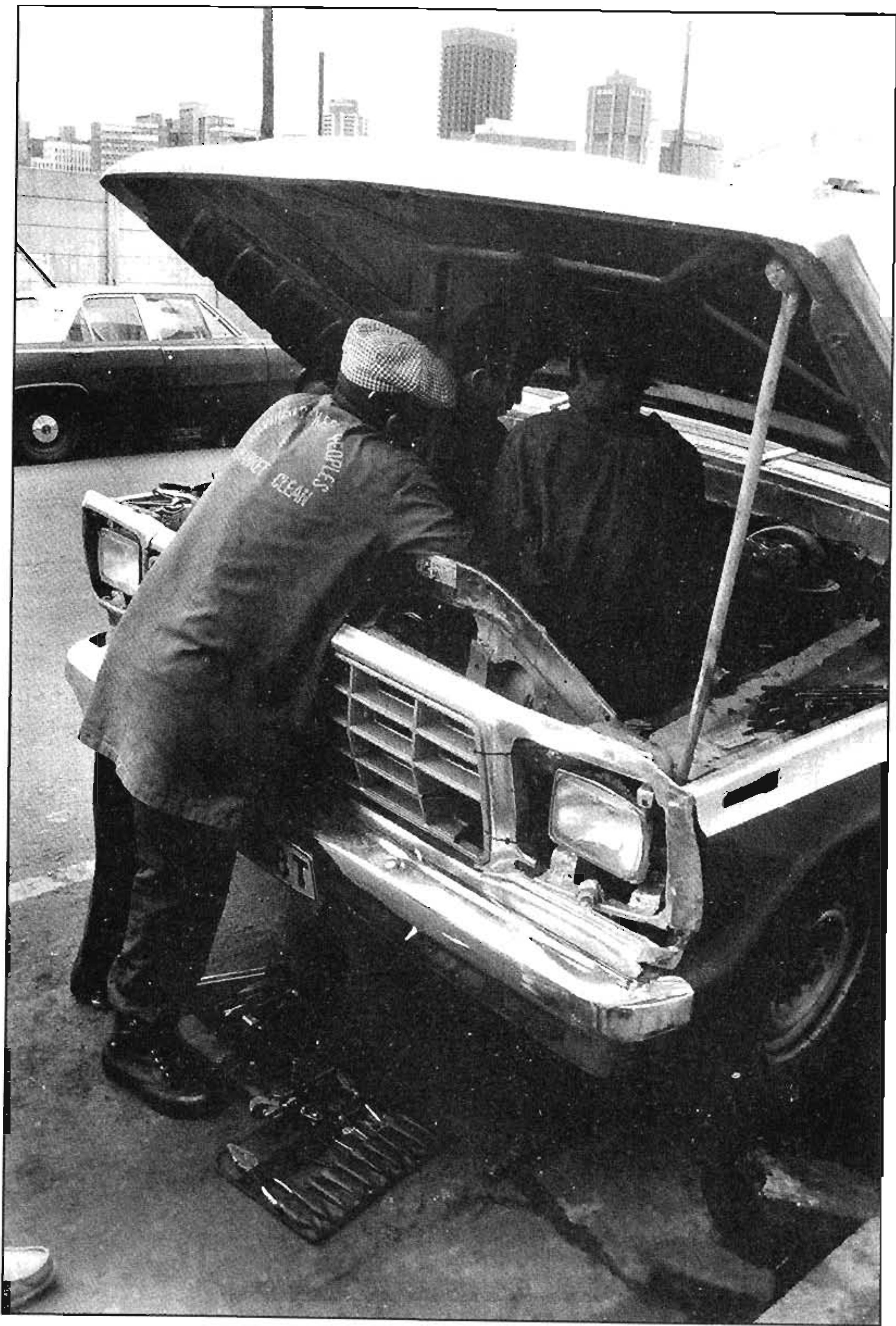
— An Advanced Course which seeks to give graduates of the Intermediate Course, an approach to the solving of problems typically encountered in applied photography.

In addition to the courses, the workshop holds regular discussion groups and hosts talks by visiting photographers.

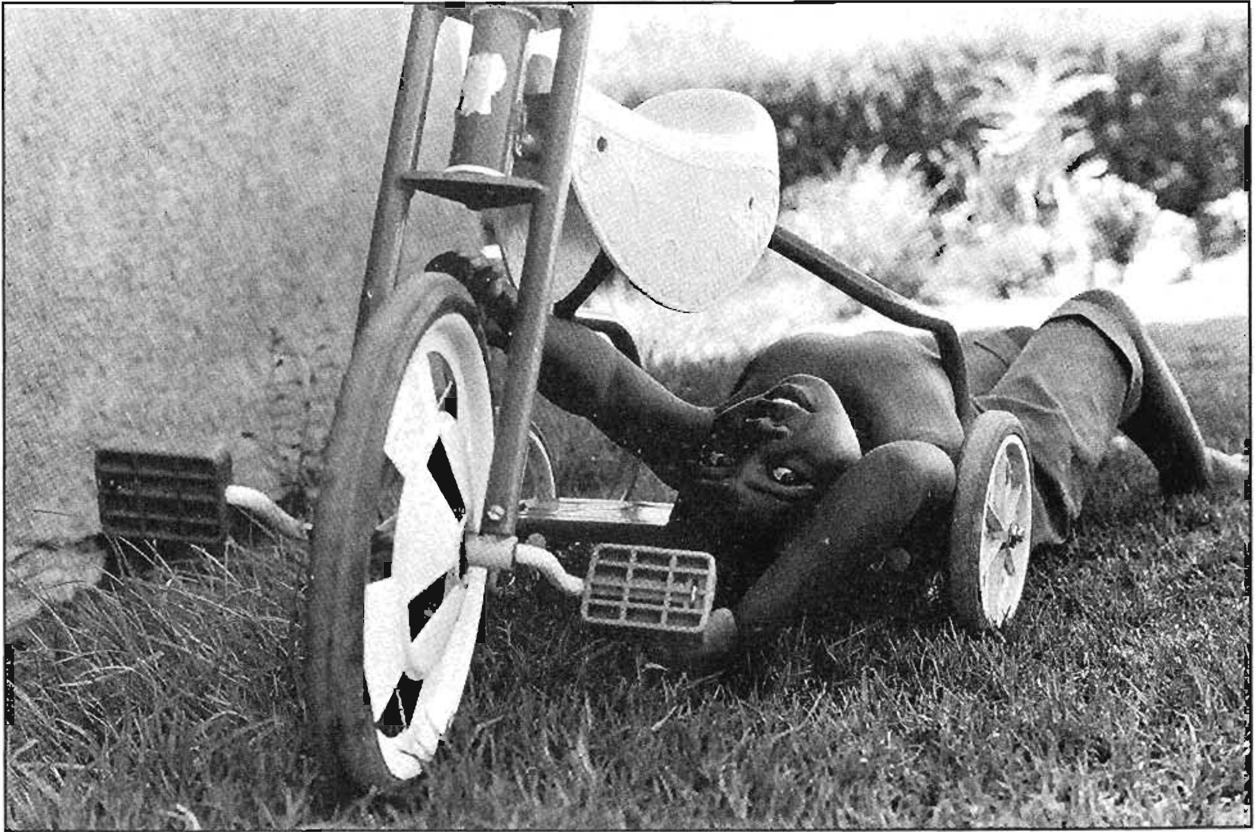


Bursaries are available for courses and people interested should contact: The Market Photography Workshop, Tel: 832-1641/2/3 ext 256.

Work from the Photo Lab



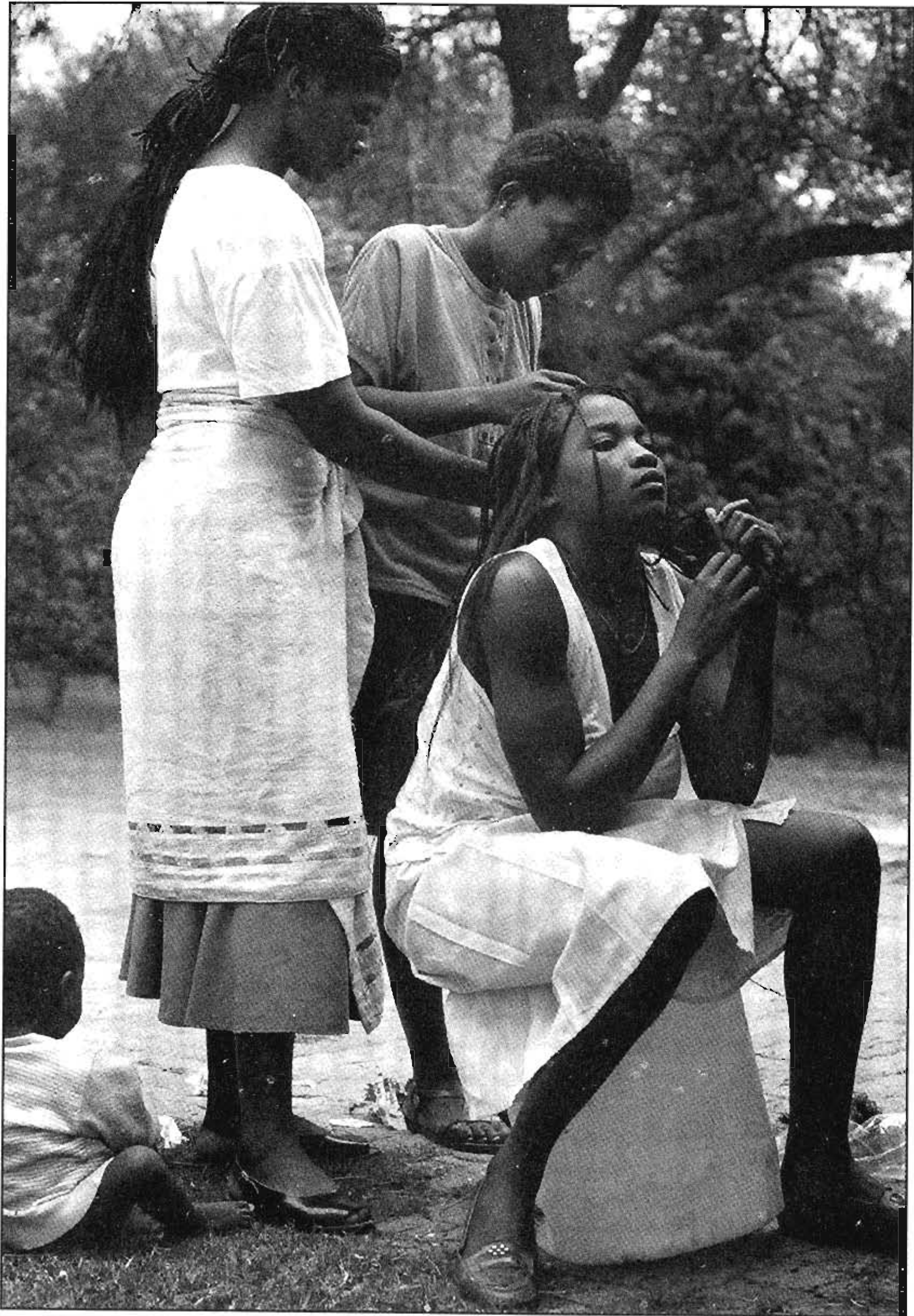
• *Busy Street* • Motlhalefi Mahlabe, 1991



• *Boy with tricycle* • Motlhalefi Mahlabe

• *CP Rally* • Mykal Nicolaou, 1990

• *CP Rally* • Mykal Nicolaou, 1990



Natasha Pincus, January 1992

SBs

Jiggs

Winter 1977. I had just been overseas. My first trip since 1968. When I saw my bras in exile, I cried.

On 20 June 1977 my son Themba had just fallen asleep after his morning feed.

I worked at the Open School which, at the time, was run by the Institute of Race Relations. I left for work. But I was just going to pop in since it was the day the Transvaal Association of Coloured Teachers held their AGM. Although I was not a teacher I had been attending these meetings since the early seventies. The teachers did not mind in the least; many of them were friends of mine and I shared a common interest in progressive education with at least some of them.

I enjoyed attending these meetings, although it seems, we achieved more between rather than during the serious sessions. I would engage these men and women in discussions regarding the crisis in education. The debates became more serious after the June 16 uprising.

Every year the meeting ended with a huge party: a *lekker* dance and lots of booze. This always proved to be the highlight of the AGM graced by three times the number of teachers who attended the AGM itself.

My location at these parties was traditionally the bar. Here my buddies and I would hold sway discussing issues educational while we imbibed alcohol at giveaway prices. Despite allegations levelled at us by drunken sods of the teaching fraternity that we were communists or working for the ANC, the bar proved a popular venue year after year.

When I got to the office, Marie, a colleague, tells me the System had called for me and had left their calling card: Be at my office at 8am tomorrow morning, Captain Sans, Security Branch. We also have other friendlier visitors at the office: about 500 kids spilling out of our seven offices and gallery at Diakonia House and Race Relations.

Marie also tells me that Race Relations wants the kids out of their offices as the staff cannot work with all the noise. I suppose it was difficult to produce all those authoritative papers on the state of black South Africa with all those little black refugees around them.

Marie has more bad news for me.

'Fred wants to see you in his office urgently!'

'What for?'

'He wants to know why you were not there this morning and what your working hours are.'

Fred van Wyk is the director of Race Relations. He obviously cannot relate to the kids and wants me to get rid of them. I phone his secretary and make an appointment. She says he's available right now. I go over.

Fred addresses me in Afrikaans and puts his hands on my shoulder; we are broers. I reply in English.

Fred is such a confusion of liberalism and Afrikanerdom that he comes across in this awful patronising way that never fails to offend.

He insists that I call him Fred but I stick to Mr Van Wyk with the excuse that it is disrespectful to call older people by their first names. The real reason is that we (my colleague Pindi agreed with me on this issue) refused to give into liberal bullshit.

He liked telling Pindi and I that he grew up with coloured and Xhosa people. But whenever him and I were alone he forgot the Xhosa people and whenever he was with Pindi he forgot the coloured.

Anyway, just as old Fred is about to hassle me about the kids, I tell him the security police want to see me. Yerre! I've never seen anybody forget the problems of the children so fast!

'What have you done?' he says literally jumping out of his seat.

'What d'you mean?'

'I mean you haven't been involved in anything subversive have you?'

Fuck. I felt like telling him that for three months — from September to December '76 — we had over 100 kids staying at the Open School and that some were so hot we had to farm them out among the white comrades who worked at the School and were prepared to take them. We had decided not to tell him and to take the rap ourselves if anything went wrong.

Fred goes into a flurry. We never tell him what's going on, he moans, and we're going to bring the Institute down. He can never find me in the office and he never knows what I'm doing.

I tell all I have been doing and that I need to get hold of my attorney Tucker to find out what my legal rights are — if any.

Tucker is out of the country. We sit and think. He suggests that we get hold of Jack Unterhalter, an advocate who sits on the executive of Race Relations. Jack agrees to see me that same afternoon.

Jack and I have a long discussion. I tell him about the kids staying at the Open School. How some left from there to join MK. How some were caught and that through subsequent trials we found out who the *impimpis* were. Amazingly it always turned out to be the characters who were the most extreme.

Jack keeps digging to find out if I'm involved. Eventually we agree that anything you do nowadays with black youth could be termed subversive.

Together we try to pre-empt the cops' motives for seeking an audience with me.

I tell him about my friend Caplan Block who worked with the PAC leader Zeph Mothopeng and who had been called in by the cops a few weeks ago.

A lot of the questioning revolved around why Horst and Ilona Kleinschmidt — friends of Caplan and me — had named their child Zinzi.

Caplan said he didn't know but he thought it quite a nice name and that South Africans should realise that they did after all live in Africa and should give their children African names.

This sent the interrogators into a frenzy. And this was where Caplan thought they were going to bash him to a pulp. Frothing at the mouth they screamed that it was because Mandela had named his daughter Zinzi and it simply fucking proved that Horst and Illona were ANC terrorists.

I told Jack that maybe they wanted to know why my son's name was Themba.

We spoke about my overseas trip. He asked me if I had met with the ANC. Of course, I said. Everyone I knew overseas was a member. I told him that I had met with them privately and that I never visited any offices.

He asked me if they had asked me to do anything for them here at home.

No, I told him they seemed quite pleased with what I was doing already.

Jack then comes up with this idea that the Law Society had been very complacent in their attitude towards detention and that it was time they were challenged. He would approach them to accompany me and to provide any necessary legal defence.

Sure, I agreed, but I said that I didn't want to

disappear in the dark dungeons of John Vorster Square for several months nor did I want to end up accidentally killing myself.

'Don't you want to be a hero?' he asks.

'No,' I reply.

He tells me that the correct thing to do is to be accompanied by a member of the Law Society. If anything happened to me they would be obliged to take up my case.

I agree.

Edward Nathan was in the same building as Jack, so in a few minutes I was in his office.

He looks at me very suspiciously. Shit, here at last, before his eyes, a real live terrorist. It must have been my appearance that made him react that way. Hair almost down to my waist, beard slightly shorter. *Mapoisa* jacket with denim jeans. And to round it off, maroon knee-high boots.

I decided in that office never to go to Europe like this again. Shit, I was either a Palestinian terrorist or a drug smuggler. Those Europeans gave me a hard time from Stockholm to London.

Nathan asks me more or less the same things as Jack asked me except he's nervous and falters all the time.

Basically he wanted to know if I was 'clean'. Nobody wants to dirty their hands.

He asked me to wait in reception while he made a few calls.

A few minutes later he gives me the name of a lawyer who I am to meet at 7.30 tomorrow morning at his office.

Relax, he says, everything's going to be fine. It's obviously a line he uses with all his clients.

Relax I cannot. I can't sleep that night. I'm shitting myself.

I don't even make the teachers' conference or the dance which is taking place even as I wonder what the fuckers want from me.

The next morning I meet lawyer number three and hell, the young man's more nervous than me. He wants to know what I've done and it turns out the whole Law Society's shitting themselves and have sent a rookie who happens to be Edward Nathan's nephew. Talk about scraping the barrel!

John Vorster Square. We get into the lift after asking directions to the security section. We keep pressing the ninth floor button but nothing happens. Eventually two policemen get into the lift.

We tell them our problem and they laugh.

'Terrorists, ja!' They point out of the lift to a dark passage to the left of the lift.

'Go through the passage out of the building. Turn left, there's a door. Go inside and you'll see another two lifts. They will take you where you want to be.'

All this was said in the typical sneering, condescending arrogant boer manner.

The directions led us to a tiny lobby, not more than a square metre. There are two lifts and one is open. We step in and, before we have time to press any buttons the lift starts to ascend.

In one corner we see a closed circuit TV camera watching us. The lift doesn't stop until it reaches the ninth floor. With a jolt the doors open.

We get out and there's a gray-haired middle-aged white man glaring grimly at us from behind a booth, an R1 rifle in his hands. Next to him are two TV monitors, a table with a control panel, and a telephone — obviously the lift control. On our right is a very securely shut steel door.

'Wat soek julle hier?' he growls.

'I've come to see Lieutenant Sans,' I stammer.

'Wag daar,' he points to his right; a little lobby with barely enough space for two people.

We hear a heavy, grinding sound and notice that the steel door is sliding open, controlled by old Growler. Shit, they must be a scared bunch, probably expecting an MK attack every minute of the day.

There's a constant coming and going out of the steel door into the lift and vice versa. Most are smartly dressed in suits and waistcoats. Most are white. If you saw them in the street you would not realise they were policemen. Then you notice their shoulder holsters bulging underneath their jackets.

My lawyer and I were totally intimidated, shit scared.

'Julle twee!' Growler eventually shouts.

We squeeze out of the little room.

'Lieutenant Sans is nie hier nie. Julle kan loop.'

'But I was told to be here this morning.' I don't know where I got the courage from, but I was really indignant.

'He can't waste my time like this. My lawyer and I could have been at work.'

'Vat jou lawyer en loop, blikskottel. Sans is nie hier nie.'

My lawyer puts his hand on my shoulder. 'Let's go,' he says and ushers me into the waiting lift.

Knowing that Growler is watching us in the lift, we are both silent. But as soon as we get out of the lift I let rip.

'Fucking bastards,' says my lawyer, 'at least nothing happened. You weren't interrogated.'

'What about my fucking nerves?' Intimidating the fucking shit out of me. Since receiving that message my whole day was wretched. I couldn't even sleep last night. What do they want to do with me?'

My lawyer is obviously too happy to be out of John Vorster Square, totally relieved that he didn't have to deal with them.

'Relax,' he says, 'it's all over.'

'It's probably only the beginning,' I rage.

We go to Edward Nathan to tell him what happened. By now my lawyer has regained his confidence and decides to take command. And the way he's explaining things you'd swear he was up front taking the initiative instead of being the snivelling little runt he actually was.

I let him do most of the talking, nodding every now and then. I think, shit, by this evening he's telling his family, friends and girlfriend how he confronted the SBs and put them in their place.

Later I report to Jack, Van Wyk, my wife and all my friends whom I thought should know.

Two weeks go by. I am just beginning to relax.

The SBs leave a card at my office when I'm not there to receive it personally. And another one at home when I'm not there. Both with the same message as the first one.

Shit! Shit! Shit!

Are these bastards following me? How do they manage to deliver these things to the office and my home when I'm not there, twice, in exactly the same style and on Mondays! They don't even allow one to have a decent hangover!

I tell Jack I can't go with that guy. He's more scared than me. I need a more mature person.

This time I know my way around John Vorster Square. The lawyer with me is more mature. He's in his early thirties, about my age, and has a few years of legal experience. He's never dealt with security cases before though, and he's a bit flustered, but so am I.

Growler beckons us into the cage. Before long Sans appears. He walks straight to me. He obviously knows who I am.

'Colin Smuts,' he says.

'I am from the Law Society,' my lawyer says. 'I am representing Mr Smuts and I would like to know why you want to see him.'

Sans ignores my man.

'Who told you to bring a lawyer along?' he barks at me. 'We only want to question you.' He takes me by the arm and tells my lawyer, 'you wait here,' pointing to the cage with his forefinger.

It all happens so quickly and within seconds I'm behind the steel sliding door. It's a long passage with glass office cubicles leading off. It reminds me of the Kafka's *The Castle*.

Sans leads me into the first office on the right. It's carpeted with a desk and chairs. I notice a kind of anteroom adjoining the office.

Sans tells me to sit and I do, gratefully.

I look at the windows. I am pleased to see they have heavy iron bars on them — close to each other. Were they there when Ahmed Timol was interrogated here? Or put on afterwards? Or do they have special rooms to throw you out the window?

Sans, by the way, is head of 'coloured' security police.

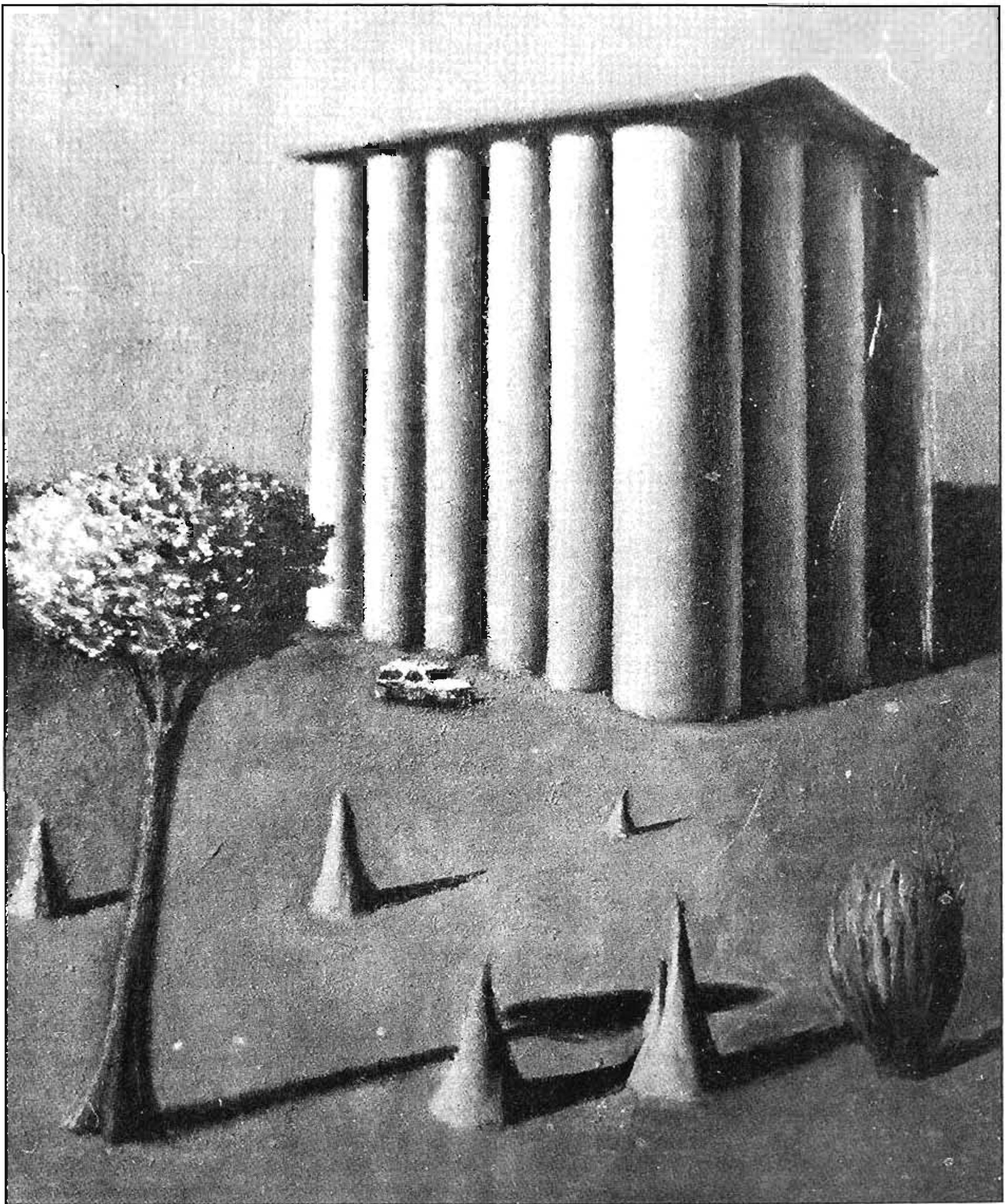
A guy called Harripersadh, I am told, is in charge of Indian security. So, depending on your classification you would be picked up by the designated ethnic head. Apartheid security.

Sans opens a file. With pen in hand he asks about my entire family — individually. He seems to know all the details: Where mother and brothers stay. Who my sister is married to. That they live abroad.

'Your brothers are white and you are coloured?'

'That's my choice.'

He tells me that I have recently been overseas and asks me which countries I visited.



Landscape with Silos • Walter Meyer • Oil on canvas

He ticks off all my answers and tells me I've answered correctly.

He takes me into the ante-room which is furnished with a household settee and two armchairs. He offers me a seat on the settee which is against a wall. I sit facing the two armchairs. There is a coffee table in the centre. Real cosy atmosphere.

'I want you to meet my boss,' Sans says. 'I'll be just a few minutes.' He disappears.

Captain Fourie has blond, short hair and blue eyes. He is of average build, a sort of Naas Botha; the epitome of the boer male.

At six feet Sans towers over his white boss.

It's not difficult to see that the bossman earns more bread than Sans. His clothes are more expensive unlike the shabby Sans who has to make do with a coloured policeman's salary.

Jesus! How can these guys take the shit. I wonder. A coloured lieutenant on a coloured lieutenant's pay!

Fourie shakes my hand very affably. They sit down in the chairs facing me. The questions begin.

One asks a question, the other follows up on it. Pretty soon it's like a circle: question, answer, follow-up question, next question. Fast, intense, and shit, they're asking me things going back as far as '72.

'At the DOCC in '72 you were part of the Mdali Festival. At the end you were one of those on stage that gave the Black Power salute. Why did you do that?'

'Everybody gives the salute, why shouldn't I?'

'So you're Black Power?'

'I'm Black Conscious like everybody else.'

They ask me about parties I attended, conferences, shebeens I drink in. It's like someone has been following me around for half my lifetime! They know who were at these parties and conferences, who I drank with.

The questions keep coming.

Their eyes are like glazed marbles. It's like looking into the eyes of a pair of Zombies; shit it's scary.

They seem to know a lot about the Open School. They tell me that I'm a front for the ANC, that I train soldiers for MK. I reply that I'm an artist, an educationist, that I teach children to think for themselves.

'Don't lie to us!' they snarl. 'All you politicians hide behind fronts! Educationists. You're all a lot of revolutionary terrorists!

'You are a supporter of the ANC!' one of them shouts.

'I am not. I told you I am black conscious.'

'Black conscious *se moer*! It's all a front for the ANC.'

The questions are so rapid that you're not sure if it's Sans or Fourie asking them. It's just a rapid fire bombardment. They must obviously do courses in this type of thing. Here were two men whom I had never met in my life before, throwing questions at me about my entire adult life! What's next? I begin to sweat. I've heard about the water treatment, the electric shocks, the bashing.

They reel off names: Jeanette Curtis, Pindile Mfeti, Ben Louw, the list is endless.

'You know all these terrorists, you must know what they are up to.'

'I don't.'

'You do. You are one of the terrorists.'

'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'Why are you always with them. You must know what they are up to.'

'Look, in South Africa it's dangerous to know too much or about other people's business. I know only about Open School business.'

'Open School business! — you're fucking lying! We have told you so many times where you were with these people.'

'Look, Pindi, Jeanette and I shared the same floor of offices. We are friends.'

'Don't talk shit to us! They are up to no good and you know it. What do they discuss?'

'Look, I drink with them. Most of the people you mentioned are friends and drinking partners. We talk about lots of things. They are great fun to drink with. Surely I can choose who to mix with and drink with.'

'Your friend Mfeti — you know where he was for a year. He told us things about your involvement, about using your offices for meetings, about publishing pamphlets, plans to agitate workers and start communist trade unions for blacks, spreading dirty lies about the government and teaching people about the ANC. You are one of them and we know it. What do you know about the Black Students Society at Wits?'

'Well, I know about them,' I replied.

'Elitist are they?' Sans said conspiratorially.

I trembled. It was the very word I had used at a recent meeting with the BSS in my office.

'What are they up to?'

'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'Didn't you have a meeting with them a month ago?' And they gave the date and the time.

'What was the meeting about, because that's when you discovered they were elitists.'

This was chilling stuff.

'They want to start a tuition programme for students because of the school boycott. They came to me for advice because of the school boycott. They came to me for advice because Hanief Vally, the Chairman, knows me and because I have experience in running tuition programmes.'

'And you told them they were elitists?' Sans said again.

'Look, they wanted to start a programme using the JMB syllabus and I told them it was way above what the average black kid was used to and it would be better to look at the DET syllabus. They said students had rejected Bantu Education which was the DET syllabus. I then said they should maybe do what we did at the Open School which is teach study skills. Some members of the group were adamant that JMB should be taught. That's when I told them they were elitists, that they were privileged to have had the JMB schooling and now wanted to aim their programme at a small elite of blacks who had done this course.'

They both took this in very quietly.

'What are their connections with the Soweto SRC?' they asked.

'I don't know.'

'What plans did they make for June 16?'

'I don't know.'

'Don't know, don't know, don't fucking lie to us! You have half the fucking Soweto SRC at your school. You introduced them to the BSS, that's why they planned that march in town. You know what's going on. You tell those kids what to do. Take the struggle to town, take it to the whites, that's what they are planning. AND YOU ARE PART OF IT!'

'I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT! I SHOUTED BACK, 'I AM A TYPICAL SOUTH AFRICAN. I LIKE BRANDY, POES AND SHIT TALK!'

We had reached a crescendo and that broke the ice. They both burst out laughing, they regained their composure, the tension eased somewhat. They continued in a normal tone.

'Look, we know you don't earn much money, you have a baby son, your wife has been studying. It can't be easy. We can help you. We can help you in lots of ways. But you have to help us. You know all these people, just let us know what they are planning, what they thinking. It's easy and you'll see how we help you.'

They waited for some response from me. I remained silent.

'Think about it and let us know. You may go.'

They rose. We shook hands.

'Thank you for coming. We'll be in touch,' Fourie said in the most friendly manner.

Sans escorted me through the steel door where the lawyer sat waiting.

'Here's Colin,' he says putting his hand on my back. 'You see, you didn't have to come. We only wanted to chat with him.' And he shakes hands with us both most affably.

Two and a half hours had passed. We get back to Jack's office where we discuss the whole thing.

It's obvious they've been watching me. However, it looks like they only know the surface, they don't know nitty gritty details. Jack advises me to be careful. Jack and my lawyer love the 'brandy, poes and shit talk' number. I tell them it wasn't meant as a joke; I was at my wits end. They reckon it's completely unique to get the SBs laughing.

My nerves are messed up. I go on a two-week boozing binge all the time trying to work out who is watching me, who is the *impimpi* in the crowd.

I contact Hanief and warn him that the BSS better be careful, they are under surveillance. He tells me all eight members of the executive whom I met were picked up individually and questioned.

There must be an *impimpi* among them, I tell him.

But if there is, who? They were all asked the same questions I was asked: the tuition programme, connections

to the SRC, the march to town by Soweto students, he says.

A bug in my office maybe? I discount that — unless someone at the meeting had a bug on him! At 5.30 on a weekday the Braamfontein traffic up Jan Smuts and down Jorissen is a roar that you hear three floors up. On top of that, next door is a music group, another group has kids playing tapes and dancing. One group is doing photography, another art, like the noise of five hundred active, energetic kids.

I'm convinced that one of the executive members is an *impimpi*. Hanief says it's impossible as they're together all the time.

I tell him how Sans kept repeating 'elitist' and that could only have come from someone at the meeting who obviously took a total dislike to what I said.

We agree to remain in touch and work together, but we decide that I would in future meet with him only and not the executive.

I became a regular liquor buyer; drinking at home instead of shebeens. In a shebeen thieves boast, intellectuals show how smart they are and generally everyone wants to feel a person in a shebeen.

Shebeen owners need to make a living and can only do so with the consent of the police. And what better way of reciprocating than by informing on your clients. What did Sans say? 'We can help you. We can help you in lots of ways, but you have to help us.'

Jeanette and Marius got married and skipped to Botswana the same year. In 1983 they were forced to move to Angola after threats from the System. Jenny and her seven-year-old daughter Katrina were killed by a letter bomb in June 1984.

Pindi was released in May 1977 after being held for a year and a day. He was banished to Katlehong and had to get a permit from a magistrate if he wanted to visit Johannesburg less than ten kilometres away.

Sometimes, when he visited and his time was almost up we would rush through the streets of Johannesburg — SBs always on our tail — to get to the magistrate's court in Germiston in time.

He was offered a job in Johannesburg. They refused permission for him to take the job. He was offered a job in Germiston. They told him he couldn't take that one either. Eventually they sorted out his working problems for him; they told him that since they had banished him to Katlehong he should find a job in its closest industrial area, Alberton, an AWB town!

Pindi had been through the mill. The electric shock treatment, the water treatment, standing on a block of ice naked, having cigarettes put out on your body, the bashing until you pissed and shat in your pants, and falling into your own shit, all while insane, demented bully boys laughed and laughed.

Quite often, Pindi told me, he would lose consciousness and wake up to find that twelve or more days had passed. Then after being examined and declared fit, the whole process would begin again.

He said the whole interrogation would sometimes gain a momentum of its own and they would go crazy, like wild animals, pounding you, not caring whether they killed you or not.

We concluded that those were the circumstances which killed Biko.

He said it was surprising more people weren't killed under interrogation.

Pindi told me to be careful as they mentioned me but couldn't pin me down; they had played reels and reels of taped conversations I had had with people.

Pindi's nerves were fucked. He never recovered from that year and one day. He had a constant nervous twitch. He would keep turning around while talking to you, whether standing, sitting in a car. The last time I saw him — in 1985 — he still had the twitch, eight years later. A year later — on 31 July 1978 — they arrived at his house early in the morning and served him with orders banishing him to Butterworth.

They asked his wife and kids if they wanted to stay or go with him. Euphemia and the two kids decided to go with him. The SBs told them to pack, called a truck. They loaded all their belongings on to the truck and bundled the family onto a car. Pindi shouted and swore at them all the way to Butterworth.

They stopped at a house in the Butterworth township where a local policeman was waiting. They unloaded the furniture, gave Euphemia the keys and left.

Pindi gained a new status. He became one of two stateless persons in his own country. South Africa and

Transkei had jointly decided not to recognise him as a citizen.

In 1984, after years of trying, and with the help of the Dutch Embassy and others, we managed to secure a bursary and permission for him to study at the University of Natal. He was refused permission to study at Wits, his first choice.

He said he was going to play it cool, complete his law degree and hopefully become a partner or start his own law practice. He felt he owed it to Euphemia who had been the breadwinner all these years, as employment for Pindi was almost non-existent. There was also a third child on the way.

We spoke on the phone occasionally. He always told me how well he was doing and that he was, as he had promised himself, playing it cool politically.

Every Saturday a friend who worked in a store would let him phone Euphemia at 1pm in Butterworth.

On a Saturday in April 1987 he spoke to her and, as usual, told his friend afterwards that he was going back to his residence. He never arrived at his residence.

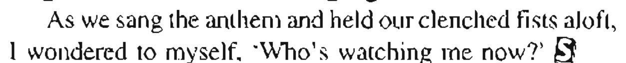
Pindi has never been seen or heard from since.

The SAP, SADF, KwaZulu, Transkei and Ciskei police all deny that they have him in custody. So did the Minister of Police and Defence to questions in Parliament by Helen Suzman. Maybe, if the real truth is ever told about the CCB one day, one of those truths will be about Pindi.

The tuition programme of the BSS got off the ground and prospered. The BSS survived and continues to operate today. I've survived too.

In September 1977, a week after Steve Biko was killed, I attended a memorial service for him conducted in Afrikaans by Beyers Naude. I couldn't believe my ears. Here was Bey speaking in Afrikaans and saying the most progressive and enlightening things in this language which many had come to identify with total fascism. It taught me a lesson about language.

As we sang the anthem and held our clenched fists aloft, I wondered to myself, 'Who's watching me now?'



Some Other Journals and Publications

The English Academy Review
The English Academy of Southern Africa,
P.O. Box 124, Wits, 2050.

Jewish Affairs
P.O. Box 1180, Johannesburg, 2000.
Poems, stories and unpublished essays on all matters of Jewish and general interest, between 2000 and 5000 words.

New Coin Poetry
Institute for the study of English in Africa,
Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 6140.
Poems. Enclose s.a.e.

New Contrast (incorporating Upstream)
S.A. Literary Journal Ltd., P.O. Box 3841, Cape Town, 8000.
Poems. Enclose s.a.e.

Southern African Review of Books
Centre for Southern African Studies, University of the Western Cape,
Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7530.
Literary and social criticism; some poetry and occasional fiction

Tribute
P.O. Box 781723, Sandton, 2146
Stories, poetry and letters.

Vrye Weekblad
P.O. Box 177, Newtown, 2113.
Stories and poetry.

Writers' World
Options Unlimited.
P.O. Box 1588, Somerset West, 7129.
News on writing. Contributions welcome.
Contributors' guide available.

Staffrider Vol. 10 No. 2 1992

Changes

My grandfather talks in volumes about the Msomi gang
And how American their dress and behaviour was.
He blabbers non-stop about Durban and District
And how he was chosen for the pick team to Rhodesia.

My grandmother's voice becomes romantic when she talks about her salad days
And how she danced the rhumba and the cha cha at the Social Centre.
When she talks about how she met my grandfather love is written in her eyes.
And she tells me that she started songs at the church.

My father closes his eyes when he talks about the mbube group
And the number of goats they won at various halls.
He brags about the number of his girlfriends before he met mother
And what a dandy he was with a walking stick.

My mother talks in volumes about her hair
And how her expert hair plaiting invited many suitors.
She praises the way whistles were directed at her
And the way her bodily movements caught the eye.

But when I ask how they fought apartheid,
They look around for eavesdroppers
And with twists of anger in their faces
They send me to the shop for a box of matches.

Mohamed Patel

By Strandfontein

Die blou hemel glinster in the water
soos die wit skuim teen die rots spoel.
Die branders stoei met die menslike
inhoud van die water wat die southeid van
die oseaan besoedel.
Baaiers van die Kaapse flenter Townships
kom om frustrasies te verspoel in die
koel kalm see wat jaarliks
sy kwota slagoffers eis
Baie kom om die hitte te ontduik
maar nie die hitte van die ewigheid
want by Strandfontein kom 'baie om te baai'
maar daar kom ook baaiers om te bly.

Leonard Koza

On Graduating

We used soap for washing both our bodies and clothes,
A few years later we graduated to Sunlight soap for both,
And then we had Sunlight for clothes and Lux for the body,
When I grew up I used Aramis on the rope and dry-cleaned my clothes.
We used green grass to brush our teeth which had turned yellow,
A few years later we used coal to make them white again,
And then we graduated to Colgate and toothbrushes,
When I grew up I asked my dentist for false teeth and gold fillings.

We wore zipless shorts and walked barefoot on hard ground,
A few years later we wore long pants with no shoes,
And then we wore Dobshires and Florsheims and Alpinits,
When I grew up I wore Gucci, Carducci and Lanvin suits.

We used to play soccer in the midst of tall grass and rickety poles,
A few years later we played in short grass but no poles,
And then we graduated to Crown Mines, FNB and Ellis Park,
When I grew up I flew to Wembley to watch Guillit, Zico and Maradona.

We lived in the rickety collection of woods below the mountain,
A few years later we built our mud and timber structures,
And then the council moved us to the location's matchboxes,
When I grew up I applied for a housing subsidy and a big house.

Sadly though
I have forgotten how to toyi-toyi.
When I shout 'Down With White Rule' my voice diminishes
And when I see a comrade I look the other side.
Have I been neutralised?

Mohamed Patel

Die Ysterbrommer

'n Ysterbrommer kry die reuk
'n reuk van mense
Wat bemoeid en bedrof saamdrom
Die brommer het soos 'n valk oor
geboë hoofde gevlieg
Skielik het die brommer 'n traan-eier
onder sy vlerke gelos.
Daar was 'n gehoes
en geproes van groot en klein,
'n oue van dae het soos 'n os
neergeslaan,
Here help! Here help
die ysterbrommer het net ongeërg
weggevlieg.

Leonard Koza

Staffrider Vol. 10 No. 2 1992

Die Snelweg

Die snelweg is breed en uitdagend, oneindig en uitputtend,
Soos a swart vernouende streep na die ewigheid
Voertuie teen hoë spoed tog veilig sny
Een vir een na die verte en word
ingesluk soos a vlieg deur a verkleurmannetjie.
Langs die swart pad hang gestroopte mieliestronke
vir myle aaneen,
soos 'n tapyt bedek dit die horison,
die mielieblare krul droewig om die
stronke asof dit verdere stroping wil voorkom.
'n ligte windjie lig die pap hangende blare
en dit sak dan weer.
die masjien fluit en elke verte word
onbereikbaar vervang deur uitdagende oneinde.

Leonard Koza

Die Lente

Wanneer is dit lente? Wanneer is dit lente?
die blommetjies in my hart verstik en lewe
nie meer.
Wanneer kom die lente?
Wanner kom die lente?
Bloed laat mos geen blomme groei
Moet dit vir altyd winter bly
sal ek vir altyd só koud moet kry?
Gee my jou hand!
Gee my jou hand!
Sodat ons saam kan blommetjies plant
maak oop jou mond en sing
miskien sal dít die lente bring.

Leonard Koza

Flags, Medals and Anthems

Gavin Mabie

I turned back and followed him cautiously. I needed to be sure before I could commit myself to asking him. He was briefly swallowed by an oncoming stream of pedestrians, before re-emerging, walking erect and purposeful. Who else could possess the short, stocky walk, but Leon. I was sure it was him.

For a moment there, a few paces back where we had bumped into each other, an instant connection was formed. Something more than the brushing of unfamiliar bodies in a crowd. It was like an electrically charged reunion. He must have felt it. Our eyes had interfaced, momentarily paralysing me. Those dauntless eyes, small and piercingly black, will always stay with me.

He had given one, two quick steps to the side and disappeared from vision. My hand went to my chest almost automatically. Yes, it was still there under my shirt, as it had been for the last fifteen years, lying coldly against my skin.

I slowly caught up with him from behind, trying to, from a distance, establish a positive identification. Fifteen years is a long time. A man can change, must have changed physically if he was a boy fifteen years ago.

I experienced a demanding thirst to solve the puzzle. What if it wasn't Leon. What if it was? What difference would it have made? Where has he been all this time and what happened to him? I was losing him. He darted in and out the whirling mass of people. Leon, Leon, I wanted to call out, to call him back. The pavement tide swept him away. He was gone. I pushed through the busy pavement traffic, trying to retrieve him, but he was gone.

His eyes still played in front of me as I walked back to the bus stop. Was it Leon? Later, much later, as the bus made its way down Main Street, memories of our childhood came back to me.

We were about twelve then. Our dreams were those of twelve-year-olds. We talked at length about how rich we would be one day, about the girls we were to marry and about the houses we would build. Our village seemed like the only place in the world. Nothing existed outside of it.

It was the only place in the world, Leon believed, where bone-shaker-riding down a steep, uneven and rocky slope, was the favourite past time for boys our age. The name of this game is derived from the bicycles we used to ride down the slopes without any brakes and tyres on the wheels. This was done to test your courage and every boy had to do this if he did not want to be an outcast.

We attended the same school, a two-block school built around a little garden, painted white with a green roof middle. There was a charming old bell which

sounded only on Sundays when school turned into a church. The school was a mission school and the principal was also the minister.

A tall flagpole towered next to the principal's office. It was here that the whole school, the girls dressed in green faded with all the washing, the boys wearing grey shorts, most of which were inevitably patched, and white shirts, would gather on 31 May every year to commemorate Republic Day.

This was a very important day on the school calendar, the principal would continually stress after the morning reading every day leading up to it.

Weeks before this ceremony we would be practising 'Die Stem' to perfection. Mistress Wolfkop, the music teacher, would drill the correct articulation of the lyrics: 'Uit die blou van onse hee-mel, uit die diepte van ons siee'. Standing there in front of us, making a circle with her thumb and forefinger. 'Rond, rooond,' she would say.

'What is a national anthem?' Leon asked her after one of the rehearsals.

'Yes, what it is teacher?' I echoed his question.

'It is something that binds a nation together. It builds national pride. Like a flag,' the teacher responded. 'So when you sing it, it should be with pride, from the bottom of your soul. Do you understand?'

'Yes ma'am,' Leon confirmed. 'But can a nation have more than one anthem? Because Nceba, who lives on my street, says that this is not his anthem. They have got their own. So I thought maybe it is alright to have more than one.'

'I think there's nothing wrong with that. Like you have different languages, so you have different anthems,' the teacher explained painstakingly.

'And this is our anthem,' I was eager to get back into the conversation, to show the teacher that I could also ask questions. But before I could think of one, Leon was already asking his next.

'But, it can't be ours because it is the white people's also. Why don't we have a separate one for ourselves, teacher?' he persisted. 'Like Nceba. Or why don't we rather practice Nceba's anthem because he lives in my street?'

The teacher was now visibly agitated by his persistent interrogation.

'Yes, why don't we?' I genuinely wanted to know.

'Those are questions you must ask your history teacher. And anyway, you are supposed to read your history books. Now go to your class,' she hastily dismissed us.

We left there disappointed because we knew that the history teacher was not one for questioning. And we did not have text books anyway.

We formed the second shift of school, because we were in standard five and our school was too small to accommodate all the pupils at the same time. So we would come in when the little ones leave just before noon. This meant going to school at eleven in the morning and retiring at five.

After five, we played around the school grounds where Leon's father was expected to pass, coming from work. He was a railway-man. We normally carried his work stuff for him and were rewarded with the leftovers of that day's lunch.

He always looked worn-out. His eyes foggy and his back curved, a picture of complete dissonance.

Leon loved him. He loved to ride on his back and to sit on his lap. I always noticed the look of admiration in his (Leon's) eyes when his father told us a story about the brave deeds of his youth while Leon drove the tiredness from his feet with a warm salt bath massage.

The trouble started when his father moved out of their house to live with another woman. Everybody was talking about it in church and at school. Leon was bitter about it. He hated his father for deserting them, for leaving himself, his mother and his two little brothers to their own mercy.

'A father and mother belong together,' he explained later. 'He belongs to us, he's our pa.'

All the admiration was turned into bitter hatred.

He never rapped a word about his father afterward. Maybe it was too embarrassing. He turned into himself.

I wanted to help him, but did not know how. He did not want me to become involved.

'This is not your business,' he would dismiss my attempts to make him feel better about it. We never played on that field again.

The days and weeks which followed saw our little community turned upside down. It all started when an

Springbok Safari IV • Karen Harber • Pen and ink

officer of the local rent collector paid each tenant or property owner a visit. I was sitting under the cast iron verandah when he, dressed in that funny grey and black uniform, came riding up to the door on his bicycle.

He gave me a pink coloured note which I was to hand to the homeowner.

'It's the new law. All coloured people will be moved,' I heard somebody shout from the street.

'We must move to a coloured area ... people can't live together like this,' my mother explained later upon my enquiry.

'But can they instruct us to move, just like that?' I asked.

'Yes. they can.'

'And what if we don't want to go.'

'You'll see what happens to them. It's the law. Anyway, that new area is better. There is running water in the houses and a flush toilet in the bathroom. Far better than what we have now. Most people will go. I'm sure,' my mother replied with finality.

'But what about the school ... my friends?' I protested.

'You'll have to go to a new school, a proper one too and make many new friends,' she countered.

The official came around again. This time he did not deliver notices, but carried whitewash and a paintbrush with him. I watched him as he moved from house to house, painting large numbers on them. He continued marking the houses, unperturbed by the people who came out to look at him. He would skip the odd house, here and there, where black people stayed.

I went to Leon's house to see if it was also marked for removal.

He too was sitting on the stoep, screening the sun out of his face.

'The man is sick,' he said, picking up a stone and hurling it at something. 'Dying.'

I turned to where he threw the stone, picked up one and hurled it in the same direction. The late afternoon sun was scorching my feet with its January rays.

'He is calling for me,' he continued, with a trembling voice.

'What would he want from me after all this time...? What, tell me. What is it he wants?'

My lips and my head felt thick and my eyes started to flood. I kicked sand with my one foot in an effort to keep from the burning sun.

'Maybe he wants to make it right before...,' turning to him. I was searching for words. 'Maybe he wants you to forgive him. He is your father...and I know you love him. Maybe you should go to see him before it's too late.' The last sentence sounded so crude that I felt like swallowing it back.

He did not go. I went instead. I think I went there to tell him that Leon loves him, irrespective of his bull-headedness. I wanted to tell him that because I believed it to be true.

Their house was small and dark. A tightness, gripping the air was trapped in that little room. The woman took me in. She looked older than she probably was. I don't think I understood everything she said.

He was somewhere on the deep hollow bed. I was afraid to go closer, but the woman pushed me forward, towards him.

He looked so small, lying there. I could only see his thin, pale face sticking out above the cover, which was rising and falling rhythmically under his breathing. His eyes were closed.

The woman spoke to him again. I wished I could understand their mumbling.

'Come here, my son,' he called softly. 'Sit by your father,' his hand reaching out for me.

'I'm not Leon,' I wanted to say, but he was talking to the woman again as he drew me closer to him. He looked and felt so weak. His hands....

'I'm glad you came...,' coughing. 'Now we can clean our hearts,' he said. The woman gave him something.

He gave it to me saying: 'What is done is done, that we can not change. Take this my son.'

I tried to interrupt him, to tell him I'm not Leon, but could not gather enough courage to utter a word. The woman looked at me sharply, as if to say, take it, take it, take it, you must take it.

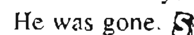
I took it in my hands, that small medal. It felt cold.

'Don't talk Oom, please you're tired. Sleep Oom, sleep.'

'You are my son, forgive me....' He could barely keep his eyes from closing.

I went out there, my whole body shaking. I searched for Leon immediately. All over, I looked for him, but he was gone. The medal was clutched tightly in my hand. It was slippery, wet with perspiration. Their house was standing there, empty.

'They moved already, all the coloureds in this street must be out today,' somebody answered.

He was gone. 

COURTESY OF NEWTOWN GALLERIES

Untitled 3 • Sylvester Khosa • Oil on board

B.M.C. Kayira

Three Poems

Independent to be Dependent

We somehow came to choose
This lane on which we rumble —
The kind of choice which made us
Independent to be dependent.

We're much akin to youngsters
Who shrug the parent's touch —
So that within the murkiness
Of some darkened shack,
The smoke may twirl around
To the gurgle of alcohol.

The preparations for the barbecue
Are done in common cause —
When the common men are lured
In the lore of gathering wood,
And that of sowing fires
Even on bare landscapes.
Then, while the bush is burning
And the counties falling prey,
Somewhere in the warmth
Of some tapered chamber:
Pop goes the party —
Far, so simply far
From the scathing fires!

First to reach the Hewers
Is the smell of oiled cutlets;
And then, here and there,
The unwilling drop of bones
Sucked flesh and season.
Unknown to all the Hewers,
The smoke is doing the rounds
In addictive dissonance
Within the Exclusive Chambers.

Then, at peak of the The Inner Party,
The smoke stains have sprouted
Beneath the hardening soles
Of the Blinded Revellers —
Deep to the bone.
And who then to treat the bone stains
But the 'departed master'?
Who then to oil the hinges
And save the fettered dreams
Of maddened opulence?

We somehow came to choose
This lane on which we rankle;
The Hewers must live to nurse
The burns of the Initial Barbecue,
To be refurbished time to time
By exotic surgery —
The kind of choice which made us
Independent to be dependent.

The Ingredients of an Opera

What we're seeing now
Are the ingredients of an opera.
In a time set to chime off
Way round the corner,
The stars themselves will beam it
Right across the skies —
So men who tread the forums
Of truth or holiness
May then spread the word
Bound or unbound.

The sky is long-tightened
And the spark-plugs glistening;
The opposing poles,
Estranged to delirium
By the gap of poracity,
Are stealthily closing in
One on the other —
Truncheons held level
Like with the brows
Of a pair of charging sheep
Vexed to insanity.

What we're seeing now
Are the ingredients of an opera;
The fragments are twig-dry,
And the chaff only fluffing
In line for the Awaited Flare —
When men who tread the forums
Of truth or holiness
May then spread the word
Bound or unbound.

The Next World War

The next world-war
Was fought long ago,
For men have learnt to mar
Without having to bear the cargo.

Every war that surges
Is a kind of world war,
The warring baits are edges
To the giants of the stolid par.

Never mind the quirk songs
Which may always come to muffle,
Nor yet the silent gongs
Which only serve to baffle.

Grand Parade

To Irfaan 1990

You do not live here anymore
In our world where we speak
and eat and think

I wish you could smell the dusk
on the Grand Parade
and taste samoosas
wrapped in twilight

Or see the street children
twined around indifferent cars
Begging for salvation
sniffing glue
or vendors juggling apples

Or does a soul have sight?

I wish you could permeate
our world
on the Grand Parade
at dusk

Carol Edson

Flautists

Your flute,
you fashioned it from the tibia of a powerful bull
and you polished it on the arid hills
scourged by the sun;
his flute,
he fashioned from a reed trembling in the breeze,
and the holes he made alongside running water,
drunk with moonlit dreams.

You play them together at the heart of the evening
as if to hold back the curved pirogue
capsizing on the shores of the sky;
as if for it to be delivered
from its fate;
but your plaintive incantations,
are they heard by the gods of the wind,
and of the earth, and of the forest,
and of the sand?

Your flute draws out the tone, the tread one hears
of an angry bull pounding towards the desert
and who returns pounding
burnt with thirst and with hunger,
but beaten by fatigue
at the foot of a tree without shadow,
without fruit, without leaves.

His flute
is like a reed that bends
beneath the weight of a bird of passage —
not a bird taken by a child,
its feathers all standing up,
but a bird lost from its kind,
watching its own shadow, for comfort,
on the running water.

Your flute
and his —
they regret their origins
in the songs of your sorrows.

Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo
Translated by Stephen Gray
from *Presques-Songes* (1934)
in *Translations from the Night: Selected Poems*
(original out of copyright)

Filao

O casuarina tree, brother of my sadness,
come to us from a far, ocean-going land,
has our Merina soil also, for your tall slimness,
the favourable element most private to your stand?

You seem to grieve for those dances on the shore
of maidens of your sea, the sand and the salt breeze,
and in a dream you see the stormless morning of before,
your unstoppable sap rising, gloriously at ease.

Now that your exile has caused your bark to crack,
the spurt of your green feathers falters, grows slack,
for the birds you offer a hopeless place without shade,

so will my song be a labour foolish and vain,
if, depending on imported rimes and made
rhythmless, it never feeds on the blood of my pain.

Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo
Translated by Stephen Gray
from *Volumes* (1928)
in *Translations from the Night: Selected Poems*
(original out of copyright)

Carol Edson

Three Poems

Abuse

The pain seems to grow beyond
my physical self
I can feel it
But I can see it too
One with me
yet not of me
I see your pain, mother
and your agony
The torture of hurting

The foetus whimpers in its shell
Craves warmth
Love
And reaches out to its
hardened, unseeing origin
The tiny, fragile foetus
Tender
Lacking warmth
caring
cries out:

'Mother
my cry goes beyond pain
We are one
I am part of your belly
Do not hurt me
For then you
hurt yourself too'

The Worker

Worker
slave of time
feeds his mind
on labour
productivity
a wizard of dogma

Sharpens his mind
on the tools
of his trade
for perfection
as he knows it

In perfect arc
complete his cycle
for economy
for progress

For bourgeouis symbols
bought with
bourgeouis money

And when he concludes
his day's work
he cannot buy
the sweat of his hands
for his children
(lower-income group, you know)

He is but a cog
in the big wheel of productivity
though without the cog
there is no wheel
and no status symbols
and no productivity

And no society
that revolves around the theme
that the worker —
forerunner of progress —
cannot enjoy the fruits
of his own labour.

Graffiti

Poetry splattered on walls
Philosophy embedded in grime
Prophets of time

Painted exclamations of disgust
Disillusionment steeped in paint rust

Oppression immortalised

Winter rain eroding,
Mocking its legitimacy
In seeping rivulets

A cry for truth
From our embittered youth
In mime

Workers' Day (May Day 1992)

Yes, comrade Jessie:
'What a shameful thing to do!' you asserted,
'Working on a Workers' Day!?'
Yes, comrade Jessie,
It is shameful, isn't it!
But it is a thing to do;
(Like writing these lines on this worker's day)

You see, comrade, as I said:
Workers will be needing us,
We have tasks to be done,
(On this workers' day)
Taking care of workers' demands.

A war to bring about love
Is like making love — some actor said some time ago;
We have to work every minute (even our minds/brains in our sleep)
To bring about this workers' paradise.

You see, comrade,
This long war is like a car or a wheel forever in revolution:
We grease it everytime,
We oil and fuel it every now and then,
Otherwise, it stalls, stutters and ceases to take us to our destinations.

Ja, rest is alien to us.
Holidays are only holy for the silent dead;
Sundays shine coldly/dimly on us their late night's journey to sleep;
Rumours of their coming and going drone on us so long after, like the sound of an aeroplane on a kwashiorkor'd kid's mind,
Time-watching is for a lucky few — not us.

This workers' day is a working day!
It is a wheel in revolution:
Every shoulder available must keep it in motion.
This workers's day!

Need I say more?
This long road to a workers' paradise:
You see, comrade, it has brought us many fortunes:
Along this road we have forgotten how to laugh,
Our lips fly up and down exposing our teeth to
pretend laughing.
To love, oh! we only embrace to give semblance to
that quality.

Our sons and daughters,
Our mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers (not to
mention our lovers),
Have no special relevance to us (anymore).
Their faces are like shimmering bicycle wheel spokes
in fast
motion/revolution
Their warmth and pleas have taken on the quality of
goods of mass-production

Should we complain?
If we have to:
Perhaps we must take this lesson from the universe,
Marx & Engels:
'Everything is in motion, nothing is static'
'Everything comes into being and pass(es) away'

This is workers' day!

Morakabe Seakhoa

Excitement

I have forgotten my purse in the taxi.
What am I going to do?
I have forgotten my personality.
What on earth am I going to do?

People are looking at me.
Do they know me?
People are thinking that I am mad.
Pushing each other to look at me.

I know the next moment I'll be mad.
I had to enjoy my excitement.
When I lose my control,
I'm excited.

I have forgotten to ask his name.
He was friendly and nice.
I have forgotten to ask for his address.
He appeared to be serious.

Hey you, everybody must relax.
I feel so good. I feel healthy.
What the hell am I doing?
I'm excited.

What do you like?
Cooldrink or beer?
When the excitement dies out,
Can I remember what was up?

Ntombintombi Mabika

COSAW Monthly Debate Series

COSAW has launched a monthly debate series with topics like:

- **Artists: which party would you vote for?**
- **The performing arts councils: do they have a future?** and
- **How should the arts be funded in a democratic South Africa?**

The aims of these public debates are:

- to generate within the arts community an interest in the issues which directly affect them
- to create greater public awareness of and sympathy for the arts
- to challenge the major political parties and allocators of resources to consider the arts and the interests of artists more seriously and
- to cultivate a greater unity and basis for action around issues of common concern among all arts organisations and practitioners.

With the arts not regarded as a political or developmental priority at the moment, it is clear that unless the arts community in our country takes proactive responsibility for their interests and for the arts in general, the arts will increasingly be neglected or limited by ill-informed state policies, narrow visions of development and profit-oriented economic priorities.

It is equally clear that within this context, unless the progressive arts structures form themselves into a united, representative lobby, the controllers and primary beneficiaries of limited resources for the arts will continue to be an elite minority.

Artists: which party would you vote for?

Geoff Klass, chairperson of the Democratic Party's Parktown constituency, Susan Voss of the Inkatha Freedom Party, the ANC's Wally Serote and Sheila Camerer, director of the National Party's information department, participated in the first debate held at the end of April, offering their respective parties' policies on the arts. While all conceded that their parties did not have well-formulated arts policies, their presentations were remarkable more for the similarities in ideas than conflict.

Similar themes emerging out of all the presentations were:

- that in a democratic society, there should be maximum State funding for the arts with minimal government interference
- that it was unlikely that given major needs such as homelessness, unemployment, lack of medical facilities, etc, the arts would receive significant state support
- that arts practitioners needed to organise themselves into strong lobbies which could agitate for resources and policies to develop and protect the arts and

- that freedom of expression should be enshrined in a new constitution with no censorship.

More predictable, party-specific themes were:

- the DP's and IFP's insistence on a free market economy as the basis for artistic freedom
- the ANC's call for artists to continue to play a role in eliminating apartheid and
- the NP's commitment to art for art's sake.

A summary of interesting points which emerged out of the presentations and in the ensuing discussion follows:

- Art should be decentralised i.e. spread throughout society as centralisation makes it easy for a government to control and if it so desires, destroy art (DP)
- What about privatising the existing performing arts councils with a view to diverting funds for the establishment of appropriate art and culture infrastructures in the major black urban and rural areas? (IFP)
- When the broader community's interests are reflected in their structures and artistic practices, the performing arts councils will be more acceptable (ANC)
- A key recommendation (of the 1981 commission of enquiry into the promotion of the creative arts) was that an arts council (as in Britain) should be formed (NP)
- A new, fully representative national arts council should be established (IFP)
- Any government in which the IFP played a role...would almost certainly move promptly to have schools and technikons offer a growing range of opportunities for future generations to develop and pursue interests in the arts
- The inculcation of an awareness and an appreciation of art must begin at home and at school (NP)
- Arts policies should surely be created by YOU (artists). Governments and parties in power should protect what YOU want (IFP)
- What about a cultural CODESA? (Audience)
- Matters of censorship should be dealt with by the courts rather than by state-appointed committees as in past (ANC)
- There should be no government control over the institutions of civil society, including cultural and artistic institutions which should be allowed to operate autonomously (NP)
- The DP has historically stood for an open multiculturalism which would at once allow the free expressions of individual cultural entities and their gradual evolution towards a synthetic national cultural identity (DP)
- The question of a tax benefit for donations for artistic purposes should be looked at (NP)
- Instead of the state allocating where taxpayers' money goes, let the taxpayer determine that him/herself and this financial support should be tax-deductible (Audience)
- What about taxing film and sports tickets with the proceeds going towards broader cultural development? (Audience)
- Multi-party control over public funding for the arts should be implemented now to ensure a more just distribution of funds (Audience)

The above comments on the performing arts councils and arts funding certainly provide a rationale for COSAW's forthcoming debates on these subjects. From the number of people gathered at this event (about 150) and the comments from the floor, it is clear that there is a great need for such debate; hopefully, these ideas will lead to constructive action.

Copies of papers presented at each of the debates will be published by COSAW and will be available from COSAW's offices at reasonable cost and as a contribution to ongoing debate and development of theory.

Ba a Ntena, Ba a Tella

Ga se jaanong borraabo ba ja mokaikai.
Ke sebaka ba gata dikgapetla di sule —
Phoka ba letse mo go yona ba fologa Afrika.
Ya re ka molelwane o le dirai, ba ikgoga diphuka Afrika Borwa.
Ba ne tla dirang? Mmusa-ka-tshipi a kgemetha,
Mosotliwa a lela a be a itome loleme sepodi.
Tlhobolo e sale e dirwa, e lekeletswe ka go thunya mmala-wa-sebilo.

Borraabo ba kile ba rwala dikokoro ...
Ba rwala dihelemete go fisa le go gaupane
Ba e rwele tlase ga mpa ya lefatshe la bona,
Ba gonya mala a lefatshe la bona a naya 'Baas'.
Ke kuane ya bagateledi ba montsho.
Re a bona Bleskop, Stilfontein, Kimberly le Carletonville, Kgakala!
Lo a reng? Re gonya phalo, mamepe a jewa ke lona bagateledi?

Ramasedi o lemogile a setse a feditse botaki ...
Metswako a kgethile e le mebedi fela fa a itlhoma,
Mogopolo wa Modimo o kile wa tlallwa, wa tsiboga,
Gabariele a tsaya ditaelo matsobane go fata lefatshe,
Ka a le thata, ka phoso a thibolola mongwe wa metswedi
Ga pumpunyega; kgapa ya penologa a a tlhakaneng le mofufutso wa segwaba.
Ba a fatile, ba a sutlha metsi a a phelang, ba be ba sutisa Rantsho.

Tota o ne a sa lebala go tlotsa 'second coat' mo makgoeng.
Matlho a ne a gasapane, ba itshelela ka ba tlwaetse boitaolo.
Setlhapi ba thubunyela, ba thuma go tla Afrika e tala.
Mmala wa sebilo ka o roroma wa nna dimenyamenyane
Ntekwane bana ga Poulo ba tla gama, be tapolla matlotlo a bona.
E rile ba sesebala, 'Nooi' a kwala lekwalo a le tlhomela mo phatseng.
A kopa 'au Saltiele' go isetsa 'klein baas' mae a kalakune.
'Klein miesies' a mmaya legofi gonne a kgomile lee le lengwe.
Setshego sa rulela maballo a bitswa 'Drama in Honolulu'.

R.E. Moloke

BBC WORLD SERVICE DRAMA PLAYWRITING COMPETITION 1992

THE PRIZES: First prize is £1,200, your play to be broadcast on BBC World, and a digital radio. The two runners-up receive personal cassette players and a selection of BBC plays on tape. A special prize may also be given for a script of outstanding merit from an author whose first language is not English.

BBC World Service Drama is interested in plays on any subject, set anywhere, in any century, so long as they are written specifically for radio. On radio anything which can be described can be created. A play can take place on the Moon, in an aeroplane, or within the confines of a single mind.

Let your imagination run riot. If you are resident outside the British Isles, regardless of whether English is your first language, get writing, and good luck!

Acceptance of entries is conditional on compliance with the following rules:

1. You are asked to write a radio play of no more than 60 minutes on any subject of your choice. The play should have a maximum of six central characters.
2. The contest is open to any writer who is not normally a resident of the United Kingdom.
3. No individual may submit more than one play.
4. The play must be written substantially or entirely in English. As well as being broadcast, the winning entry will be considered for possible publication.
5. The play must be the original unpublished work of the person submitting it.
6. The play entered in the contest must not, at the time when it is submitted, be on offer for publication or broadcasting in any other form or medium, and competitors will be deemed to have entered into an undertaking not to accept offers for their entries from other broadcasters or publishers before December 31st, 1993 without informing the competition organisers.
7. The final adjudication will be carried out by a panel consisting of:
   a) Shirley Gee - Radio Playwright
   b) Alton Kumalo - Actor and Playwright
   c) Jatinder Verma - Artistic Director, Tara Arts, Playwright and Translator
   d) Gordon House - Executive Producer, World Service Drama
   e) Alastair Lack - Head of Production, BBC World Service

   The BBC reserves the right to change the panel at its discretion.
8. The decision of the judges is final and incontestable.
9. No manuscripts will be returned by the BBC.
10. In respect of the winning entry, subject to a satisfactory recording being made the winning play will be broadcast on BBC World Service some time in 1993. No fee will be payable, other than the £1,200 offered as prize money, for the first broadcast cycle on the World Service. If repeated on the World Service, a fee equal to 50% of £1,200 will be payable for the first repeat cycle and thereafter the BBC will be entitled to broadcasting and other rights on the terms of the applicable BBC Radio Drama contract. (On the basis of a notional Initial Fee of £2,076).
11. In respect of all other entries, the entering of any play for the competition shall constitute a grant to the BBC of broadcasting rights to the play, on the terms of the applicable BBC Radio Drama commissioning contract at rates similar to those outlined in No. 10.
12. The BBC reserves the right to withhold prizes in whole or part if in the opinion of the judges the standard of entries so warrants.
13. It is a condition of entry that entrants warrant that their work contains no defamatory matter (provided however that they shall not be liable for any defamatory matter which in the opinion of the BBC was included in the script without negligence or malice on their part), also that it does not contain any quotation from copy-right material without appropriate permission having been obtained.
14. The BBC will consider arranging for the publication of a book containing some of the plays entered in the competition. To make this possible, it is desirable that writers retain their publishing copyright until December 31st, 1993.
15. All plays must be submitted by November 30th, 1992.

Please complete form below and send it with your entry to:
BBC World Service Drama Playwriting Competition, Bush House, PO Box 76, Strand, London WC2B 4PH

PLEASE WRITE IN BLOCK CAPITALS

Name...

Address (where normally resident)...

....

....Telephone number..........................

Title of Play...

Is English your first language? (yes/no)..

Signed..

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