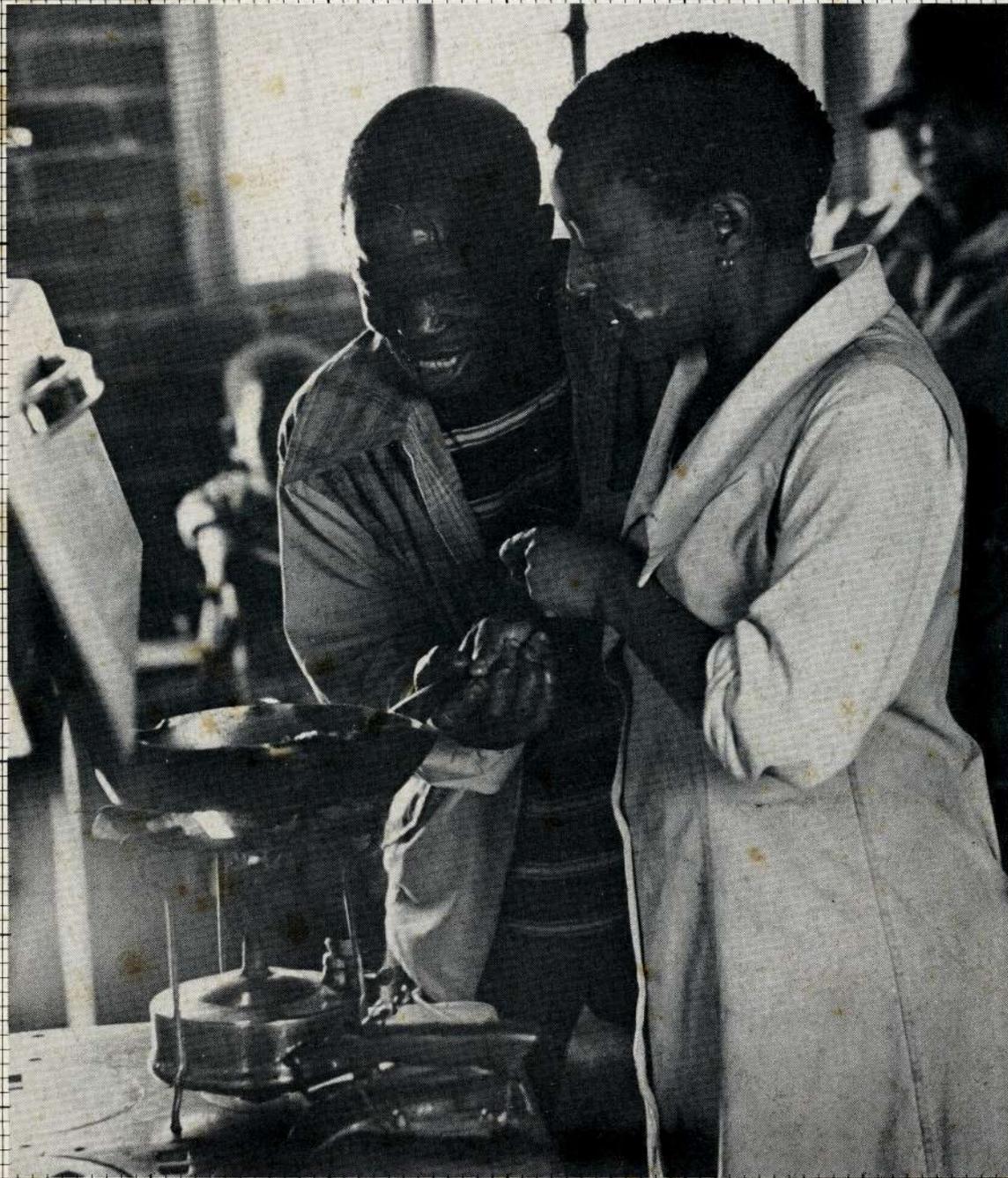


Staffrider

Vol. 1 No. 2 May/June 1978



What's Cooking?

S.A. writing from Kimberley, Kentucky, Jabavu, Kwa Thema, Lenasia, Mpumalanga, Johannesburg, Rockville, Diepkloof, Dundee, Orlando, Pimville, Durban, Iketlo, Dube, Cape Town, Hammanskraal, Evaton, Alex / 50+ writers in this issue.

Letters on the banning of Staffrider No 1
Athol and Sheila Fugard, André Brink,
Directorate of Publications, the Publishers 2-3
Mafika Pascal Gwala
Mpumalanga, Hammarsdale, Natal / Five
Poems 4
Julius Chingono
Zimbabwe / Four Poems 7
Ahmed Essop
Lenasia / Gladiators, a story 8
Stanley Mhlongo
Evaton / It's Love Freedom In This District . 10
Mtutuzeli Matshoba
Orlando / My Friend, the Outcast, a story . 11
Setsepe Sedibe, Zakhele Mtsweni
Bayajula Group, Kwa Thema / Poems 16
Meshack Mabogoane
Bayajula, Kwa Thema / Strangers in the
Day, a story 18
Bonisile Joshua Motaung
Kwa Thema / Two Poems 22
Sipho T. Molale
Iketlo, Soweto / Portraits of the Gone,
a poem 23
Wessel Ebersohn
Durban / The Dumping Ground, a story .. 24
Douglas Livingstone
Durban / Two Poems 26
Mango Tshabangu
Jabavu, Soweto / Thoughts On A Train .. 27
Sekola Sello
Jabavu / Vincent, a tribute 27
Hitler, a cautionary tale 28
Fanyana Mokalleng
Jabavu / Rain, a poem 28
Mashadi Mashabela
Jabavu / Barbed Wire Fence 28
Miriam Tlali
Rockville, Soweto / The Point of No
Return, a story 29
Mandla Ndlazi, Oupa Thando Mthimkulu
Rockville / Poems 33
Christopher van Wyk
Johannesburg / Five Poems and a Playlet 34
Muhammad Omar Ruddin
Johannesburg / Two Poems 37
Cherry Clayton
Johannesburg / Three Poems 38
Lionel Abrahams, A. Spiegel,
Reg Rumney
Johannesburg / Poems 39
Len Morgan
Johannesburg / The Fugitive, a poem 40

Errol Great Mpye, Lady Nunu
Ramohlokwane, Gordon Khuvutlu,
Moalusi John wa Ledwaba,
C. S. Gopane
Creative Youth Association, Diepkloof,
Soweto / Poems 42
Pat Seboko, Elias Rakau Mphulo,
Edmund Thengani
Open School Group, Johannesburg /
Poems 43
Stephen Watson
Cape Town / Four Poems 44
Pam Cox
Cape Town / Forbidden Fruit 44
L. B. Z. Buthelezi
Dundee, Natal / Namhla ngu Goodfriday,
a poem 46
Mothobi Mutloatse
Pimville, Soweto / Two Stories 47
Sol Rachilo
Dube, Soweto / The Bicycle, a poem 50
Jackie Seroke
Alexandra / Black Egoism, a poem 50
Noorie Cassim
Kimberley / It Is the Storm, a poem 51
Thabo Mooke
Hammanskraal / Matshidiso, a poem 51
Amelia House
Kentucky, USA / Four Poems 52
Tributes to Casey Motsisi 53
Soweto Speaking, Mrs H. Konopi
interviewed by Miriam Tlali 55
Yesterday, Yesterday, Now
a new Staffrider column 56
Reviews / Jonathan Paton,
Xolile Mavuso 57

Cover photographs:
Ralph Ndawo, whose work also appears on
..... 15, 29, 49, 50, 51

Photographs by:
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Terence Bloch 35,52

Drawings by:
Paul Stopforth 5
Nhlanhla Xaba 17
Madi Phala 19
Matsemela Cain Manaka 41

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The Banning of Staffrider No 1 : Two Letters

Sir,

We must strongly protest at the banning of the first issue of *Staffrider*. This issue presented writings by new black writers, and also work of established white writers. Its impact was strong. The voices were unique; whether they were blacks of Rockville, Soweto, CYA, Diepkloof or poet Douglas Livingstone, writing from Durban. The work was truly South African, and shared by all races. It's shocking that this authentic writing has been banned. A tragic blow to the development of our literature.

Sincerely,

Athol and Sheila Fugard.

Dear Editor,

It was nauseating to read of the banning of your first issue, following so hard on the heels of the total ban on *Donga*. If ever it was imperative for the voice of Black South Africa to find creative expression, it is now, in the unsettling wake of Soweto. And if anyone still doubted that censorship was primarily a political instrument and the extension of brute force, this ban should have convinced him of his sad error.

Whatever happens, please go on riding.

Yours faithfully,

André P. Brink.

A Letter to the Publishers' lawyers from the Publications Directorate

Dear Sirs,

**PUBLICATIONS ACT, 1974: PUBLICATION:
STAFFRIDER — Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1978**

In reply to your letter of 25 April 1978, I have to inform you that the Committee's reasons for deciding that the above-mentioned publication is undesirable within the meaning of section 47(2) (a), (d) and (e) of the above-mentioned Act, were as follows:

1. *Staffrider* is published by Ravan Press as a medium for what the publishers regard as 'new creative writing'. Some of the material is of the same undesirable nature as that published in *Donga*, now a prohibited publication. Other material again is not undesirable under the law, and some has decided literary merit. The Committee is not detailing these acceptable parts, as it would amount to pre-censorship. The fact that the publication itself, as a whole, is declared undesirable, does not mean that parts of it, which are not undesirable, may not be published elsewhere.

2. Section 47 (2) (e): Amongst the undesirable parts in the publication are those in which the authority and image of the police, as the persons entrusted by the State with maintaining law, internal peace and order, are undermined. These include the articles 'Soweto Hijack' (p. 12 ff) and 'Van' (p. 26ff), and the poems 'At The Window' (p. 25) and 'Stray Bullet' (p. 33). Other material prejudicial to the peace and good order include the poem 'Nineteen Seventy-Six' on (p. 21); Keith Gottschalk's poem 'Petition to my Interrogators' (p. 37); the poem 'Før Fatima Meer' on p. 46; and parts of the article 'The Day a Leader Died' on p. 57.

3. Section 47(2) (a): Offensive language — such as the use of 'f---' and its derivatives, 'p---' and 's-----' — is found in the article 'Van' on pp. 26 and 27.

4. Section 47(2) (d): Material calculated to harm Black/ White relations appears, inter alia, in the poem 'Change' on p. 11 and the article 'Soweto Hijack' on p. 12 ff.'

Your faithfully

(signed)

DIRECTOR OF PUBLICATIONS

An Open Letter to the Publications Directorate from the Publishers

Dear Sir,

Your letter giving reasons for the banning of *Staffrider* No. 1 has been received by our lawyers, and we have delayed publication of our second issue to publish it together with this reply.

We thank you for your compliment on the literary merit of some parts of the magazine, and your reassurance that not all parts of it are 'undesirable'. Your reference to *Donga* is, you will agree, too vague to be helpful to us. We would like to state that we regret the passing of that brave periodical. Perhaps we will have an opportunity to discuss its merits with you at some time.

You make two interesting and encouraging points on the questions of *pre-censorship* and *further publication of parts of the magazine*. We take it that you are opposed to pre-censorship in principle. Whether some of the material in a banned publication can be republished elsewhere has been a moot point for some time, and we are glad that you have cleared this up to some extent — though of course it is never clear *exactly* which items are undesirable and which are not.

We would like to deal briefly with the third main point of your letter before coming to the brunt of our reply. Whether language is 'offensive' or not surely depends on the context in which it is used — in the case of the story 'Van' it was aesthetically appropriate to the character portrayal. Incidentally, it is difficult to see how s----- can be a *derivative* of f---

However the main issue at stake in the banning of *Staffrider* is raised by points 2 and 4 of your letter. Do parts of the magazine harm the authority and image of the police, undermine the state and damage Black/White relations? We would like to argue that the *banning* of the magazine harmed, undermined and damaged the above far more than its publication.

The authority and image of the police are, let's face it, in considerable disrepair as far as blacks are concerned. This is not always the fault of the police since the situations in which they are called upon to act are sometimes *structurally* ugly and volatile. Nevertheless all the black readers we consulted (did you consult any?) thought that the depiction of the police in the magazine was fair. Moreover, they felt that the depiction, openly published, would relieve tension rather than exacerbate it: a 'safety valve', if you like.

It has been pointed out to us that the narrator in 'Soweto Hijack' goes out of her way to look for a 'good' policeman and does, in fact, find one (p. 16, col. 3), and that the policeman in the story 'Van' is in the end a 'sympathetic' figure for some readers — perhaps *because* all his weaknesses are shown. The poem 'At The Window' is a tender and delicate piece: its reference to arrests and deaths in custody reflects a very common anxiety and alarm. 'Stray Bullet' reflects the natural reaction of Soweto people to the many senseless (see the title) and tragic deaths during the disturbances. Can we overlook these feelings? Do they not have a right to be expressed? You may be interested to know that the writer of 'Nineteen Seventy Six' was criticised by some readers who felt that his poem was not hard-hitting *enough*. 'Petition to my Interrogators' reflects a general criticism of the handling of security investigations in South Africa. Must we pretend that this criticism does not exist? 'For Fatima Meer' is a moving personal tribute to a woman whose considerable stature as an academic and public figure has not been diminished by a banning order. 'The Day A Leader Died' is a distinctly original contribution to our understanding of the Soweto events. Its critical edge is not directed at the authorities alone. 'Change' may be critical of 'white conspired intentions' but it asks the question 'Will it change?'

Whatever reservations you may have about the contributions on which you pass comment, we ask you to consider above all the following line of argument. Is it not more advisable to permit these voices to be heard than to stifle them, since it is hard to see how the authority and image of the police, the standing of the state or Black/White relations can be improved until it is accepted that 'words are better than guns'? A letter from one reader of the magazine makes the point. '*Staffrider* is great because it inspires one with the desire to resort to the power of the pen compared with the power of the barrel.'

It is obvious to any reader of *Staffrider* that it is an *open* forum for creative writing. Many of the writers who contributed to it expressed an initial doubt: can we continue to publish our work in South Africa? We convinced them that it was worth one more try. The popularity of the magazine and its essential spirit depends on our refusal to apply pre-censorship. In its own way *Staffrider* has brought its measure of hope and trust to our troubled country, and we believe that its continued existence should be welcomed pragmatically, not punitively banned.

In particular we would ask that black community leaders be consulted before the fate of future issues of the magazine is decided. We also feel that it would be pertinent to your deliberations to consult the writers themselves, many of whom are members of a branch of P.E.N. International recently established in Johannesburg.

Yours sincerely,
The Publishers.

Mafika Pascal Gwala: Five Poems

Words To a Mother

I

I am still learning to say Mother
Yet I wish to share your dreams;
How much should I know of you
That I should know more of me?
Mother, whether people containerize theories
or containerize goods,
They will end up with moods
a shade darker than blue.
Mother, I need your guiding star
'Cos Mother, before I touched down
on planet Earth
I was a cosmic ray in your wombed dreams;
I lathed through the orbit of your dreams
Mother Afrika.

II

Today the neon fluorescence blinds me
as I spit out the wanton niceties
that are sweetening my teeth to rot;
I love your unadorned beauty. Mother
Mother, your stomach isn't drawn in
by Gossard's tights
The rage of your make-do's
braids your daughters to modesty in pride
Your buttoned-up anger tells me
gaming is over
You want the sun should go down bright
Until next morning to rise up bright
The way it was with the forefathers;
Not the way skyscrapers lengthen and shrink.
Your cities of today are gasketted
with autoroutes and airports,
Your cities of unequal rights
Your cities of violence and intrigue
Your cities of human challenge.

III

Mother,
my listening to jazz isn't leisure
It's a soul operation
Mother,
crankish excitements at gumbas
don't warm our souls
Mother,
the feed-in of the blues
has saved us;
Your Afrika blues blow truth
your blues are not addicted
to lies and prejudice
Mother,
they lied to me Jesus
about brotherly love and salvation
They lied to me
about the biblical piece
Mother,
help rid us of blinkered attitudes;
Or should we wait upon
the droppings of a peace dove?
Mother,
help rid us of those
who grade custom, class and property
as the world gets weaker, grows sicker
Mother,
I can feel your tight breathing
Mother,
you are a caged lioness.

IV

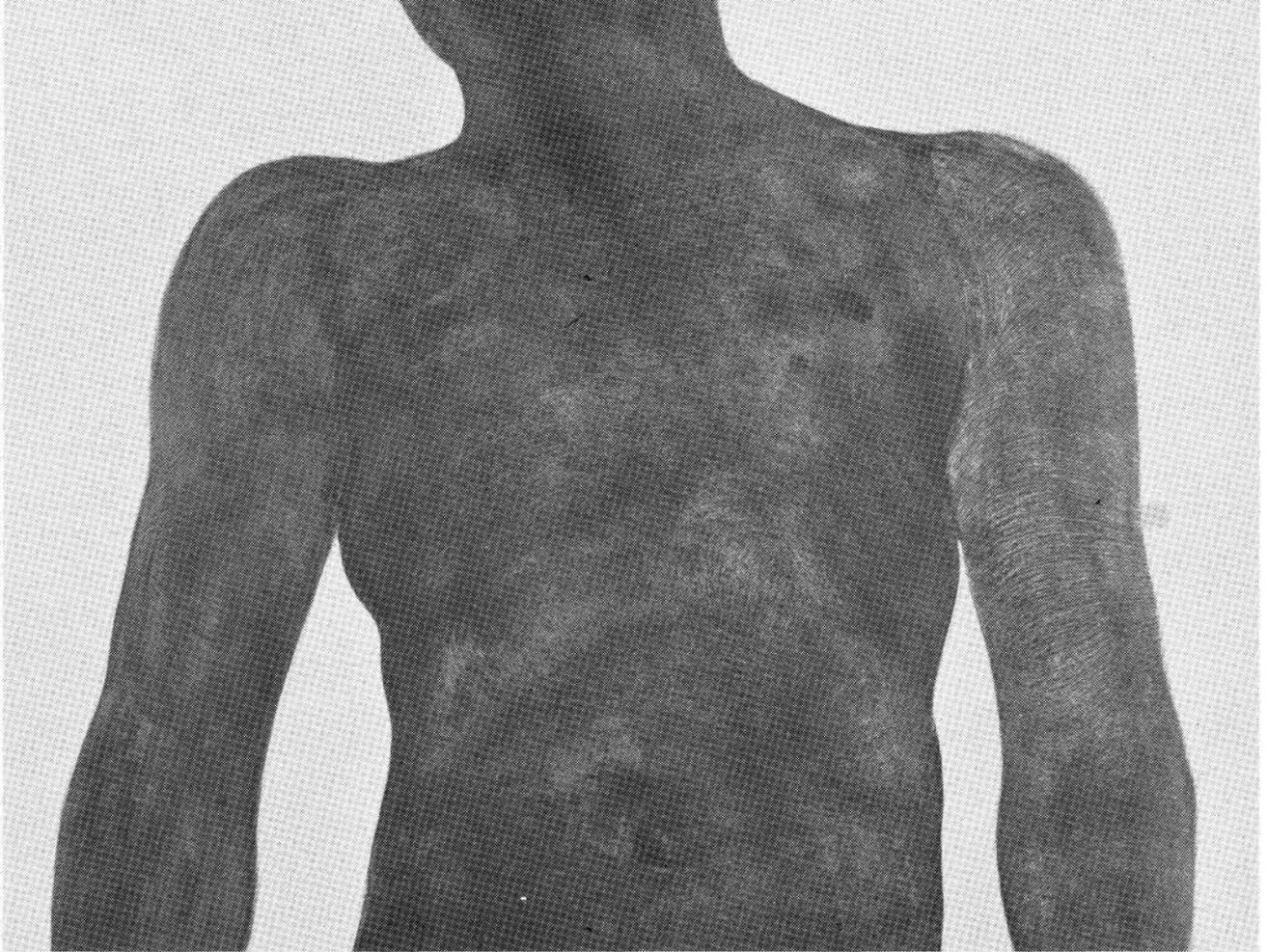
While Alexandra chokes
Your torrents freshen the buds
of wild flowers born of your nature, Mother
Across the veld at Dindela.
In the dusty evenings of Mabopane
they hail you, Mother;
Where many a son of yours
has been deballed by free world larceny
that chains you to the yesteryear
of slave cargoes and piracy;
Yet you once roamed free with your sons
to fountains of learning at Rabat
You sniffed the high walls of Baghdad
You threatened the Alps of Italy
You mothered the Lion of Judah.
Your beauty is nourished by the salts of the earth
In a world bedizened by plastic parks
In a world crowded by plastic festivals
In a world cheered by plastic wonderlands.

V

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
Your sons who drift
Your sons who sleep across the colour line
and get up to grab dompas
Your sons who are boundless like the wind
Also,
Your sons who stick up for the correct
path, to regain their rights as men.

VI

Mother,
this Azania, your Azania
will oneday be a liberated Azania
will oneday 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 our efforts
We shall honour the machines
We shall honour the sun
We shall honour the rain
To retrieve lost dreams.
Mother,
poets won't have to write of hate
Neither will there be tree and flower poems;
No, poets will add or delete
whatever is of a people's wish
in concert
with the people's will.
Mother,
am I going too far?
Am I pushing too fast?
Mother,
do you hear me?



Shroud

Paul Stopforth

Mpumalanga

BONK' ABAJAHILE

And you once asked why
blacks

live so fast
love so fast
drink so fast
die so fast.

It doesn't start with Emalangenii;
It doesn't.
It starts with the number
you found smeared on the door
of your home
— and you from school
— or from work.

one and two
three and four
bonk' abajahile

The cement smile
of the teller at the bank
adopted as symbol of courtesy:
'work and save
wear smart
get yourself a hi-fi/tv
buy yourself a car'.

one and two
three and four
bonk' abajahile

At Webber's I saw him
running like mad
on a futile marathon
after he'd grabbed a bag
from that white farmer
who pronounced 'Mophela'
like 'amaphela'

I saw her pulling up her pantihose
fixing her semi-Afrowig
With a blue eye and spitting blood
after a fight with another
of Playboy Joe's girls;
Playboy Joe was already at Umgababa
pulling dagga zol with other matjietas,
And at Umgababa Alice's Juba
wasn't sour this Friday afternoon.

one and two
three and four
bonk' abajahile

I saw him wave an Okapi
under the Umnqadodo Bridge
to settle scores born of a factory life;
Umgababa's guavatree branches broke
The guava fruit projectiled
onto Duma's music car:

Hammarsdale 1972.

The knife wound gave the telling of his death.
They covered his body with a Spinlon dustcoat
Waiting for someone to ring Inchange 41.

one and two
three and four
bonk' abajahile

Langashona's hand against his face
A face long dead to wind the story:
A flower plucked off in bud
Down Unit One South,
Msingi's expressionless face
A face not squealing.
She tried to run, to flee, to plead;
Whick! Whack!
Into flesh came the bushknife
On the sand dunes she collapsed
Waiting for fate to say it's over;
How she let her soul go
is a mystery to bemoan:
Can we blame her kind of life?
Can we blame the rage that held him
in spell?
If we are not saints
They'll try to make us devils;
If we refuse to be devils
They'll want to turn us into robots.
When criminal investigators
are becoming salesmen
When saints are ceasing to be saints
When devils are running back to Hell
It's the Moment of Rise or Crawl
When this place becomes Mpumalanga
with the sun refusing to rise
When we fear our blackness
When we shun our anger
When we hate our virtues
When we don't trust our smiles

one and two
three and four
bonk' abajahile

Sing, how can we sing
with chainblocks barring us
the Malombo Sound?
Play, how can we play
with games turning into nightmares?
Talk, should we not talk with deep,
open voices?
Wait, should we wait till the cows
come home?

UPHONDO

Dlothovu, pho kungebe ngcono
ukubhula amaphupho ethu oxolo
Sibale imilambo esiyakuyiwela
kanye nezinkalo esiyakuzikhankasa?
Kuthi lapho izintombi
zigqiza qakala ezinkwazini zemifula
Izinsizwa zigaxe imijojantaba
Kumazibuko onkana:
Phoke, uphondo nxa seluchithekile
Kuseduze ilanga lishone
Kubekanye kugudwe umnyama
wosizi oludala ngangayizolo.
Okhokho bethu kade balubeletha lolusizi:
NoChakijane, noBhambatha kaMancinza
bayonanela.

Mpumalanga

IN DEFENCE OF POETRY

What's poetic
about Defence Bonds and Armscor?
What's poetic
about long-term sentences and
deaths in detention
for those who 'threaten state security'?
Tell me,
What's poetic
about shooting defenceless kids
in a Soweto street?
Can there be poetry
in fostering Plural Relations?
Can there be poetry
in the Immorality Act?
What's poetic
about deciding other people's lives?
Tell me brother,
What's poetic
about defending herrenvolkish rights?

As long as
this land, my country
is unpoetic in its doings
It'll be poetic to disagree.

CIRCLES WITH EYES

A circle with zombie eyes
flushing Rand notes
down shopping centres
in Africa-Adieu fashion.
A circle with quincy eyes
seeking kicks in record bars
not forgetting to seek funk
in the cartridge tape of Snow White.
A circle with lobster eyes
up Sydenham's Admiral Hotel
running off with the last bit
of Asoka's seasoned drunks.
A circle whose flashy raakuit
is now Bachelor of Tarts
and Master of Ceremonies
over straights of Scotch whisky
at that posh joint of Bra Three Dice.
Where are we going
with circles that have eyes
plucked out of empty skulls
by the Law of the Vulture?

Zimbabwe

Julius Chingono : Four Poems

THE BLACK VARUNGU

Seasons have been swallowed by time
like seeds by swallows.
Snakes complain of the winters
and ants would like more summers.
The black varungu say
times have changed.

In a valley their village lies
like a grinding stone become a gravestone.
Hump-backed huts sit cross-legged
among deserted old women whose
petticoats freely accommodate lice.

There are dusty altars in their kitchens
and rusty spears hang from the thatch.
The hearth is as cool as ash.
Broken gourds from which the spiders drink
prepare strange looks for the stranger.

The black varungu
breathed Indian hemp too deeply,
wore the white man's perfume,
swallowed enough Greek and Roman
dust to craze them
and so are wanderers
searching for their homes.

I RESIGN, MY LOVE

I resign, my love, I resign.
My sweat melts the stones
Underground in the mine
But fails to melt your heart.

I, THE HEN

Picking
one by one
picking all day
one by one
scratching
the ground all day long
swallowing the grain
one by one
that is me
the hen
nothing to store
no time to rest
that is me
the hen.

AN EPITAPH

Here lies Stephen Pwanya
a renowned gentleman
who lived to forty-five.
He is survived by his pipe.
The smoke could not wait
and took to the wind.

Gladiators

a story by

Ahmed Essop

Mr Rijnhumal Rajesperry, the principal of the Tagore Indian High School, lived on the first floor of a two-storeyed building. He was a bachelor. His state of bachelorhood was not the result of his insensitivity to feminine allure, but of his positive dislike of all things Indian. He considered Indians to be the 'filthiest and most uncouth denizens on the earth's crust'. Once when Ebrahim spoke of marriage to him, he answered:

'Are you suggesting that I terminate my single state of man by marrying an Indian Yahoo? The day I marry, I shall marry a white woman.'

'Are you ashamed of being an Indian, Mr Rajesperry?'

'For your information I am not a common Indian. I am a pure Dravidian.'

Cleanliness was his forte and his obsession. His suite of rooms — a polished brass plate outside the door blazed: Mr R. A. J. Rajesperry B.A. — was carpeted and expensively furnished. His clothing was immaculate. His middle-aged body, consisting mainly of bones, was at all times spruce and smelling of perfume and after-shave lotion. His sparse gently-waving hair was glued to his head; his moustache was the barber's masterpiece. His motor-car, a black Citroen ('Note that this is a car in advance of its time') was polished to a mirror's gloss by his white-clad servant Anna.

Though Mr Rajesperry's manners were impeccable, he derided our frailties and foibles in sadistic street sermons. 'The words "Thank you", "Please", "Pardon me" do not appear in the vocabulary of Indians. You are a mob of unruly Yahoos. I find your manners odious and crude.' And he would walk hurriedly away towards his car, open the door, operate the pneumatic suspension so that his car rose from its low-slung position, and drive away with a look of utter disdain.

At school Mr Rajesperry spent his time in dealing with 'long-haired, unproductive louts'. He fought an endless battle to have recalcitrant pupils march in military fashion, show eternal respect for superiors, obey instructions and 'behave like Europeans'. He was the victim of many complimentary nick-names, but eventually the word Yahoo recoiled in vengeance upon him and became permanently his. It was a name that must have flayed him, for schoolboys 'Yahoood' from stairs, balconies, corridors and dark recesses and the name reverberated through the streets like some wild call in jungle terrain.

Mr Rajesperry was a 'dedicated student of the Fine Arts'. His artistic pretensions were displayed in canvasses in which a vibrant orange-red dominated his paintings of landscapes — his only subject — where the oil ran in surrealist rivers of fire and destroyed perspective. On occasions he would exhibit his paintings on the balcony. Once he constructed a number of miniature homes, as architects do, with wood, plaster, paper and other materials, and opened the exhibition to the public. In explanation he said: 'I have been commissioned by the authorities to plan the new

Ahmed Essop's stories have already won him a special place in the literature of Africa South. *The Haji and Other Stories* is to be published later this year by Ravan Press.

Indian residential suburb of Lenasia and these are models of some of the homes that will be erected.' We examined the models with interest. 'Please remember it is a solo effort, a solo effort. My only hope and prayer is that the Yahoos won't convert the suburb into a slum. I may also mention that I have been commissioned by my educational superiors to draw up the new syllabus for Fine Arts in schools. Indian children are generally ignorant about art, not to mention a certain primary school principal.'

* * * *

The primary school principal was Mr Rajah who lived on the ground floor of the building. He was a fat satyr of a man, a lover of the flesh of goats and the flesh of fat women. On several occasions I carried messages from him to certain well-nourished women in Fordsburg. He had five children from his fat wife Halima. He was an extremely affable man and was always ready to take us for a drive in his red Chevrolet ornamented with chrome-plated accessories to various cafes and fruitshops and regale us with confectionery, fruit and cool drinks. 'Help yourselves, boys, it's on me,' he would say, with the owner looking wide-eyed and pretending to be pleased. We later discovered that the various fruitshops and cafes belonged to parents of children who attended his school and that 'It's on me' hardly meant at his expense. His kitchen was well-stocked with provisions, from spiced ox-tongue to trays of choice fruit, and the provisions seemed to increase in quantity when end-of-year examination results at his school were about to be released.

Mr Rajesperry and Mr Rajah were enemies. The origin of their antagonism lay in their differing temperaments rather than in any quarrel over something or other. One day we were clustered around Mr Rajah who was sitting on a chair outside his doorstep. He was talking to us about Mr Rajesperry.

'He thinks he is superior because he lives upstairs and has carpets in his rooms. And

all those Whites visiting him? A lot of stupid school inspectors. Yesterday I heard him telling Mr Marks that if I so much as looked at his paintings he would have me arrested for it would be "tantamount to theft". Those were his words. His paintings are fit for the rubbish heap of an asylum.'

We laughed and just then we saw Mr Rajesperry going up the stairs to his apartment in the company of a man.

'Some people always attach themselves to their masters,' Mr Rajah said loudly. We tittered satirically.

Mr Rajesperry, smarting at the sarcasm, proceeded to his rooms. We remained with Mr Rajah for some time while he told us anecdotes and cracked jokes, most of them of an indecent kind.

Mr Rajesperry and the man came down the stairs. We watched in silence. Good manners demanded that Mr Rajesperry accompany the man to his car in the street. On his way back Mr Rajah addressed him:

'Stop, Mr White'

But he quickly climbed several steps of the stairs and then stopped.

'Some people's manners are putrid.'

'Some people use Elizabeth Arden's complexion creams but there is no white result!'

We laughed derisively.

'If you speak to me address me properly, Mr Rajah.'

'You can only run after Whites.'

'I am proud of that. They are civilized.' Ebrahim decided to intervene in the argument.

'Mr Rajesperry, the Whites are oppressors.'

'I am afraid I don't understand you politicians. They are our superiors.'

'We Indians have a culture. What have your superiors?' Mr Rajah asked.

'Culture? If you call eating foul-smelling curry culture, eating betel-leaf and spitting all over culture, living in filth culture. Has anyone in India ever invented such a thing as a bicycle, not to speak of an advanced machine like my Citroen? Indians are a lot of unproductive morons. Yahoos!'

And he walked up the stairs to his apartment in triumph.

Mr Rajah felt beaten.

'You boys should not take this lying down. He has insulted you. Don't worry about me. I'll get him someday.'

* * * *

The fight between the two men took place one day — not directly, but by proxies. Anna, slender and tall, represented Mr Rajesperry; Elizabeth, fat and short, represented Mr Rajah. The battle had its origin in a squabble which started after a basin of dirty water had been emptied over Mr Rajesperry's Citroen. Mr Rajesperry came down the stairs, stopped half-way when he saw Mr Rajah, and accused him of having sullied his car. Mr Rajah retreated to the safety of his doorway.

'Why don't you instruct your servant to empty your filthy water somewhere else?'



Photographs by Mark Lavender

Lenasia

'The two clasped naked bodies were rolling on the pavement again. Suddenly Anna screamed: Elizabeth had her teeth embedded in her arm.'

'Why do you park your car on the pavement?'

'I will park it where I prefer.'

Mr Rajespery's servant stood beside him, dressed like a nurse, and Mr Rajah's servant beside him, dowdy and ugly.

'Anna, did you see that creature empty the dish water?'

'I saw her, master.'

'You didn't see me,' shouted Elizabeth.

'I did, with my own eyes,' answered Anna, placing her index-fingers on her eyelids.

The two women now took up the argument in an African tongue. They spoke menacingly and shook their hands wildly. Suddenly Anna came down the stairs, Elizabeth proceeded towards it and they confronted each other.

They began with a sort of skirmish during which they tried to tear off each others' clothes. Anna's starched cap went flying, the straps of her apron forced apart, and her blouse ripped off. She in turn tugged at Elizabeth's dress; the cheap material offered no resistance.

Anna delivered several hard punches to Elizabeth's body. Elizabeth clasped her and the two women fell and rolled along the pavement. They threshed, wrestled, pounded with clenched fists. When they were tired they rested for a while, their hands gripping each other's, their legs intertwined.

The battle had moved a short distance from where it began. Mr Rajespery was left standing on the stairs and Mr Rajah in his doorway.

The two clasped naked bodies were rolling on the pavement again. Suddenly Anna screamed: Elizabeth had her teeth embedded in her arm.

Several people threw themselves on the women and, at length, managed to free Anna's arm from Elizabeth's teeth. Anna lay on the pavement, her arm bleeding. We ran to Mr Rajespery who was still standing on the stairs to tell him of Anna's condition, and that he should take her to a doctor.

'To a doctor? I am a doctor,' he said, staring at us.

Mr Rajah stood at his door, his thumbs in his braces, and laughed triumphantly. Mr Rajespery, seeming oblivious of him, descended the stairs, went towards his car, opened the door, entered and operated the automatic suspension. His car rose to its maximum height, then went down, rose again, went down again. Mr Rajah came to sit on the fender of the car, and laughed jeeringly as the car rose and sank. Suddenly Mr Rajespery darted out of the car in a swift menacing movement that shocked Mr Rajah who fell and sprained his ankle, bounded over the steps of the stairs, entered his apartment and locked himself in.

Someone took Anna to a doctor. Fortunately her wound was not serious. But more serious was the state of her master's mind. Next morning he was seen sitting in his Citroen, speaking to himself, shaking his fists at those looking at him, and refusing to come out. Many people came to see him; children milled around his car; and everybody laughed at the sight of Mr Rajespery in his black Citroen, going up and down.

Evaton

It's Love Freedom in This District

by Stanley Mhlongo

There comes a time when this world whirling on its axis can propel an awakening bloke to dizzy heights.

A bloke with a hangover like mine may wish for the tranquillity of the sea, but where the blazes will composure come from with all this buzzing and zooming, and the ticking of a clock very nearly turning my pad into a madhouse? The blankets too are irritating, seeing them so close — so close, you know, instead of a fleshy woman to keep the inside stories of bed narration going. The zooming of vehicles on this highway! With my house on a sharp curve, I need a robot in my head to manage the noise reaching my ears. But my grimace (if you could see it) is actually the child of the 'bikinyana' from yesterday's booze supply, which those clevers and know-alls care to dub 'haja', or brandy to be formal.

At its bitterness, a pause, then a sharp reflection on the wifey, so-called because I rather like her to be underlined only for reasons which stink of liberalism, the in thing in this environment. Marriage counsellors and lobola instalments are customs rotting in the garbage since the willing patriots of the new idealism became authoritative here, with the 'vat en sit' stance to the fore. I am part and parcel of

the civilised clan who invented this 'free enterprise' notion, according to which the feminine pawn is fed the idea — which I believe stinks of Women's Lib — that 'a husband is not the boss of your life, hence you are not his possession — you owe him nothing if you want out, when it comes to sharing the bed with him for the night.'

Since this idea was first fed to non-voters who just were not interested, a compromise has at last been reached in vehement support of women manoeuvring their own apron-strings, hitherto attached to the malevolent animal called man. Now lobola instalments, marriage counsellors and what do you know, the pathway to these sophisticated matrimonial channels (lobola receipts) are things forgotten and described as abstract trivialities which have dissolved into oblivion.

When I met Meg at this particular shebeen, I mistook her for a shebeen queen as she commanded a podgy figure, overflowing with fat, the symptom of these liberal dependent spouses. There is no rule changing love at first sight in the statute books yet. So I eloped with Meg. That is, we conspired to leave together, in other words Meg's own willingness to play the 'sacri-

ficial lamb' and come and live with me did the trick.

To be verbose, I told her: 'You get tired of me then you just vamoose. You don't need to be sworn in and out like a trooper. Why violate the words in the holy book — until death do us part — just because you will be wanting your freedom? Love is like a candle and can be blown out just as easy. What happens when you change my name in your diary for another man's that suits it better, you think? Buying you with that kinda money, that lobola look like today, will make me a loser and leave me with a broken heart. So I give you your liberty and my love, eh?' I suggested.

Whereafter I slugged down the Bantu beer popular as 'fast move', then I handed her the jug. 'Yeah,' she giggled. 'Your story's a good one so I buy it Sammy. It has all the aroma of love freedom.'

Today, as I splash my head in cold water, I distantly remember her suggesting separate sleeping corners for the night, hence the whyso I was sleeping alone. There is no nagging and no complaining. So who needs the dreary love customs. After all it's love freedom in this district (and no loss, I should add) so who cares? Aha six mabone!!

My Friend, the Outcast

a story by Mtutuzeli Matshoba

*Woe to them who devise wrong,
And work out wickedness upon their beds.
In the morning light they do it,
Because it is in their power.
They covet fields and seize them,
And houses, and carry them off.*

His name is Vusi. For his whole life he has lived with us at our location. I have known him ever since I started to notice that there were other people in the world besides those whom I saw at home. We made trains with mealie cobs together when we were small; we hunted the delicious wild rats and little birds of the highveld on the mining land where we were not allowed, together; we learnt to swim in the Klip rivulet together when it had rained and the water was deep enough; we went to old, and now gone, Harlem cinema next to Faraday station together; we learnt to smoke and to lie in wait for the little girls at the shops together; we played 'chailence' (soccer challenges) with a tennis ball against the boys from the other streets, together. He quit school first and he sold apples and sweets in the trains and I went to school but we were always together at all other times. Ah, there are countless other things that we did together, which if I counted I would never get to telling you about what happened the other day.

Roughly, here is the story of my friend. Mind you, I was not there when this happened for the first time, but I can just imagine what took place; what with such things being part of life for us darkies. We read about them in the papers, we hear about them every other day, we come across the people who bring them about, that is, who cause our friends pain and sorrow, many times in our lives. But when you read about it or hear about it, it is never as realistic as when it happens to someone who is close to you.

Sometime last month on a Wednesday morning, when the eastern horizon was beginning to be etched out against the grey light cast by the first rays of a young day, there was a loud knock, that rattled the dishes in the cupboard and vibrated the window panes in their frames, at the front door of Vusi's home. Vusi's mind was wrenched painfully from the depths of slumber. At first he thought that he had just woken from a terrible nightmare in which ghouls had converged upon the house screaming for his blood. When he recovered from the shock, he realized that it was the unmistakable knock of the police that had jolted him from sleep. While he reached for his trousers on the small bench near the bed, he tried to remember what he had done wrong. 'A guy's mere existence is a crime in this cursed world. You break the law without being aware of it, no matter how you try not to,' he thought.

'Vula, open up, or we break in!' a furiously impatient voice with a Xhosa accent shouted from outside, followed by another nerve-wrecking knock.

From the other bedroom Vusi's mother's tremulous voice sailed, 'Who is it, Vusi?'

'It's the blackjacks, ma. I wonder what they want,' answered Vusi, having peeped through a slit in the curtains to see. He felt a slight relief at that. The WRAB police never meant serious trouble and they were a dull lot who had not been brainwashed into sadism, although when they found the going downhill, they tried to ape their sadistic counterparts.

'Let them in quickly, my child,' Vusi's mother said, and to herself she muttered, 'Thixo wami. At this time of the night! It must be something bad. But we've been paying the rent. Let me rise and see what they want.'

'Okay, I'm coming. Stop knocking like we were deaf,' Vusi said exasperatedly as he went to open. Dikeledi's eyes shone in the semi-darkness. She smothered the cries of their baby, who had been woken by the rude knocking, with her breast. The other baby, two year old Nontsizi, was whimpering with fright on the floor beside the bed. Temba, the little boy who had come with Dikeledi from the dusty streets and was now calling Vusi 'baba', slept soundly next to his sister, and in the other room on the sagging sofa, Muntu was sleeping off the last dregs of the skokiaan he drank every-day, snoring like a lawnmower. Vusi felt an urge to kick him in the ribs. He knew, however, that he could never bring himself to do it, in spite of the revulsion he felt towards anyone who drank excessively; Muntu was his brother, moreover his elder brother.

He switched the light on and the big bulb flooded the room with a glare that sent the cockroaches scampering for cover. They made the grimy walls look more slimy and Vusi felt ashamed that he was about to let in strangers to such a house. It was slightly better when Nontsizi had spruced it up. The insects were a nuisance as well as part of the family, having always been there, surviving all the insecticides on the market.

He unlocked the door and heaved. There was a screech that set everybody's teeth on edge as it swung open, and in strutted three 'blackies'. Recently their uniform had been changed from a depressing pitch black and a khaki shirt and tie into another dull colour that only a painter can name for you.

'Where's the owner of the house?' asked the first one with a bushy moustache and puffed up cheeks, in a gruff voice and with an air of importance.

The others did not want to be left out of the fun. 'Are you the mnumzane (master), you? Ha, ha, ha,' the fat one with an oily face and a neck like an accordion said. They had not even removed their caps.

'No. This is not my house. There's the old lady. She's in bed,' Vusi answered, ignoring the goading.

'We want the father of the house maan. And we haven't got forever too,' the third one butted in, not to be left out either.

'There's no father. Only the old lady. The old man is late,' Vusi felt a tightening in his chest as he remembered many years ago, when they were told, without really grasping what was meant, that their father had committed suicide by hanging himself from

the rafters of his bedroom with a thin wire, leaving them to face a merciless life which had defeated him, a man, alone with their mother. He had always asked himself what had made his old man, whom he could only remember very faintly, decide that the only way out of hardship was death.

'Wake your mother, boy. There's nothing we can talk to a tsotsi,' the one who had come in first said, with the smirk of a coward who had got a chance to push someone else around.

Vusi's mother appeared from behind a tattered curtain which was meant to give a little privacy to her bedroom. All seventy-five years of her woken up unceremoniously at ungodly hours.

'Hawu, my children, what has made you to pay us a visit at this early hour?' she asked slowly, in the manner of the ancient.

The dignity of old age overcame some of the visitors' braggadocio. 'It is abakhulu (the big ones) who have sent us, magogo. Are you the registered tenant of this house?' Bushy Moustache asked. He had pulled out a battered chair and seated himself while the others remained standing. Muntu continued to snore.

'Yes child, but he pays the rent,' she replied, pointing at Vusi.

'He pays it under your name. Don't he?'

The old woman nodded.

'It's you that's wanted then. Come with us to the office.'

'Is it trouble, my children?'

'We don't know. Our duty was just to bring the owner of the house in. Asazi, you'll hear from the big ones,' the fat one said and moved towards the door. His behind reminded Vusi of an ox.

That morning they took the old woman away for an interview with the superintendent at Uncle Tom's Hall. Vusi wanted to go along but the 'blackies' would not allow him in the van. Dikeledi persuaded him to go to work and he agreed with her reassurance that they had never failed to pay the rent on time. He had a bad day at work.

* * * * *

It was not until about four hours later, at nine, that the white staff started showing up. There were three of them, the superintendent and his two assistants. As soon as their cars came into sight, those blackjacks that had seen them first rushed forward and waited to open the doors for their gods. One even went so far as to carry a briefcase inside the building for the white man who arrived last, trotting behind the latter like a schoolchild that had beaten others in the race to aid the principal with his case. Those who had been caught unawares appeared to begrudge the others their alertness. Two of the new arrivals wore shorts which seemed too big for their thin dry legs.

It took the superintendents another hour of browsing through their morning papers to assure themselves that they were the masters of the fates of hundreds of thousands, before they could get really started with their work. With single strokes of their

'He kept toying with his pen on the blotter while his underscrapper buzzed around arranging the house files . . .'

pens they decided the comfort and discomfort of the people who came before them.

The old man who had been called in ahead of Vusi's mother came with his pass-book, the old folding 'dompass' type, held in front of his eyes, squinting and tilting his head to read whatever he was trying to make out. He stood there shaking his head dejectedly, his shoulders drooped, unlike when he had been called in. There was no doubt that he had received a stroke of grief.

The interpreter-clerk-aide stood at the door and shouted at the top of his voice, 'Mrs Nyembezi!' The frail structure of the old woman tottered painfully from where she had been sitting. It took her some time to reach the door, and in the meantime the clerk coaxed her dryly, 'C'mon, c'mon, magogo, phangisa (hurry up). Umlungu will not wait for you. We are working here!'

'Awu, my child, the years have passed. The bones have gone weak, child of my child,' apologised Mrs Nyembezi with a wrinkled smile. She tried to quicken her step but all she did was give herself fiery pangs through her body.

At last she was sitting on the bench before one of the superintendents, a middle aged man with a beaky nose, thin downturned lips, a pale pinkish, leathery, veined complexion and impersonal grey eyes. He kept toying with his pen on the blotter while his underscrapper buzzed around arranging the house files and the rubber stamps on the desk so that his lordship could reach them without straining himself.

'Ja, ouma. Wat kan ek doen vir jou?' the thin lips barely vibrated. He asked this absentmindedly, opening the file.

Mrs Nyembezi tried her best to comprehend what was said, although she knew that she understood scarcely one word of Afrikaans or any other white man's language. She looked from the man to the clerk. 'My child, please come and help me here. I can't understand a single word of what he says,' she pleaded.

'Jong! You can't even speak Afrikaans?' the white man went on in the same language. He sounded as if he regarded it as a grave sin for the poor granny not to be able to speak his tongue.

He looked up from the papers into the old eyes. His face was expressionless. Again he studied the file. 'Tsk, tsk, tsk,' he shook his head.

'Why don't you pay rent, jong?' And the clerk translated.

'But . . . but, my child, I pay. I've never missed paying. We'd rather go with empty stomachs at home than fail to pay. And I keep all the receipts. I could bring them to prove that there is not one month in all the years that we lived in the house that we did not pay,' Mrs Nyembezi explained, wringing her shrivelled hands weakly. 'There must be a mistake somewhere, banta bami (my children).'

The clerk interpreted.

'You want to say I'm lying ouma? It says here you are in arrears to the amount of one hundred rand with your rent, maan!'

The sudden outburst made Mrs Nyembezi cower, frightened even more. 'Nkulunkulu, the young white man is so angry. What shall I say to him?' And loudly, 'Please child of my child, ask inkosi not to send me to jail.'

The clerk looked exasperated. 'No one is

sending you to jail, magogo. Umlungu says you owe rent. You know you owe, so I don't see why you're making such a fuss about it.'

'But I don't owe anything. Honestly, I paid. Where could I get the receipts if I did not pay? Ask him my child, ask him.'

'So you think you're smart about the receipts, huh? Didn't your children steal them when they burnt down the offices? And if you bring them, against what do you think we are going to check the black power period and that which comes before it? We don't have the records. Your own children destroyed them with fire. Moreover who do you think has the time to check your stupid record of payment? Get this straight, ouma. First you should teach your children not to burn down things that have been built for you people out of our taxes and, secondly, I want that money paid — are you working?' he asked, a ridiculous question.

'No nkosi. My son works. I receive old age pension,' the old woman's distress was audible in her undulating voice, which trailed off hopelessly.

'How much does that son of yours earn, and how much is your pension?' the superintendent demanded.

'I don't know how much he earns but I receive thirty rands every alternate month.'

'I don't see what beats you in paying your rent when you've got income. Or perhaps you drink it in shebeens? Tell your son to stop drinking and help you with your rent — understood?'

She nodded because there was nothing else to say. The white man was really angry.

'I want that money paid as quickly as possible. Otherwise you go back to the bantustan you came from and your son gets a room in a hostel; and somebody who is prepared to pay his rent gets the house. There are thousands on the waiting list. Now go. I don't want to see you here again. You're lucky I don't throw you out immediately. Say thanks I don't,' the superintendent said and clamped his thin lips.

'Thank you very much, nkosi. We'll raise the money and pay.'

It was like saying she would get a duck and make it lay eggs of gold for her.

During the first month after the interview, the going was tougher at Vusi's home. They had to sacrifice some of their basic needs which in the circumstances acquired luxury status. Protein was one thing they could not afford at all, the little ones having to make do only with sour porridge, and when the smallest baby got sick Dikeledi had to stay away from work to take her on day-long visits to the babies' clinic at Orlando, seeing that she could not spare five rand for a quick visit to the private doctor. No one whined. Dikeledi did not ride Vusi about money, careful not to drive him to desperate measures.

When one day Vusi had come home talking about how people become rich only by stealing from others, she had discouraged him from nursing such thoughts in the strongest terms by saying what he was thinking was the same as a woman resorting to prostitution to ease up the pressure on their children. They agreed that such practices were the surest sign of weakness in the face of desolation.

At the end of the month they paid forty rand of the money they had come to accept that they owed, plus that month's amount;

and braced themselves for the next one. At least that month it would be slightly better because the old lady's pension was also due.

Someone had told Dikeledi that what was happening to them was what had happened to her before she was thrown out into the streets after her own husband had been stabbed to death in a Soweto-bound train. A person with money goes to the superintendents and tells them that he needs a house badly. They tell him that in view of the fact that nowadays there's so little money and so many people going around without any, those in possession of the little carry more weight than those who have none at all — so what about a coupla hundred rand and a solid, electrified, four-roomed matchbox at, say Mzimhlope? 'You see,' they go on, 'you Bantus think that all Europeans are rich and well-paid in their jobs. But, I and my colleagues here can assure you that we don't get enough; so we have to make a little for ourselves on the side too. How much can you afford?' they ask.

'Three hundred,' answers the prospective buyer, the thought of what would happen to those who lived in the house never having entered the minds of both men.

'You have a house,' and the green tigers exchange hands.

'Righto! Come and see us at the end of the month.'

At the time Dikeledi's friend was relating this, little did they realize that a similar deal was the subject of difference between a superintendent and a man who had paid money to get a house. The person who had paid was getting impatient. He was demanding service or his money back, and the money was no longer available.

'You said to come and see you at the end of last month. When I came you said to wait a bit. Now you tell me that the house is not yet ready and meanwhile you've taken and spent my money. I doubt if there was ever any house or if I'll ever get one. It's either I have the house now or you give back what you took from me. Otherwise I'm going to expose the whole thing through the papers,' the young man said heatedly. He had decided that the only way in which he could compel the superintendent to perform his obligation or return his money was to show him that he was capable of embarrassing him.

While the superintendent listened to these taunts, the whole of his body turned hot with rage at being addressed that way by an 'inferior', but especially the bit about the newspapers unsettled him. 'Nowadays the Wrab is getting a lot of bad publicity as an organisation to disorganise the lives of Bantus. These English papers!' he thought. 'Now the bloody unmannered kaffir is threatening to bring them into our money-making scheme, our secret. That's what comes of an opposition that plays verligte and screams at you to give the Bantus a decent education and a better deal. Build them a machine to run their affairs and the first thing is for you to fashion houses with a magic wand to keep up with their galloping birthrate. And most surprisingly, in a white area! Here, how I wish for the good old days when Bantus were Bantus and knew their place. Bring them out of the bush and teach them to read and write and they think they're smart enough to swear at the baas. Good old Bantus . . . that rings a bell! That old woman. The one who owed

Orlando

a hundred rand. Let's see how much she managed to pay. If she hasn't paid all! It's the bantustan for her and the stupid in front of me gets off my neck. Then I can breathe freely again, without thinking of the damn English papers that are busy agitating the kaffirs to demand rights; ha, ha, rights in a whiteman's land? They should have been banned too. I don't know why they were left out because they endanger our security and therefore that of the state too.'

He brightened up at stumbling upon a solution for his problem. He remembered that the ouma had shown little resistance when confronted with the amount she supposedly owed. If she had not paid all, which he was positive was as beyond her reach as the faintest star that she could see on the brightest night, he would bring down the wrath of god upon her. This trick always worked. She would relinquish the house to him, no, to the board, and go live with her relatives. The good thing with them is the way they can live in crowded conditions. He put that down to their strong family ties, and 'the way they breed'; baby girls with child before they know where they themselves came from. 'That is what they know best, sex and liquor'.

To the fuming man in front of him he said, 'Now, now, quiet down. Don't flip your top man. How can we solve your matter if we make threats at each other?'

'You better be quick. I'm not prepared to listen to your cheating anymore.'

Barely restraining himself from striking out at the 'cheeky Bantu', the superintendent ordered the clerk, and not in the kindest terms either, to produce old Mrs Nyembezi's file.

'Hawu, my friend, you haven't gone to work today?' I asked when I met Vusi at the station at about seven in the morning the other day, a time when he should have been at work. He had to be on the five o'clock train to be on time.

His hands were sunk deep in his pockets and his shoulders hunched. His head was not held as high as I had known him to hold it. He dragged his feet when he walked and he took a long time to return my greeting. I knew immediately that my friend's spirits were down. Something was wrong and I knew from his dejected semblance that I would not like it when he told me. Yet I wanted to know. That was what friendship was made for.

'I didn't go my friend, is sleg (it's bad),' he replied slowly in a downcast voice.

'Why, what's it, Vus'? Why do you look like your homestead has been burnt down? Is it because your baas is going to halve your wages and make you work overtime for nothing to cover lost production when you return to work? Don't fret about money, that is the root of evil. Your teacher taught you as much, didn't he? I went on in an attempt to cheer him out of the doldrums.

'I'm going to the office. The 'blackies' took my mother there for the second time this morning. The first time was last month,' and he proceeded to tell me about what had happened since that first visit from the Wrab. He blurted out his story with unbridled bitterness, emphasizing that the debt was a fabrication aimed at squeezing them out of the house. His bitterness spilled over to me and by the time he got to the end I was helping him to curse those who were bringing his already destitute world crumbling down around him. He finished off by saying, 'South Africa! A cruel, cruel world with nothing but a slow

death for us. I hate it, mfo, I hate it!'

I accompanied him to the office. That was all I could do to help my friend to try and save his home, the four-roomed centre of his life. He kept asking me what he could do and I hated myself for being so impotent in the face of a friend's distress. He told me that he did not know where he would go if all this was building up to an eviction. Let alone Dikeledi and the three children, because the other one, his late sister's retarded daughter, would be returned to a home for the retarded at Krugersdorp where she had spent the previous year. I tried to strengthen him by telling him that everything would turn out alright in the end; he was only being pessimistic, the Wrab officials were also human and would not be so callous as to throw them out into the dusty streets.

We did not stay long at the office either, for as soon as he and his mother came before the superintendent concerned, the one with the beaky nose, all hell broke loose. They were told in the crudest terms that, seeing they had been given two months to pay and they had managed only forty percent, the board had no choice but to repossess its house and give it to another person who would pay the rent without trouble. When Vusi tried to point out that the time had not been stipulated and neither had the two months mentioned expired, he was cut off by the inevitable question, 'Do you mean to say I'm telling lies, boy? Your mother lied to you, huh? Your mother's fault. She should have told you that the money was wanted immediately,' and turning to Mrs Nyembezi, he asked, 'You are not ashamed to lie at your age, ouma? But she did not understand.

'Would you please give us another week, menceer? We've got another thirty-five rand with us, we'll do all we can to raise the balance this week. Please help us, sir, we haven't anywhere to go if you chase us out. Here's the thirty-five rand. Show him, ma, show him,' Vusi said in his best pleading voice. The old woman produced the folded notes which were tied in a knot of her handkerchief and gave them to Vusi who tried to hand them to the superintendent. The latter threw Vusi's hand so violently aside that the money flew out of his hand, 'Can't you hear, I say your time to pay is long overdue!' he screamed. 'Now get out. By sunset I want you out of that house or I'm having you arrested — hear? I'll be there to make sure.'

The clerks who were working at their desks and the two other white men continued unperturbed by the scene. Only one or two black clerks, one of them a woman, threw half interested glances. The people who were there for their own problems ogled and hissed softly, the way black people do to express sympathy without words.

One ten rand note had landed on the desk of one of the other superintendents. As Vusi took it, their eyes met. There was a smirk of sadistic satisfaction in the man's eyes, like one who was deriving pleasure out of a tragic scene in a drama. To show his approval to the villain, he winked at the latter and smiled. His thick eyebrows and large facial bones and the bristles growing out of his nostrils made him look like a lion.

I saw it on their faces the moment my friend and his aged mother stepped out of the hall. I did not ask them anything because I wanted to save them the agony of going over the details of their disastrous meeting with the superintendent. I wished that I had not been there to share those first

moments of their tragedy because it was now my responsibility to console them and I did not know what to say. I was dumb-founded and so were they. It was hard for all of us to accept that they were now homeless. We said very few words all the way from Phefeni to Mzimhlope, and Vusi's mother moaned from time to time. I hated to think that I was going to be there when they were removing their belongings from the house, actively assisting them to carry out the heartless bidding of the superintendent.

When we came to the house Vusi's mother asked him to make tea before everything. 'At least I'm entitled to a last cup of tea in what has been my home for the great part of my life,' she mumbled. Old as she was, her composure was remarkable. That desperate look had gone from her creased face. She gave me the impression that she looked forward to the bleak future as if it were one more challenge in addition to the many which had comprised her life.

Before the tea was ready, beak-nose and lion-face, true to the former's word, arrived in the van. There were three black men in overalls with them. The two officials alighted from the vehicle with a marked urgency and the three other men followed them and stood waiting for orders on the stoep while the two barged into the house without knocking. There was no need to knock.

Seeing an official van and whites coming out of it into the house brought the neighbourhood out to watch. Children who had been playing in the street abandoned their games and ran home shouting, 'Abelungu, abelungu' At Temba's home! Their mothers left their chores unfinished to stand in their small yards with folded arms and curious expressions on their plump faces. Seeing a white man in Soweto was like seeing an eskimo in the middle of the Sahara desert. And when he went into a house, it could only mean one thing, namely trouble for the people living there.

'Jislaaik Gert! The blerry fools are still sitting!' Beak Nose exclaimed. 'Didn't I tell you to get out of this fucken house immediately? I told you that I shouldn't find you here!'

Gert played up to the tune, 'And you're still sitting! Can't you hear what says the baas? All you want now is the fucken police to come and show you the gate. C'mon, get moving, I say!' and I ducked as he made as if to strike me with his open hand.

I joined Vusi in the kitchen and we stood there, reluctant to start moving the things. It was all so untrue and yet so true that they were being thrown out by the scruff of the neck, like a drama enacted in a cruel nightmare. Mrs Nyembezi did not move from where she was sitting holding her hands together and looking her persecutors in the face, no longer afraid of them but hating them — no their deed — with all her being. I say their deed because I never knew that old woman to bear hatred for another human.

Gert saw that we were not getting started and called in the three waiting outside to cast out everything into the street, as well as the three of us if need be. They got to work like mules and soon everything down to the last rag was in the street. When they finished, Beak Nose demanded the keys and the house was locked. The officials got into the front of the van and the three black men behind. With screeching tyres they were gone from sight.

The people, who had all along watched from a distance, converged upon Vusi's mother to ask what was wrong although they had already guessed. They came with

Orlando

shawls draped over their shoulders like someone had died. They did the only thing they could to show that they were grieved at losing a longtime neighbour that way. They collected fifteen rand, saying that perhaps it would help them to persuade the office people to take the payment if only ten rand was short. Some advised that it would be better to take the money to the Wrab offices at New Canada where there were white social workers.

Mrs Nyembezi now had fifty rand in the knot of her handkerchief. Vusi began to cheer up a little at this. 'This is the best thing to do, my friend,' he said. 'Take the money to the social workers at New Canada. They'll understand the whole bleeding thing better than those sadists at Phefeni. What I'll do tomorrow is to go and borrow the ten rand from the 'mashonisa' (shylock or moneylender) where I work and by the time they open the offices at New Canada I'll be waiting for them.'

'Ya. I agree that's the best thing to do. How the hell did we overlook that angle when those Phefeni people would not understand? If we had gone straight to New Canada from Uncle Tom's perhaps all this would have been prevented.'

As the following day's events at New Canada proved, we were being only too presumptuous of the social worker's ability, or shall I say, readiness to help.

Dikeledi's arrival from work coincided with that of the new tenant's to see what sort of place he would be moving into. The stranger arrived in a Chevair, which placed him among the fortunate of the sprawling locations.

It had been decided that there would be no harm in returning the furniture into the backyard while it was being decided where it would be taken. So, of the two, only Dikeledi saw that something was terribly wrong; from the way in which those who knew her looked at her as she walked from the station. The first thing that entered her mind was her three children. When she approached the house the missing curtains told her the whole story.

She was opening the battered gate when the stranger stopped the car behind her and called out, 'Sorry girl.' He was not being disrespectful. Dikeledi was no more than a girl. 'May I ask?'

She turned and went back to the car. 'Do you stay here?' he asked, noting the way she swallowed nervously.

'Yes buti. I stay here.'

'I... er. Okay, let me come out.' He came around the car and stood with his hands on his hips. He wore a navy blue suit, a snow white shirt and a blue tie with small white dots. There was the air of confidence about him which is characteristic of those who have just found a way to keep their head above the water. Most probably very recently married and badly in need of his own four-room. Dikeledi felt uneasy standing before him, the way she felt when she faced a white man.

'Awu,' and he paused, perplexed. 'I thought this was a vacant house, mos. Is anybody else around? I see there are no curtains.' Dikeledi thought he had a friendly, though puzzled voice.

'I don't know, buti. I'm just arriving from work and I'm just as baffled. I'll see if they're there,' she turned and headed for the gate.

'Let's go in together,' he said and followed her.

She knocked on the front door but there was no response. They went round to the back of the house along the small passage, jumping to avoid the puddles made by the

water from the leaking drain-pipe which Vusi had recently repaired as best as he could, after it was reported twice and in vain at the office. The drain-water turned the dust into a rank paste that brought the flies in swarms.

Vusi and I had gone out to buy fatcakes. We could have sent little Temba but we had to have an excuse to get away from the continuous sympathisers and location gossip mongers.

Dikeledi and the stranger came upon the backyard scene unexpectedly and it struck them with an impact which broke down the girl's composure and she wept uncontrollably. She had gone to work knowing that her mother-in-law by her common law marriage had been hauled out of bed to face the authorities at the office and, until she saw the curtainless windows and, finally, their rags strewn around in the backyard, she had not thought the visits in the small hours of the morning to be anything more than one of the little inconveniences that were an integral part of a black person's life.

The stranger stood at the corner of the house, taking in everything slowly. The dilapidated state of the furniture and the piles of rags, the extreme poverty that he was witnessing did not shock him, because it was part of his life too. He had come upon such desolation a million times in his life and perhaps he might have come through it too. What made his heart bleed more than anything was the realization that he had contributed to everything that he saw before him. Where would these people go if he took their home from them? It had been stupid of him to think that he would be given a vacant house. There simply was not a single house in the whole of Soweto. That was why people stayed on the waiting list for houses for decades. He had thought that he could avoid waiting for eternity, when more houses would be built, by paying to be considered whenever a house became vacant. Those who had tricked him into causing more anguish to the poor family had assured him that houses did become vacant. He had not delved deeply into what they said and had only been too pleased when they took his money. His idea of an empty house was, say, that the people staying there were leaving on their own accord. The shock wave of 'seventy-six, the year of the tumults, had sent many a timid soul packing for the sleeping countryside. He also knew that there were many lonely old people with no one to look after them, who kept their houses on doles so that they might at least die under a roof and not like dogs, in the wilderness. These derelict humans were only too prepared to accept young couples to take over their houses and give them shelter and food until death arrived to deliver them from unrewarded lifetimes. The thought that a whole family would be thrown out to make way for him had never entered his mind. It was immoral and he would not be a willing party to it. He wanted his money back and he would add to it to build himself two small rooms in the backyard of his home and wait there for eternity. They were still childless and by the time they were really forced by circumstances to leave home something might have cropped up for him or he might have saved enough to have a four-room built for him on the new thirty-year lease system.

We came as he was telling Mrs Nyembezi what to do. 'Please ma, do exactly as I'm telling you. You said your son would try

and get the ten rand, neh? It's a pity I have nothing on me, otherwise I would help. Tell him...'

'Here he is, my son. I was hoping he would turn up so that you tell him what is to be done.' She called Vusi, 'Come and meet your brother here. He has been very good to us. God works in wonders.' The goodheartedness of the young man of slightly more than our age was reflected in her eyes.

She introduced them and left them to discuss the matter by themselves, saying, 'Because you are young and understand the ways of the white man better than we old people who allowed ourselves to become their sacrificial lambs.'

I went to join them.

We listened carefully to each word that the man told us. In short he advised us not to waste precious time by trying to take the money to the superintendents who had ordered the eviction, because he would still refuse it and sell the house to someone else so as to raise the money he had received from the young man. 'The best thing to do is, take the money to New Canada, as the old lady has told me you've already planned to do. The social workers there might be of some help in persuading the officials to take the money. But this man is a 'skelm' as you have seen for yourselves, and he might have tipped off the others at New Canada and you might never even get to explain your problem to a social worker. Don't make a mistake about it, my friends, these whites benefit together from our sufferings. So I doubt if, when you come there looking for a social worker to help you with such a problem, you would be taken to the right people. If they don't attend to your matter satisfactorily, go either to the *Daily Mail* or *Star* offices and tell them the whole thing. Don't leave out a single scrap of information. *The Star* or *Mail* people will do their best to help.'

We thanked him heartily for his noble deed in refusing the house because of Mrs Nyembezi and her family and giving advice about what was to be done. The old ladies accompanied him to his car.

Everybody was blessing the stranger for his kindness. I was inclined right then to become a little superstitious by thinking that if the affairs of man are run by a just omnipotent then that was the subtle way in which he made his presence known to us.

'Do you think it would be wise to put the things back inside?' Vusi asked me.

'It's locked up mos. How are we going to open?'

'Oh, stupid me! I should have asked for the key from that guy. He couldn't have come here without one. They must have given him one at the office,' Vusi said.

'What do we do then? Commit HB? It would be too risky. Remember that the bloody house is under the control of those sadists, and boy, should they find you here!' I opined.

'You're speaking the gospel truth, my friend. They might return in the middle of the night. It means our troubles are not yet over, then. Let me sound the old lady.'

'Awu, women!' she said to the five or so matrons who were crowded around her. 'The little ones are not lying when they sing that the burden of our lives is heavy. A glimmer of hope in the dark and you follow it. Before you're anywhere up crops another problem. Vusi here asks whether it's safe to go back inside the house since that boy, who is now the rightful tenant wouldn't mind us keeping the house.'

Orlando

'Hey, my mother's child, that good child is not the superintendent. You may make matters worse for yourselves if you do that. Wait until you get permission to go back into the house,' one woman gave her sound opinion.

The neighbours offered to divide the furniture and other things and to keep them until everything was back to normal. Some wanted to give them a place to sleep in their own crowded homes, but Mrs Nyembezi declined politely, saying that they had already done enough for them by donating the fifteen rand and taking their belongings for safekeeping. She would take one of the children to her sister at Orlando East and the two little ones who still needed their mother's care would go with the latter to Mofolo, to her sister. The retarded one would be returned to the welfare at Krugersdorp. She turned to Vusi, 'Where will you go Vus?'

'I haven't decided yet, ma. But I'll see. Maybe I'll go to uncle at Klipspruit. But today I'm sleeping here at Mzimhlope. I'll find a place somewhere with my friends.'

We slept in that controversial matchbox that night, with only the two blankets that Vusi had taken, saying that he wanted to contribute at least the blankets, wherever he was going to sleep, which would have been at my place; only for him to insist on sleeping 'home'. He told me that the whole police force, let alone the 'blackies', would never stop him from sleeping there that night. I couldn't help but sleep there, also. You might not care to know that we remained on edge the whole night. The hard floor and thin blankets did not worry us very much; we were used to that in jail. It was the possibility of being found there by the Wrab people that robbed us of sleep.

The morning brought us great relief. We washed at 'my home' and set out to where Vusi worked to see 'mashonisa' about the ten rand. Moneylenders are only too obliged to lend.

Vusi explained to a pleasant young white man why he had not turned up the previous day and that he wanted that day off too. Without demanding the typical 'proof' he gave Vusi permission to attend to his affairs until they were settled and he assured him that that would not affect his paycheck. How contrasting people can be!

Our next destination was New Canada. The white so-called lady social worker sat with her stony face balanced in the palm of her left hand. By the time Vusi came to the end of his story I could not have been sure that he was not reciting to a wax mannequin but for the incessant yawning of the listener. The problem was not communication, because Afrikaans is one of the seven languages that Vusi can speak with reasonable fluency, the others being: Zulu, English, Sotho, Pedi, Xhosa, Shangani.

'I'm sorry I can't help you boys. Go back to your superintendent and seek for forgiveness. You must have been disrespectful for him not to take your money. I can only suggest that,' and she erased us from her attention as if we had suddenly vanished.

The next train took us to Westgate station. At the *Star* offices we were received cordially. A statement of my friend's plight was taken down and he was assured that it would be thoroughly dealt with. He was told to return in a fortnight to hear the result.

Meanwhile we stay with crossed fingers and prayers that things might take a better turn. Vusi is at Klipspruit with an uncle. It is two days since I last saw him. He passes my place on his way back from work. I wonder what is keeping him from coming.



Photographs: Ralph Ndawo

Poems by Setsepe Sedibe and Zakhele Mtsweni

YESTERDAY'S CHILD

Wandering aimlessly
From noon till dusk
Teetering in the twilight of life
Existing in a world of fantasy,

Times are changed
Yesterday is no more
Discard that worrying
Over what you should have done
But never got around to doing.

Rather than delude yourself
By dwelling on how rich you'd have been
Toil for your existence
Strive for a peaceful destiny
Be tomorrow's old man
Not yesterday's child.

Setsepe Sedibe

THE GRAND ILLUSION

Thank you
For the love you gave me all these years
Bringing back alive
A soul that was in despair,
A life that had lost all will.

Thank you
For showing me the way
To a life of hope
Taking mankind as charitable
Living on a cloud.

Thank you
For showing both sides of the coin
Shattering a dream in the process
With the revelation that life
Is but the Grand Illusion.

Setsepe Sedibe

WINDS OF CHANGE

Majestic tree
Swaying gently on the mountain side
Your roots protruding from shallow ground
Are you not afraid
That a gale force wind might blow you down
If you do not sink your roots more firmly down?

Beautiful mansion
Slanting gracefully in quicksand
Displaying your sandstone foundation
With your builder's genius
Can't you request an additional pillar
To support you in case the earth should move?
Beware! It is known to be treacherous here.

Young man of the world
Graduate in modern philosophies
Custodian of worldly values
Isn't it about time
You got your feet on the ground
Following better-suited ideals and
Making your convictions stick?

Behold!
The winds of change
Are blowing violently towards you, and
The bottom of the sea
Is not a comfortable place
For one endowed with vast knowledge
As are you.

Setsepe Sedibe

BORROWED TIME

Even the wildest desert
Stretching to fields afar
Is worth keeping by the owner:
Then how did I bargain on mine?
Where will I find sleep
To face the tomorrow of hunger?
Who loves being a tenant:
Where even the coming dawn might not find me,
Where even pain evades the cry of my sickly child,
Where even thugs avoid the barking of my dog,
Where even my death will pass without a report,
My head pay for my stay.
Where's my plot
If not this?

Zakhele Mtsweni

I SPEAK IT

I speak shame
I speak blasphemy
I speak terror
I spit venom.
I haven't spoken till
I feel my thickened lips
opening and pouring consciousness.

Zakhele Mtsweni

MY SONG

Nobody sang the song as I did:
I might have cried
Where some found laughter.
Softened instead of shouting
I sang —
I was only singing my song.

Humanity rings unison:
Feeling,
quality
Pitching differently,
Generations blending harmony.

I've failed to notice how people care:
Sure I know that
The few attending left
Still know my tune —
They all sing my song.

I don't need a chord to rationalize my discord,
Now listen to this . . .
Do I sing of discord or harmony?

Zakhele Mtsweni



Drawing by Nhlanhla Xaba of the Bayajula Group

Strangers in the Day *a story by Meshack Mabogoane*

He flicked the dishevelled heap of blankets half aside. With a yawn, uttered with an anguished laziness, he stretched his right hand up to flex himself and heave out like a snake covered by a thick pile of grass. The curtain was barely open and formed a slit that sent a heavy bright ray into the sombre bedroom. His clothes were scattered: the pair of trousers was lying across the arm and seat of the chair. The shirt was sprawling on the floor, half covering one shoe. The other shoe was not immediately visible. Surveying the remaining items of his clothing he spotted his jacket neatly hung on the knob of the door.

He tilted his head to the left side and silently quipped to himself: 'Drunkenness has a way of sorting things out. The jacket was after all the most important.' The wallet was in it, his identity documents and a miscellany of important papers. 'Well,' he said to himself, 'I can drink as much booze as I like, but I'll never reach that low ebb of oblivion at which I'd stop caring about my security.' He laughed and mumbled, 'Nobody knows the troubles I've seen.' He stood up and stretched.

The shriek of vehicles which made a morning cacophony of discordant sounds was absent. The morning was already a trail blazed behind the immediate promise of noon. The day which called people to all manner of occupations had worked at its gradual pace to bring on an order and quiet which showed up his own lack of purpose and preparations. He could hear the faint voices of children and could sense too that their staccato of sounds was fading. Their romps were almost over. 'Shucks,' he said, 'even the kids have beaten me in the game of early starters.' A flash of reflection passed through his mind on what he called 'this damned unemployment business.' He ducked it by returning his thoughts to the children. He cursed the fact that his house was in the main street on the corner. 'This place is a hell's corridor for the whole township,' he often and bitterly commented, 'and a meeting ground for the little devils that gather each morning to receive the fires of the morning sun.'

Dressed in slippers, a pair of shorts and a pyjama top, he stopped outside to send one of the boys playing on the pavement to the store for cigarettes. When the boy returned he remarked to himself, 'I find work for devils to keep them busy, and keep them out of mischief.' Such darting, wry imagination came in handy in these grim times. Two days earlier he had had a tiff with the wife. 'It can't be that there are no jobs,' she had said, 'It is just that you are not earnest about seeking them.' 'I have known you to be a literate person who reads papers. Haven't you seen the swelling figures of the job seekers,' he had replied. 'Those who seek jobs wake up early each day to do their rounds and try their luck. You soak yourself in drink all night and wait for the sunny morning to dry you out for the next thirst.' She had winked and stared at him.

'You are still the Liz I married for the humour and imagination. May I renew my married vows to you . . . through storm and joy . . . and all that,' he had said, genuflecting towards her. 'You are making this

marriage as shaky as your hands that seem able to lift only glasses and bottles. If you are not careful it will fall down and crash,' she had said, and put an end to the banter.

In the past few weeks she had been working herself up into a bitter and biting temper. Jake, the husband, had drastically increased his intake of booze and was spending more time during the day at a drinking joint three streets away from their house. With the passing of each day the hour of his return was getting later. It was a bitter irony that as more people were laid off jobs the shebeens were nevertheless doing a roaring business. Though Shirley, who owned the shebeen that Jake and his buddies were patronizing, was lenient (or 'understanding' as they put it) because she allowed credit, she could be hard on those who delayed in settling their accounts. And some of the wives complained that money which could be used to meet domestic bills 'in these tough times' often filtered into her pockets.

Liz was making for the end of the bus queue. She was a bit late as Mrs Mampe was already ahead, and there was evidently no chance that they would ride on the same bus. She felt quite low because she would miss the daily jibes and raucous laughter of Mrs Mampe. She envied the morning journey by telling imaginary but tart jokes about the unfaithfulness of men as well as their weaknesses. Her favourite ran like this: 'The simple reason men are unfaithful is that if they made do with one woman they would soon be shown to be weak. Now they move around with several, so that the poor women are made jealous of each other and this diverts them from really evaluating the true performance of their men.' To this and other sallies there would be bursts of laughter.

'I am speaking from experience,' she would say, while shaking with uncontrolled laughter. The passengers, mostly women on the 7.50 a.m. bus to the city, would laugh with a mixture of incredulity at such confessions. Others would say, 'She might be right about men, but she could not have done it with mine.'

Though Liz would miss such bawdy but light remarks her spirits rose when she saw Mrs Mvulane coming up to join the queue just behind her. After all, there might be a talk about the church. They were in the same women's association, the Manyane, of the Methodist Church. Liz had not been going regularly to the meetings. Perhaps Mrs Mvulane, a great enthusiast, would fill her in on the latest developments.

'Oh, how are you Mrs Modise, after such a long time? We have been missing your enterprise. Anyway, I knew there must be a reason,' said Mrs Mvulane, opening her bag to take out her weekly ticket. But for the ferreting hands she appeared unruffled, staring at Liz with the same assurance as she felt about finding the ticket.

'How are you, Mrs Mvulane. We have had a number of family commitments that have kept us busy, but things are now clearing up and I shall be active again,' said Liz, who appeared to be quite uneasy.

The bus had arrived and the queue was steadily moving in. They continued their conversation on church matters. When they entered they were able to find a seat together. Surprisingly they drifted away

from their previous talk. What transpired was a series of short and unrelated comments that ranged through a gamut of topics, from the speed of the vehicle to past and coming social events, all punctuated by 'Well!' and 'What a pity!' The shriek of the brakes and the swaying as it negotiated sharp bends, seemed to bring life to such matter of fact statements. They got off at the Noord Street terminus and walked towards Wanderers Street. As soon as they had left the bus stop and the crowd, Mrs Mvulane said to Liz that there was something she wanted to mention to her.

'I could not do so before, because I did not see you for so long. And I was tormented inside me whether to come and talk to you about it. Well, I will soon tell you what it is,' she said, looking aside and up at Liz, then straightening her eyes to look ahead at the street. Liz remained quiet but seemed to steady herself for what sounded like a serious announcement with no punches pulled.

'Friendship sometimes demands that one must be a bit brave and forget about cheap fears like what might happen if you faced a friend and said something that would possibly hurt her', Mrs Mvulane resumed the conversation in a tone that was a mixture of flatness and agitation. But she managed to control this by laughing and opening her bag to take out a handkerchief. This gave her a moment of respite to compose herself. 'We don't have much time. There is a lot of talk among the church women and eh . . . as you know some of them would not blabber about such things. It is said that your husband, Jake, is having an affair with Shirley, the shebeen queen, and that he is in the habit of fetching her supplies from town. For this he gets paid like someone employed.'

To Liz this came like an explosion, as if a stick of dynamite had been hurled at her to bring terror. The news of the affair was shocking enough. That it was Mrs Mvulane, a woman she regarded with high esteem and who seemed to deliver those words painfully, as if participating in a national disaster, made it worse. And that the story was going the rounds among church women, a group that provided her with social relevance, was deeply undermining.

'Take it calmly and speak to your husband. There might not be truth in it. Or perhaps you can clear it up quickly,' was what Mrs Mvulane said in trying to comfort her. Liz was already showing signs of agitation, as if the fires of the explosive material were penetrating inside her flesh to foment there a reign of terror whose outcome was as uncertain as its duration.

She decided to go back to the bus stop and return home. Mrs Mvulane had already parted from her. Liz walked slowly toward the station. When she got inside the bus she stared blankly at the seats which were mostly empty. The ride home was noisy. The iron seats rattled and this had the effect of nauseating her, aggravating her disturbed nerves. She yearned for this ride home to be over. As if the driver felt her desire the speed increased suddenly, jerking her with a heave that gnawed her inside, as though her viscera had been siezed and shaken. And she felt more



Drawing by Madi Phala of the Bayajula Group

Bayajula Group, Kwa Thema

tormented as the vehicle swung, forcing her to hold firmly to the seat while being rocked by the hither and thither motion. At last she saw the end of the journey approaching as the bus entered the main street of the township. She would get off at the first stop.

She walked fast but steadily, opening her purse as she approached the house. As soon as she was inside she changed to put on the clothes she wore at home; a little soiled dress and the apron on top. She felt uneasy, as if the house was a strange place that might spring a surprise, as if the real owners might suddenly appear. She tried to make herself feel really at home by cleaning their bedroom. Then she went into the kitchen to sweep. While she was removing the doormat to beat it against a stone she heard the voice of Poppy, the neighbour, greeting her. Before she could turn around and return the greeting, Poppy asked when she had come back. 'Just now. I actually went to work to ask them to give me time off as I wanted to sort things out here,' she replied briefly. She felt easier, talking to a familiar face. Her commotion was beginning to fade away. The uncertainty surrounding her presence had faded. She was indeed at home, in spite of everything.

'Jake has just left, heading around the corner,' said Poppy, who was holding a broom as she had been sweeping the yard. At these words the thought of Shirley's house flicked through Liz's mind. She looked sternly but very briefly at Poppy and then said that she must get back to the house.

The lunch hour was nearing and she took out meat from the paraffin refrigerator, got vegetables down from the rack and began preparing for herself. While she was washing the vegetables she heard the creak of the gate and the whistling, which she immediately identified with Jake. The door was ajar and Jake sauntered in.

'What a surprise, you stranger of the day', he said. 'Have you received the normal treatment in these times — re-trenchment?'

'It has nothing to do with my work,' she replied.

'Oh, then we are still safe from poverty, unlike the church mouse,' he replied casually with soft laughter. She made no reply but the word 'church' poked her inside and ignited the smouldering, devilish fires. She went ashen.

'Why are you so sullen and so . . . eh . . . suddenly?'

He moved to the bedroom without excusing himself. What he was going to do was not clear. He did not have the jacket on when he came out. He was after all sensing some trouble. And he wanted to be quite cool. After drinking water he went back to the bedroom. He sat on the bed and gradually reclined to relax. Many thoughts and images whirled through his head. None of these came to anything, however much he tried to concentrate. Subconsciously he passed over any harsh possibility. He fell into a light sleep.

When she went into the bedroom to say that lunch was ready he rose and remarked about how nice it was going to be to have lunch with his wife on a weekday. It was long, long ago that this had happened. He mumbled a Frank Sinatra tune but changed a word:

'Stranger in the day.'

He laughed as he stood up to move into the sitting room.

'You have hurt me enough by not showing enough interest in getting a job. A

decent one,' she said and paused to look at him, knowing that the word 'decent' would provoke him. There was a momentary silence. He made no comment. The fork which he was using to turn and lift the food was held midway for a longer time than usual. He was all anticipation, and the air was charged with uneasy feelings.

'You have decided not to work so that you can spend the whole day with that . . . er . . . Shirley who employs you in many ways,' she said without looking at him. Her lips were trembling but she tried to stop this by putting food in her mouth and chewing. Jake had already fixed a firm but puzzled look on her. His face showed a mixture of anger at such brazen accusation and wonder at what could have made her come out with such a blatant remark. Yet he did not make a comment.

'It would have been decent of you to have at least waited until you got a decent job. That would have showed that you were not interested in her for the sake of drinks and becoming her booze runner. You have disgraced me so terribly that it is going to be difficult for me to forgive you,' she said. He made no reply and continued to stare at her with a firmer gaze. Then, suddenly, he rammed the plate into her face and followed up with a hard blow. He then hit her repeatedly with his fists. As she screamed and the utensils clattered to the floor he turned round the table to kick her in the face and behind the back.

'And don't come along sounding like a poet. When you get closer to earth it is thorny and prosaic . . .'

As her shrieks increased in volume children gathered near the fence. Poppy came out of her house and hesitated at the gate. When she heard him shout 'Bloody nonsense!' and 'I will kill you!' Poppy finally mustered enough courage to go into the house and find out what was happening.

'I don't know what you two are quarrelling about, but please stop the fighting. It is a disgrace. Look at the crowd of children outside, and they are also attracting more people. Please, stop, please!'

Jake disappeared into the bedroom and fell silent. Liz sobbed as Poppy pleaded. With a measure of peace returning, Poppy sat on the chair in the sitting room and said that she hoped they would settle whatever it was that had caused the uproar peacefully. Then she stood up to face the inquisitive gaze of the children.

Jake's affair with Shirley had started long before he was out of a job. It had been a discreet thing. In fact Shirley had already fallen in love with Jake before her husband left her to stay with another woman. It was rumoured among some of the 'inner' clientele at the shebeen that it was because Jake was behaving like the real man in Shirley's house that her husband had decided to leave her. Others said that the affair was

merely a pretext for Siphso, Shirley's husband, to pull out of an already disintegrating marriage, and that Shirley had decided to lean on Jake for support.

Two weeks after the incident in Jake's house Norman, a friend of his, dropped in after sunset to see him. Jake was at home after spending the afternoon in bed, a sequel to a night and early morning of heavy drinking. 'It looks as if the lay-off is already taking a toll. You loll in the house like a doll the whole day while we are straining and sweating like men.' 'Well, my life is not a bed of roses. And don't come along sounding like a poet. When you get closer to earth it is thorny and prosaic. Anyway, how is it with you after such a helluva time,' replied Jake, who was holding a facecloth to wipe his wrinkled and drowsy face. He yawned surreptitiously, covering his mouth with the cloth.

'Hell man, I have struck a spring from which you will soon be drinking the whole day, and yet come out soaked but dry and sober. And you will be leaving that place very prepared for a whacking sundowner,' Norman laughed and looked at Jake with tearful eyes.

'From poetry to parables. Now what is this, Norman,' said Jake. 'Whatever it is, you owe me a drink for getting me all confused. It will take a good half bottle to clear my mind.' They both laughed.

Jake and Norman moved out and turned the corner, heading in the direction of Shirley's place. On the way Norman came to the point: there was a job going. They wanted a matriculant with experience of laboratory work. And the pay and conditions were good. When they reached the shebeen Norman ordered a half-bottle of brandy.

'Well, this is one way of celebrating your getting a job for me,' said Jake, as he poured himself a stiff shot. 'But I hope it doesn't turn out as mean and half-measured as what you've just called for.'

'Hooray for the forgotten morning blues,' said Norman, raising his glass. 'Cheers.'

They left as soon as the bottle was empty. As they parted Norman told him that the vacancy was to be filled as soon as possible. And, unnecessarily, he nudged Jake.

Liz had already arrived. She was in fact under the blankets reading a picture book with the lamp flickering brightly on the bed stand. She lifted the book, eyed him with a glinting look, and said: 'So early to bed. Where is the source of this new found wisdom?' 'I have to wake up early in the morning. There's a possibility I may be hired tomorrow. Norman tells me there is a position in his company. They need a hard working and sober guy like your dearest one,' he chuckled.

'Ugh. We will see', she said as she put the book away and turned around to sleep.

Liz went to church that Sunday. A new priest had to be installed. He was still young and the women had arranged a rota to keep his house clean as he was not yet married. The arrival of the young priest caused considerable excitement. The joy was a sequel to the departure — to the other world — of the previous incumbent. The late priest had been a very old man. The fact of his death and the events that led to it were sombre. He was often struck by a severe illness which doctors attributed to senility. The sermons and other church duties were affected. Yet, like an aging soldier, he decided to fight on and to die in service. When he finally died a

Bayajula Group, Kwa Thema

'During the meal the conversation meandered over many topics, punctuated by laughter and looks that took on more and more the form of sublime familiarity . . .'

natural sorrow was expressed as a matter of formality. There was also a truer sense of great relief. His replacement was a young man who came straight from the training school. The stark contrast in years, the failing health of the old man and the new man's robust and enthusiastic approach to his task were the ingredients of a contest between life and death, and it seemed to the eager and happy congregation as if life had triumphed. That an unmarried young priest was to be assisted with household chores was expected. That he came under these particular circumstances increased the readiness of the women to come to his aid.

Liz was included among those to do chores. On the day, a Saturday, that her turn was up she told Jake about it. 'I am going to help at the Minister's home,' she said in a matter of fact way.

'Sure, it will serve you right. And remember that you will be representing the Nkabinde household, so do a satisfactory job,' he said, with a broad smile and one eye closed as he tilted his head towards her. 'Don't look at me in that way. You should have respect for the kind of man we are talking about, or at least for his position,' she said as she was moving away. He made no comment.

When she arrived at the priest's home he was out. But the place was not locked and a note was on the door. It stated: 'Please come in and make this your home until I return.' Liz began with the kitchen. She washed the dishes but left the floor undone as she went into the dining room and from there to the spare bedrooms. These she did thoroughly, taking almost two hours over them. It was already midday. She then moved into the priest's bedroom. As she was sweeping there was a noise outside and then she heard footsteps inside the house. She walked towards the bedroom door and peeped. The priest was standing in the middle of the hallway and, as if wondering to himself, he looked around. As he saw her he waved his hand and beamed.

'Oh, so you are still cleaning. The concern you have shown is marvellous. Those who have already done their stints here have all finished by this time,' he said in a singing but soft voice, looking straight at her. 'I am just trying to do a perfect job, if that is possible,' she replied in a sharp and tremulous voice. She went on with the work and he went to sit in the dining room. While he was sitting reading the morning newspaper Liz made a pot of tea and carried it to him.

'I really must say what a good hostess you are. It is a wonder how you have not only made yourself at home but made me feel like a treasured guest,' he said laughing and taking the tray from Liz.

'It is a part of helping you to settle down and making everybody under you feel that we have someone to look after us. You can say it is tit for tat in the best sense,' she said smiling with a mixture of coyness and boldness.

Then she went to prepare lunch. She went at it as though she had been working as a chef with an exclusive restaurant. The potatoes were mashed and done with butter and milk. She asked the priest how he preferred the steak. In asking the question she surprised herself remembering culinary nuances which she had learnt in a domestic science class but never put

into practice in her five year marriage to Jake. Her pulse beat faster at the memory of her youthful days. A thought passed through her mind about the bachelorhood of the priest. And his youth. Lunch was served on a tray and then taken to the verandah where there was a small table. On seeing Liz coming with the tray the priest waved her to take the food to the lounge. 'You don't expect that we are going to eat here in the public view. Better make the table in the lounge,' he said as he stood and straightened himself up. Liz wanted to say that she had not intended to share the table with him seeing that she had to be back at her home and have meals ready for her family. Yet she could not voice her feelings but went ahead to lay the table. She then placed one plate and some table accessories. When she entered to sit for the meal he immediately remarked about the single plate. 'I don't expect to sit all alone eating. Where are you going to have your bite? In the kitchen? No, no, no! I am a guest who expects full hospitality of my hostess,' he said laughing and extending an inviting charm that caught Liz unawares.

'No priest, I can't eat here. I must go now and make a meal for my family,' she said in meek protest, uttered with a delicate stammer and blushing eyes.

'I understand. But please call me Thomas, or better still, just Tom. If you are going to eat at your home you must at least have a drink to keep me company. And show your beautiful hospitality. My food will go better and I shall be able to savour what you have so lavishly prepared.'

Liz agreed and the two shared a table. During the meal the conversation meandered over many trivialities, punctuated by laughter and looks that took on more and more the form of sublime familiarity and suggestive blushes. When the meal was over Liz quickly washed the dishes and decided to leave.

Two weeks later Liz was fired: they called it 'redundancy'. When she told Jake the news he simply shrugged it off as a symptom of the times. 'The unemployment blues have bitten you. Hope you don't sing doleful tunes about the strains of sitting at home and having almost nothing to do,' he said. Quite a number of church people got to know about her new situation. It even reached the ears of the priest. Why people bothered themselves so much about Liz being unemployed was surprising. There were many women remaining at home. After all Jake and Liz did not have the many family responsibilities facing couples with larger families. They had only two children who were staying with Liz's mother in Evaton, thirty kilometres away from their Alexandra home. Perhaps the concern stemmed from the fact that for as long as most people had known her she had had a job. Such a change might put a strain on her. It was a rainy day, the kind of rain that falls intermittently. The clouds were dark, giving the day a sombre mood that kept people indoors. The smoke which churned from chimneys added to the effect of the clouds and wrapped the township in a pall that seemed to permeate the atmosphere and the tempers of the people.

Liz was in the house trying to gear herself for the house chores. A car drove on to the pavement adjoining her house. She went to the window to peep. The priest was already moving towards the gate, dangling the

keys. The knock came and she gasped with a hand on her mouth. She moved towards the door and opened it to him. The surprise gave way to a relaxed feeling which showed that she was already resigned to the situation. After tea was served the two found themselves in the bedroom. The priest's jacket found itself on the knob of the door which was not locked. The other items of clothing were neatly placed on the chair.

At work Jake was told that it would be necessary for him to stay a few hours late that day. This was the first time he had been requested to do overtime. He decided that during lunch he would ask the company to lend him a vehicle so that he could go home and report to his wife, so that she would not become anxious. He was given the car and drove off at high speed to the township. Before driving to his house he decided to visit Shirley's place for a quick drink. He gulped the beer so fast that Shirley remarked about it.

'Well, let me go before we get into a conversation. I don't have much time,' he said and sauntered towards the door.

Perhaps it was the drink that prevented him wondering about the presence of the vehicle next to the house. In any case his mind was too preoccupied with getting back as soon as possible. Any delay would jeopardise his chances of using the company's vehicle again. He opened the kitchen door and called for Liz, heading for the bedroom. He pushed the door and went in. He then saw a figure completely covered by the blankets, and Liz staring ashamed.

'Oh, I see we have a visitor who has occupied my position. Sorry for the disturbance. I know well how lousy it is to be disturbed on such occasions. Anyway, I came to say that I won't be back 'till late. I will see you tonight. Make my apologies to my strange bed fellow,' he finished, and moved out backwards. As he was getting out he picked up the jacket and took it with him.

When he had left Liz and the priest began to dress in a heavy silence as shameful as their eyes that could not meet.

'I'd better go now. Hope there is no blow-up,' he said, and left. She looked outside as he pulled the car away. It was not so much to see him off, as it were. Her mind was concerned about the faces in the vicinity. The street was quiet and empty and the drizzle which had already caused several pools continued. She felt somewhat relieved at the absence of conspicuous faces. She closed the curtains and got down to cleaning the house. Her overworked feelings made her to concentrate hard on the chores, unleashing energy that fired her to exert herself with a dedication that would remove more than the dirt in the house. As she worked her mind tended to drift away from the anguish. Occasionally as she moved from one chore to another there would be a darting back to the memory of the morning. Supper was prepared late. She had earlier sent a child to buy vegetables, a half kilo of mutton and a tin of cream to go with the mixed fruit salad.

Jake arrived at 10.30 p.m. to find that dinner was ready. No remarks were made until they sat down for the meal.

'By the look of things it seems that our guest was well entertained. We should have more of them so that your gifts as a hostess

Bayajula Group, Kwa Thema

can often be brought out. I also benefit by eating the leftovers,' he said without the usual laughter that accompanied his humorous comments.

'I prepared this for you,' was Liz's weak answer.

'Me? When last was I a favoured person in this house, to deserve such delicacies? Even on exalted Sundays I have never tasted so much good food. By the way, talking about Sunday I feel that this coming one I shall go to church. I feel so remorseful for having disturbed you this morning that I need to pray over my sins,' he said as he looked straight at Liz. She tried to divert this stern gaze by asking him to pass the salt.

'You see, this house has become a Sodom and Gomorrah and unless we do something to repent we shall really suffer. I sound quite religious. I have been bitten by the church bug and I ought to consult with the priest who should know the reason for this,' he said and stood up to move from the lounge to the bedroom.

Liz remained to remove the dishes and put them very tidily in the sink. She did not wash them as it was already late.

On Sunday Jake said that he must have his clothes ready so that he could keep his promise of going to church. He collected the documents he found in the priest's jacket. These included the identity card, some papers relating to church matters, and a miscellany of other items. He took the jacket along with them.

At first Liz was reluctant to go with him.

But he insisted and threatened to beat her if she refused. They arrived a bit late. The church was full, though there were a few openings on the last benches — both for men, on the left, and for women, on the right. They went in as the priest was preparing to move into the pulpit to deliver the sermon. The silence was overwhelming even though a child here and there burst out in an innocent shriek, or started crying.

'Before I start my sermon I shall request the choir to sing a song of their choice.'

The sang, 'Jesu, lover of my soul.'

After finishing they sat down and the priest began with the sermon. 'Before I start with the actual sermon I should like to say how delighted, or should I say how amazed I am by the choice of the song by the choir. I have chosen as the theme of the sermon a message of Our Lord Jesus Christ when he was asked what a person must do to gain the Kingdom of Heaven. The answer, the one that faces us, was given as 'Love thy neighbour as thy self.' We need to remind ourselves of this great truth and message. And we should try to practice it too, not only to hear it and preach it,' he said, and it was becoming evident that he was already immersed in words, as he was generating emotions to emphasise them.

Jake was exhibiting the signs of someone who was being moved by the sermon. He concentrated deeply, his face exuding sweat, making him reach for a handkerchief. In the opposite row, Liz sat quite still.

'Many of us have a superficial and sometimes a remote relationship with our neighbours. We treat them as though we do not have a bond, a Christian one, that should make us have an awareness and concern for our fellow men. We moan about how bad the world is but we forget that it is through our failure to look at ourselves that we fail to remember and practice this great message of our Lord,' he said.

While he spoke Jake had shifted to the end of the bench. He placed his hand inside the inner pocket of his jacket and let the hand rest there. He paused for a while and then suddenly jerked himself to his feet and went up the aisle. Heads turned towards him, but he moved steadfastly, accelerating his steps, which made a hollow, thudding sound. The priest gasped silently, but continued to preach. Jake stood for a while near the pulpit and placed his hands inside the inner pocket of the jacket. He waved the documents and the priest's jacket, the one he had taken away a few days before. Then he pointed to the priest and spoke the word. 'Adulterer!' He turned to the congregation, and called Liz from her seat.

'This jacket and these documents were found in my house while this man, this priest was visiting my wife. I found the two of them undressed in the bedroom. He hid himself well enough under the blankets, but neglected this proof of his presence. I have no more to say.'

There was a hush in the church. Then Jake left.

Kwa Thema

Bonisile Joshua Motaung : Two Poems

AT THE SUGAR CANE FIELDS

Men, women and children
They rise early before the sun rises
In mielie sacks they cover their bodies
And put a daub of imbola on their faces,
Making them look like circus clowns and
Coon Carnivals of the Cape.
They run to the sugar cane fields,
Where the Induna, the honourable Baasboy
Awaits them with eyes full of sleep, a tummy
Packed with illegally-brewed-brand of compound
Made 'Sqatha' and a mouth full of bad-breath
And abusive words, the real qualities of a
Slave in authority.
With slashes in hand and a song
They cut the cane in unison.
At eight one train carriage is full,
At nine another load is completed.
They work very hard to please the baas
Work hard to beg for shelter in KwaZulu.
There are snakes in these fields, but
They are not afraid, the rats are also there
Being the only domestic animals they are
Allowed to own.
The mosquitoes bite, fever is a commonplace
Occurrence, and disease befriends all.
The hot-day-and-night-summers of KwaZulu
Leave them with scorched lips and irritated skins
They don't have meetings except at funerals,
They do no war-dances except during weddings.
Once in a year, on Shaka's Day,
They meet their relations at Gezinsila Stadium
Kwa Dukuza, Kwa Mondeni, e Mandeni, e Mngababa,
And there, give vent to their suffering.
They tell O'ka Senzangakhona how they
Live and how they miss him.
They return to their sugar cane fields,
With hearts full of hope, that some day
Ilembe eleqa 'many'e 'malembe will answer.

With slashes in hand and a song
The young men sing of their maidens
'Mtakwethu Sanelisiwe'
Ngane ka baba, ngane ka Baba
Vuma, vuma, vuma, vuma
Ngikha thele ukulinda e'mfuleni . . .

The young girls sing of marriage with
An indescribable nostalgia.

'Woza, woza, woza sithandwa
Kade ngavuma, kade ngalinda
Kophela 'busika, kophela' hlobo
Buye 'Goli sakh'u 'muzi . . .

The women sing about their children, who
Have turned moles in West Deep Levels and
Owls in the white-by-night Johannesburg.

'Buya ngane yami
Buya ngane yami
Kophela 'kuhlupheka
Ngoboph' iduku, ngibhinci 'syalimane . . .

The men don't sing but mumble through the songs,
They speak about uShifu and talk about Inkatha.
At ten the Baas comes, for a moment the singing
Stops but the slashes ripping through the cane
Continue, their heads bow down and a short drizzle
Of sweat falls onto the african soil that has
Disowned them. They look at the sweat as it disappears
Like darkness at a flash of light.
Like lambs in a lion's den they wait with hearts
Loaded with fear, the fear of being swooped on
By the Baas's hard-to-please-temperament.
The Baas moves around with inspecting eyes,
He calls the Induna, 'the baasboy', who comes
Wearing a face flashing smiles, showing four
Missing teeth in a row of mmboza-smoke-darkened teeth.
His expression and gestures like a monkey
Peering from behind a tree.
Together they talk in whispers, the labourers
Hope for the best 'cause three train carriage
Loads are done.
The Baas points here and there, frowns, he smiles,

Kwa Thema

He looks at the people and they in turn look at the
Fields and lofty hills far off.
The Baas looks at them again, just to induce fear
He mumbles something to his boy, the bassboy, then
He shouts,

'msebenzi, 'msebenzi phambili
kudala kwasa, kudala kwasa
'moba lo, must go namhlanje
'stimela lesi, must go namhlanje' . . .

The people listen like they do to 'Mfundisi at the
Old school yard where they attend church.
They bow their heads as though saying 'siyabonga'.
They work themselves hard the whole day
And return to their tin shacks called home
Moving with the dignity of a funeral to face the night
Where living is absent and existence impossible.
They pack their tummies with amasi,
And their heads worry about the morrow
And their eyes are afraid to face the future.

Bonisile Joshua Motaung.

SO WELL TOMORROW

SO long we've been
friendly and patient
looking to the day when
the trumpet of the Lord
shall sound
'ABOUT TURN'
and
the first be the last
the bottom, the top
the lowly, the worldly.

WE, the silent majority
freedom disappears like a mirage
as we come.
Our song is now hummed
for it's been sung too long.
We fail to cry
for tears we've lost,
we are guests to death
strangers to life.

TO where? we don't know
for the honey bird is lost in the mist,
the lanterns shine not, for Herod
rules in fear, afraid of the child,
we hope for hope while
bathing in showers of sorrow,
we run
we cry
we hope
'SO WELL TOMORROW'

Bonisile Joshua Motaung.

Iketlo, Soweto

Sipho T. Molale : Portraits of the Gone

Like an unending melody,
As songs longingly sung,
Yet the ever new tragedy:

They pass on . . . and on.
It is all not new,
All is not really old . . .

Luthuli
they never knew
Biko
Of intellect and spirit bold
Who could laugh and forgive
His tormentor, and will be
The ultimate conquistador,
Prof who could not in the end
Tell the deaf about the land
He held so reverently dear,
How its cumbersome pricks to bear . . .

Yes, it is nature's comedy
That those of baser stature
And indubitably dubious mien
Do carry on; yes, but it is nature,
It is not all new.

She nurtured Luther King
But she also spewed
Forth Hitler:
It is not new, not old,

It is man in man
Holding, indomitably cold
In popular adversity
Or in holy martyrdom,

It is yet man who will pass
Holding his beliefs fast
While they live in our memories.

The Dumping Ground *a story by Wessel Ebersohn*

From Harrismith the road to Phomolong is rutted, dusty and about a mile and a half long. From where Rosie sat on a storm water culvert at the edge of town she could see its whole length, running first across a short stretch of flat land and then twisting to the left up the hill. At the top of the hill the only part of Phomolong that was visible was the church spire.

The people of Harrismith had built it there so that they would not be able to see it from the town. Then they installed a rickety unreliable bus to run between the two for those of Phomolong's people who could afford the fare. If you could not afford the bus, you either walked or rode your bicycle, if you had one. Of course you could spend your days in Phomolong. But there was no work there. So, if you wanted to eat, you came down the hill every day, whether by foot, bicycle or bus.

Almost the whole of Phomolong's population came down the hill daily, being careful to be back before nine o'clock each evening when the curfew siren sounded. If you were caught outside late, you might be fined ten rands, and if you only got eight rands a month, it would mean jail for sure and no earnings while you were inside, unless your boss or missus came and paid for you. Then you would be very grateful and they would deduct it at a rand a month. That is how it would be, if you had a good boss or missus.

Many of Phomolong's people walked. Every morning there would be a long untidy line of walking people, coming down the hill and across the veld into town. In the evening the line was there again, going back up the hill. At any time during the day, if you looked towards Phomolong, there would be a few walkers on the veld, walking steadily, not slowly and not hurrying. They would be coming to do their missus's washing and ironing and scrubbing, or run their boss's errands or dig their gardens or chop their wood. And they would be walking to save the ten cents for the bus. If you earn eight rands you can't spend ten cents a day on the bus. And it takes a long time to save thirty rands for a bicycle.

I will be accused of distortion if I fail to mention the man who lived in Phomolong and owned a car. Although how he acquired it, given the confines of his community, is a mystery that might interest the police if it were ever solved.

Rosie had not worked in Harrismith since she was seventy-two, three years previously. She now lived with her daughter and looked after her six grandchildren. Her daughter was lucky. She had a good missus who paid her twelve rands a month and meals. Her daughter's man got thirty rands, but without meals. So they were not poor by Phomolong's standards, but there was never anything over for Rosie. And when she came to town she walked.

Rosie had become very fat in the three years since she had stopped working, making walking difficult. To get to her feet she rolled over to one side, pressing both hands against the cement surface of the culvert to heave her heavy body upright. Once on her feet, she paused for a moment to look down the mile and a half of road to Phomolong before she started walking. Rosie did not know how she was going to get back up the hill. It had been nearly a

year since she had last come to Harrismith, but she had been feeling much better then.

Half a mile ahead the road was crossed by another. If you turned left there and then right a hundred yards further on, you passed through the grounds of the municipal rubbish dump. You could then go straight on up the hill to Phomolong, walking across the veld. It cut a few hundred yards off of the journey, but it was very steep towards the end and you had to cross a ten foot donga.

That was the route that she had decided to take. The dump was about half way. She knew that she would be very tired by the time she got that far. But she would be able to rest there and dig in the ash while she

'In the past she had found many good things in the dump — bottles that were still good, pieces of wire that she had used in the garden, a pretty ring with a stone in it . . .'

rested. Perhaps she would find something. She felt in the pocket of the old black coat she wore. Her trowel was there. Her son-in-law had made it from a piece of an old oil drum.

In the past she had found many good things on the dump — bottles that were still good, pieces of wire that she had used in the garden, a pretty ring with a stone in it . . . even the coat she was wearing came from the dump.

Rosie walked very slowly on the edge of the road's gravel surface. I did not have to, she thought. Why did I come? To see if the old-missus had anything for me — to keep me warm at night. And the old-missus was not at home. I should not have come. It was for nothing.

But she had come and Phomolong was still far away. She would just have to keep going slowly until she reached the dump — just keep going as far as the dump and then she would be able to rest. After resting she would feel better. Her legs would feel stronger again. Also the disappointment would be less if she found something good at the dump. Perhaps she would be lucky. She had been lucky often before. Perhaps she would be lucky again. I will not think about the heat or my legs or the way I feel. I will just go along slowly until I reach the dumping ground.

The sound of a truck, coming down the road behind her, caused her to turn round. It was a delivery van, going to drop a load at the shop in Phomolong. She knew the

man who was driving it, but she also knew that he was not allowed to give lifts. She stood still, watching the van come down the road towards her. She waved no greeting to the driver and, apparently, he did not see her. The van passed without slowing and was immediately hidden by its own dust cloud.

Rosie started walking again with the dust now swirling round and slowly settling upon her. I must not stop again until I reach the dump, she thought. Once you stop, starting again is too hard. She reached the cross-road and turned left, walking very slowly. Her legs were weaker than ever. She had never known them to be so weak before. I must take small steps, she thought, and be careful not to trip on a stone. If my leg twists or if I stumble, I will fall.

The afternoon had become very hot. The dust had settled at last and nothing else had come past to stir it up. She could feel the gravel pebbles through the thin leather soles of her shoes. But her legs — her legs were the problem. If she could only hold on carefully to the little strength in her legs. She was sure that if she fell she would not be able to get up again.

The gate to the municipal dump was only a hundred yards from the cross-road. Looking for it, it seemed as far as it had ever been. But she could feel the road passing slowly beneath her feet and she knew that she would get there, if she could only keep going. And getting there would be half-way home.

Then the afternoon and the heat and even her tired legs began slipping away from her, until she was no longer aware of any of them.

It was cooler. She could still feel the heat of the sun, but somehow it was not as fierce as it had been. For a moment she thought that she had died, but her consciousness opened again and everything came back. The afternoon was still the same, but now she was sitting on the ash of the dump. The ash was damp, the moisture insinuating itself into the fabric of her clothing until she could feel it against her skin. It was the damp ash that had made the afternoon cooler. Her legs were no longer supporting her and this, too, was a relief.

She glanced up at the sun. Very little time had passed since she had been on the road. Looking around, she could see two other women. They were both old and they were working steadily, scratching their way through the refuse. One of them had already collected a small pile that she was going to take home. Rosie could not see clearly from where she was sitting, but it did not seem that the other woman had found anything special. All that she could distinguish was a coil of rusty barbed wire and a chipped glass bowl. She felt a little jealous at the sight of the bowl. It was not a bad bowl. It was not even too badly chipped. The wire was nothing. She had already found enough wire on the dump to repair the whole fence in front of her daughter's house.

Durban

' . . . the wind changed and blew the fire into her face. She stepped back drunkenly, her eyebrows singed and her eyes burning with sweat . . . '

The dump was divided into two main sections. One was the ash dump where all the small things were dumped. This was the greater part and this was where Rosie was sitting. The other part was where larger articles were left to rust and decay. Sometimes people found wonderful things there. Johannes Mpunzi brought back a perfectly good bed from there, carrying it all the way home on his back. But Rosie knew that she would never have the strength to carry anything big up the hill.

She felt in her pocket for the trowel and began digging steadily into the ash without getting up. It was soft and came away easily under the probing of the trowel. She poured each load into her free hand where she sifted it quickly through her fingers before filling the trowel again. For a while as she dug into the ash she found only the bottle tops, orange peels and other junk that she had sifted through her fingers so often before. She knew that some of them did not sift it through their fingers, but if you did not sift it you stood to miss all the best things. Rosie would have missed her ring if she had been that careless.

Her work was interrupted by the sound of a truck turning off the road and coming up the track towards her. The truck was hidden by part of the dump, but she could hear the continually changing pitch of the engine as the wheels spun on the loose surface of the track. When it came into view she saw that it was a Post Office truck, open at the back with a ladder-rack on top. The back was piled high with interesting items that the South African Post Office was about to discard.

Rosie got slowly to her feet. New rubbish was always interesting. If she had looked around she would have seen that the other women had stopped working and were also watching the truck. It stopped close to where Rosie was sitting. The driver, a young white man in short trousers and an open-neck shirt, and a black man, wearing a Post Office uniform, got out. They worked quickly, first unloading a pile of cardboard boxes and then a few dozen used dry-cell batteries. Then they lifted a tarpaulin that was lying in the bottom of the truck and emptied its contents onto the pile they had made.

The three women watched every movement. Rosie had never seen anything like this before. It was all good stuff. She could use the boxes for packing things and they burnt well too. And she was sure her son-in-law's radio could work from the batteries. There was also new bare wire and thick wire with plastic covering and other things that she did not recognise, but would have to examine more carefully.

The two men had made their junk into a neat pile and returned the tarpaulin to the truck when the black man knelt next to the pile and put a match to it. He remained kneeling until the cardboard boxes were burning and then got into the truck where the other man was waiting.

Oh God, Rosie said to herself. The urge to run forward and rescue something from the fire was strong inside her, but as long as

the truck stood there she was unable to move. Then the engine started and the truck moved away down the track towards the road. Still Rosie hesitated a moment before starting towards the fire.

She almost fell with the first step, having forgotten how weak her legs were. With difficulty she regained her balance and walked quickly across the ash, holding herself erect and putting down her feet carefully. By the time she reached it the whole pile was burning strongly. She hurried round the fire, trying to remove burning pieces as she went. A few of the batteries were near the edge, allowing her to reach in and pull them out. Rosie had thrown two clear and was reaching in for the third when the wind changed and blew the fire into her face. She stepped back drunkenly, her eyebrows singed and her eyes burning with sweat and the heat of the fire. Moving round to the other side, she stumbled badly and almost gave up, but she had to get something to take home before it was all destroyed.

The bastards, the bastards, the bastards — why did they have to set fire to it? The bastards, oh Lord Jesus, the bastards. I must get something. Oh please, Jesus, let me get something so that this afternoon will not have been for nothing. There's such a lot of batteries. I must get another battery. Please, Jesus, I must get another battery. Oh Christ. The bastards, the shit bastards. I hate them. I hate the bastards.

She snatched one unburnt cardboard box from the fire to add to the two batteries, but that was all. Tired by the effort, Rosie sat down heavily on the ash and rolled over onto her side. She was breathing deeply and irregularly and could not see clearly, but she pushed her body upright as if by instinct. Slowly she became aware of the voices of the other two women, laughing and shouting. 'Hey, Rosie, the battery is dead. It cannot work the radio now.' She could see them dimly, and then, after a moment, she could see them clearly. The wide toothless mouth of one of them was laughing at her, looking like a mobile pink cavern in the black face. They were still standing where they had been when the truck came into the dump. Neither of them had moved at all in the direction of the fire. 'They all dead batteries, Rosie. You cannot use them.'

After a while, seeing that they would get no answer from her, they returned to their hunting, only glancing at her occasionally and then shaking their heads and clicking their tongues.

The sun was low by the time Rosie left the dump and continued her climb to Phomolong. After her adventure with the fire she had not dug any further, but had only rested, waiting for the afternoon to cool, eventually watching the other two women wrap up their finds in an old blanket and move away up the hill. 'Come, Rosie. It is time to go home. Leave the dead batteries and come.'

She walked slowly, leaning slightly forward against the slope of the hill, being

careful not to trip over stones and holding the box with the batteries inside it in both hands. A teen-age boy, her cousin Winifred's child, was coming down the path at a canter, his brown stomach showing through a tear in his khaki shirt. She stopped and lifted a hand to wave him to a halt, waiting for him to reach her. She opened the box to show him the batteries. 'Boy, will the radio work with this battery?'

The boy reached into the box and took one of them out. He looked at it and then put it back. 'No. That's three volt. For the radio you must have nine volt.'

'This is a good battery. You can see it is a good battery.'

'Maybe it is a good battery. Maybe it is dead.'

'You can see it is a good battery. Look at it. You can see it is new.'

The boy started edging away. He was in a hurry and did not want to waste time talking to an old woman. 'It looks right, but it might be dead inside. You cannot always see if a battery is dead.'

Rosie stared at him defiantly. 'It is a good battery,' she said. 'I will use it in the radio.'

The boy was walking away from her backwards. He shook his head. 'For the radio you must have nine volt. That is only three volt.' Before she could reply he turned and ran.

It is a bigger battery than the other one, Rosie thought. It will work the radio. The boy knows nothing.

The veld between the dump and Phomolong was far steeper than the road and she had only gone a short distance when she realised that she should have gone the other way. But at least she had the box and the batteries. If she had taken the road she would not have had them.

The hillside was rocky and the grass was short and stubbly from being too heavily grazed. Through the holes in her shoes where the stitching had come apart she could feel the sharp edges of the stones and the hard bristles of the grass. To feet that had rarely known shoes during their seventy-five years it was only a minor irritation. Her legs were the problem.

When I get home I will never go to Harri-smith again. I will stay in Phomolong until I die. Let me die in my daughter's house, but I will never go down the hill again. Only let me get home. Please, Lord Jesus, let me get home.

At the edge of the donga she had to rest again. Sitting down in the sun near the edge, she looked absently into the deeply eroded furrow. It had not been hot when she had left the dump, but now she was hot again. It was the walking. If she rested just a little it would be better. It was not too far now. Once she was through the donga there was a steep slope up to the road and after that it was flat all the way home. After a little rest everything would be all right.

The donga was about ten feet deep at the point where Rosie had to cross. The foot-path led steeply down the mud wall and zig-zagged more gradually up the other side.

Durban

Standing on the edge, she knew that many people used the path every day. But still she was afraid. She knew how easily she could fall, and if she fell she was not sure that she would be able to get up again.

Rosie sat down in the dust on the lip of the donga. Looking to see that there were no children nearby, she slid slowly down the steep slope. In the bottom she got to her feet and dusted off her skirt. Then she began the climb up the other side, going slowly on both hands and feet. A few times she slipped, but each time she stayed very still, being careful not to scramble until the movement stopped. Each time she would begin again, pushing the box of batteries

ahead of her, and each time she brought herself further up the path.

The effort Rosie had to make was too great. When she reached the top she closed her eyes and lay down on the hard stubble of the grass. The box with the batteries lay on its side next to her. She felt as though her whole body consisted only of her beating heart. When she opened her eyes they picked up the last glow of daylight, but no more than that.

After a long time had passed and the last light of the day had gone, the beating of her heart subsided. She heard the sound of the bus coming up the hill from Harrismith, often having to stop to engage first gear before shuddering on its way. For a

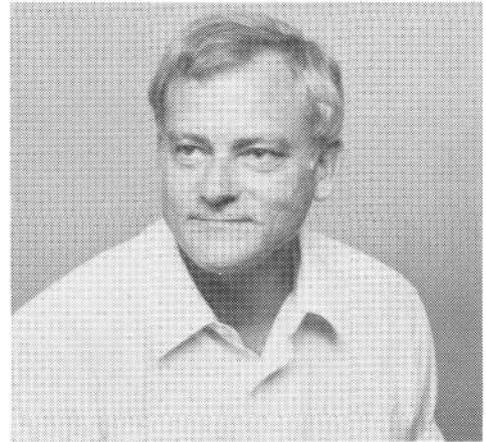
moment she hoped that someone in the bus might see her and she tried to wave an arm. But then she realised that it was already too dark.

Rosie opened her eyes wide, but she could see nothing. I'm blind, she thought. No, it must just be the darkness. She half-turned her head towards where she thought the lights of Harrismith would be, but there was only the darkness. I'm not blind. I know I'm not.

There was no point in trying to get up. She knew that she would not have the strength. In the darkness she reached for the box that held the batteries. Rosie did not know how she would get home.

Douglas Livingstone: Two Poems

*Douglas Livingstone's
new book of poems
The Anvil's Undertone
has recently been published
by Ad. Donker. His earlier
books include Sjambok and Eyes Closed
Again the Sun, both published by O.U.P.*



GIOVANNI JACOPO MEDITATES (on his *Regio absens*)

There is a green Place of mossed Rocks,
Tall trunks, a Stream, compliant Grass;
Foliage filtering the Sun
Or a blond Moon — you can so choose!
The Stream, naturally, chuckles,
& is, like the Azure, cloudless.

Hunters & Haunted, the Shutters,
The Shut, the Spaces between, that nameless Horde
— Everyone else — has simply departed.
From the Near-Distance jut Ruins
Of a Monastery, with one
Good Room: Table & Clavichord.

There are Books, Chairs, a Four-Poster.
Close by, on Eiderdowns & Silks,
Dreams a Maiden — closer than the
Benign Unicorn rooting through
The Orange Bushes. She is age-
Less, comely without Cosmetics.

Her Waist is thin; her Expression
Earnest; Legs expressive & long,
Of stunning Shapeliness; Breasts of
Neither Import nor Gravity.
There are lengthy Pauses from Speech:
Stillnesses that counterfeit Song.

The Deep-Freeze is stocked for a Siege.
Who has stroked his Tongue above the Fringe
Of an unadorned Eyelid the Texture
Of a Rose-Petal, within this
Forgotten Country of the Mind,
Calling himself less than a King?

FIRST SEED: FIRST BLOOD (for 2 Voices)

Young Abel left the sheet that was to be
His shroud. His straw bed, mimetically,
Gave up on him, forever, every trace.

*Cain's peaceful fruit were not up to the feast
Of gore from Brother Abel's slaughtered beast:
Not good enough that hoe, planting and tilling.*

Abel will not be seen again unless
In dreams: this good shepherd has gone to earth.
*It seemed that a little shedding and spilling
Was required. Blood had proved the sincerest —*
The branded one lives on, fingered by fate —

*Melter of darkness: more blood would be spilt.
Cain's mother cast her die before his birth.
So he slaughtered his own, and that nearest.*

Under the cultivated furrows wait
The thirsty battlefields of tomorrow:
The crops of Czars, First Secretaries, Caesars —
*Unrepentant, guilty, denying his guilt,
His calloused hands assumed the impersonal
Callousness of surgical instruments.*

Ordering bereavements, reaping sorrow,
Kaisers, Politburos, murderous Fuhrers —
*This farmer would learn to forge an arsenal
From his agricultural implements —*
Pausing only to hone their scythes afresh —
The grim implacable ethos would spread —
Always the weapons, the bruised, bleeding flesh.
The first colour Cain ever saw was red.

Thoughts in a Train

a story by Mango Tshabangu

When we ride these things which cannot take us all there is no doubt as to our inventiveness. We stand inside in grotesque positions — one foot in the air, our bodies twisted away from arms squeezing through other twisted bodies to find support somewhere. Sometimes it is on another person's shoulder, but it is stupid to complain so nobody does. It's as if some invisible sardine packer has been at work. We remain in that position for forty minutes or forty days. How far is Soweto from Johannesburg? It is forty minutes or forty days. No-one knows exactly.

We remain in that position, our bodies sweating out the unfreedom of our souls, anticipating happiness in that unhappy architectural shame — the ghetto. Our eyes dart apprehensively, on the lookout for those of our brothers who have resorted to the insanity of crime to protest their insane conditions. For, indeed, if we were not scared of moral ridicule we would regard crime as a form of protest. Is not a man with a hungry stomach in the same position as a man whose land has been taken away from him? What if he is a victim of both!

We remain in that position for forty minutes or forty days. No-one knows exactly. We, the young, cling perilously to

the outside of coach walls. It sends the guts racing to the throat, yes, but to us it is bravery. We are not a helpless gutless lot whose lives have been patterned by suffering. The more daring of us dance like gods of fate on the rooftop. Sometimes there is death by electrocution but then it is just hard luck . . . He was a good man, Bayekile. It is not his fault that he did not live to face a stray bullet.

We remain in that position for forty minutes or forty days. No-one knows exactly.

We move parallel to or hurtle past their trains. Most often my impression is that it is they who cruise past our hurtling train. Theirs is always almost empty. They all sit comfortably on seats made for that purpose and keep their windows shut, even on hot days. And they sit there in their train watching us as one watches a play from the box. We also stare back at them, but the sullen faces don't interest us much. Only the shut windows move our thinking.

On this day it was Msongi and Gezani who were most interested in the shut windows. You see, ever since they'd discovered Houghton golf course to be offering better tips in the caddy business, Msongi and Gezani found themselves walking through the rich suburbs of Johannesburg. Their

experience was a strange one. There was something eerie in the surroundings. They always had fear, the like of which they'd never known. Surely it was not because of the numerous policemen who patrolled the streets and snarled in unison with their dogs at Black boys moving through the streets.

Msongi and Gezani were young no doubt, but this writer has already said that bravery born of suffering knows no age nor danger nor pattern. Fear of snarling policemen was out with these two young Black boys. Nevertheless, this overwhelming fear the like of which they'd never known was always all around them whenever they walked through the rich suburbs of Johannesburg. They could not even talk about it. Somehow, they were sure each one of them had this strange fear.

There was a time when they impulsively stood right in the middle of a street. They had hoped to break this fear the like of which they'd never known. But the attempt only lasted a few seconds and that was too short to be of any help. They both scurried off, hating themselves for lack of courage. They never spoke of it.

In search of the truth, Msongi became very observant. He'd been noticing the shut windows of their train everytime he and Gezani happened to be in ours. On this day, it was a week since Msongi decided to break the silence. Msongi's argument was that the fear was in the surroundings and not in them. The place was full of fear. Vicious fear which, although imprisoned in stone walls and electrified fences, swelled over and poured into the streets to oppress even the occasional passer-by. Msongi and Gezani were merely walking through this fear. It was like walking in darkness and feeling the darkness all around you. That does not mean you are darkness yourself. As soon as you come to a lit spot, the feeling of darkness dies. Why, as soon as they hit town proper, and mixed with the people, the fear the like of which they'd never known disappeared. No, Msongi was convinced it was not they who had fear. Fear flowed from somewhere, besmirching every part of them, leaving their souls trembling; but it was not they who were afraid.

They did not have stone walls or electrified fences in Soweto. They were not scared of their gold rings being snatched for they had none. They were not worried about their sisters being peeped at for their sisters could look after themselves. Oh, those diamond toothpicks could disappear you know . . . That too, they did not have. They were not afraid of bleeding, for their streets ran red already. On this day Msongi stared at the shut windows. He looked at the pale sullen white faces and he knew why.

He felt tempted to throw something at them. Anything . . . an empty cigarette box, an orange peel, even a piece of paper; just to prove a point. At that moment, and as if instructed by Msongi himself, someone threw an empty beer bottle at their train.

The confusion: they ran around climbing onto seats. They jumped into the air. They knocked against one another as they scrambled for the doors and windows. The already pale faces had no colour to change into. They could only be distorted as fear is capable of doing that as well. The shut windows were shattered wide open, as if to say danger cannot be imprisoned. The train passed swiftly by, disappearing with the drama of the fear the like of which Msongi and Gezani had never known.

Vincent, a tribute

by Sekola Sello

A certain part of me is dead. I cannot state exactly which it is. But for a fact I know I will never be the same.

And this has occurred since that fateful Tuesday, April 25, when I first learnt about the death of Vincent Boy Ntuli.

We Africans are wont not to say (publicly) bad things about the dead. I still have to hear a man who was a menace to society being called precisely what he was.

So, whatever I have to say about Vincent Boy Ntuli must not be seen in that context. It will be Vincent as he was, nothing more, nothing less.

Here was a benign and affable fellow. Although he came from a well-to-do family, he was always in the company of the ordinary and the poor.

Despite his academic achievements (he was formerly a student at the then Pius XII College, now National University of Lesotho) and his distinguished professional career as photo/journalist, Vincent Boy Ntuli never kept aloof from the less privileged.

It was this humble attitude which made him a true friend. I remember that when I was still a struggling sprig in journalism, he was the first to guide me through those difficult stages.

He was my elementary teacher in journalism. But I am more indebted to his charming personality. He was patient and gentle with all beginners in journalism, polite and courteous to the man in the street.

It will always remain in my memory how well we argued. But for all his education, experience and seniority (he was twice my age), he always allowed me to have my say.

That was Vincent. Never too big for anyone. You could say all sorts of things about him but you would never move him to lose his temper. A born (and practical) religious man.

Among the true friends I think I have (they can be counted on one hand) Vincent was number one. Most of my colleagues asked me on one occasion or another what made us so close.

I never could give the answer for I did not know then. It is only now that I realise what brought us together despite all the many things which should have separated us.

I have now found the answer albeit in a painful way. Vincent supplemented a certain part of me. He possessed all the qualities and characteristics I yearned for but lacked.

It was in his company that I became humble, as I have always wanted to be. It was in his company that I met the really interesting figures in life. Not the high or snobbish. The poor and gentle, the real sons and souls of this earth.

Vincent was Vincent and there can never be anyone like him in this world.

When he died, a certain part of me died as well.

Jabavu, Soweto

Naledi, Soweto

Sekola Sello : *an encounter with Hitler*

Barbed Wire Fence

The Fuehrer is alive, well and living . . . guess where — of all places, in sunny South Africa.

I came eyeball to eyeball with the Nazi mass murderer one cold morning. It was April 27. Time 4.00 a.m.

There was no mistaking him. The famous little moustache was there. So was his pompous posture, and he was in full military uniform lacking only the Swastika.

If you are frolicking with excitement, hoping to hear the Nuremberg trials all over again, you are going to be disappointed. The Nazi leader is under safe protection.

Instead of seeing Nuremberg, the best bet is that you will see gas chambers, concentration camps and pogroms but — this time unleashed against Blacks.

For this is exactly what Adolf Hitler and several well known dictators who were in conference with him said during the brief encounter I had with them on April 27. Time 4.00 a.m.

On that day Hitler was surrounded by several well known leaders. They all took an oath. To rid the world once and for all of the Black population.

I heard it with my own ears. Hitler said it. The leaders emphasised it. A South American leader was also there and made a strong point about it. There was applause and cheering all round.

The folks who cheered wildly numbered about 10 000 strong.

I pricked my skin to find out if this was true. I pricked my colleague. He looked at me in disbelief. It was pointless to ask him for he was as baffled by the situation as I was. While this chest beating and purifying of the White race went into full steam, I decided to jump into the fray. Of course I was expecting the human mass to pulverise me anytime.

Nothing happened. In fact, the Fuehrer himself was prepared to talk to me. Horror of horrors, we even shared a joke, although I cannot remember what it was.

Hush. Before that august body, the Publications Board, descends on me with all its might for insinuating that the country is a haven for the mass murderer, let me hurry to explain.

It was nothing serious really. I was struck by that disease which for years tormented Joseph, the son of Isaac. In short, it was a DREAM.

by Mashadi Mashabela

He is a black South African caught up in the midst of apartheid. He is ensnared by a white created, white painted barbed wire fence. The notorious thorns of the fence show the dry blood of the black men who tried to climb it. One foot at a time, he trudges towards the fence, his glowing watery eyes fixed on it. Under the dim sun his shabby clothes create a bleary shadow. He continues trudging. Still staring, he sits down at its foot. Gradually, he raises his eyes higher to get a whole view of it.

The size of the thorns seems to become smaller as the height of the barbed wire increases.

* * *

The lowest part of the fence is covered with a pronounced filth, coloured by some red patches. It has ugly smudges of mud, torn at intervals by scratches and drips of red gone dry. The marks seemed to have been there for centuries. He looks to see if he cannot trace any footsteps, but all seem to vanish the higher he goes up the fence looking.

* * *

The middle part is painted a light grey with small clean thorns; the higher point is plain, it doesn't have any thorns. The highest point is crystal clear left to be painted by the black people of South Africa.

* * *

He then stares across it at the land beyond the cage. The flat picturesque grassland with its rolling mountains, its running streams and spectrum of birds is almost forgotten. To him it is a continuous tombstone. It holds memories of the past, memories of his forefathers. After some unsuccessful attempts to climb the fence, he sits down, his head morosely nodding. His face is dripping with sweat and his hands trembling with anger.

With some effort he raises his head to look at the highest point of the fence, and then stares at the world beyond. Thinking . . .

Rain a poem by Fanyana Mokaleng

It was raining
Raining very soft
In the beloved country
The beautiful South Africa.

It was medupe
Soft soaking rain
Soaking our minds
Soaking our lost hearts.

The soaked soil
The soaked black soil
Was smelling very fresh
We were soaked, and consoled by the showers.

It was not a thunderous,
Nor was it a violent rain
But soft showers
Showers which enable a man
To grow, to work, to sing and to resume his peace.

Men and oxen
Under heavy yokes
Were appreciating
A soft soaking rain.

I was singing
Everybody was singing
'Mankokotsane pula ya na'
In the soft soaking rain.

Molefe wa Phetoe
Dumakude ka Ndlovu
Mothobi wa Mutloatse
Were also singing Mankokotsane
In the soft soaking rain.

Precipitation was mightier
Everything went black
Black clouds accumulated
Thunder roared, lightning struck
Destruction took over and
WE DIED.



The Point of No Return

Miriam Tlali whose 'Soweto Hijack' appeared in the first issue of Staffrider, looks back at the sixties in this warm and moving story of S'bongile and Mojalefa, two young people whose lives are swept into the stream of political events.

S'bongile stopped at the corner of Sauer and Jeppe Streets and looked up at the robot. As she waited for the green light to go on, she realised from the throbbing of her heart and her quick breathing that she had been moving too fast. For the first time since she had left Senoane, she became conscious of the weight of Gugu, strapped tightly on her back.

All the way from home, travelling first by bus and then by train from Nhlanzane to Westgate station, her thoughts had dwelt on Mojalefa, the father of her baby. Despite all efforts to forget, her mind had continually reverted to the awesome results of what might lie ahead for them, if they (Mojalefa and the other men) carried out their plans to challenge the government of the Republic of South Africa.

The incessant rumbling of traffic on the two intersecting one-way streets partially muffled the eager male voices audible through the open windows on the second floor of Myler House on the other side of the street. The men were singing freedom songs. She stood and listened for a while before she crossed the street.

Although he showed no sign of emotion, it came as a surprise to Mojalefa when one of the men told him that a lady was downstairs waiting to see him. He guessed that it must be S'bongile and he felt elated at the prospect of seeing her. He quickly descended the two flights of stairs to the foyer. His heart missed a beat when he saw her.

'Au banna!' he said softly as he stood next to her, unable to conceal his feelings. He looked down at her and the baby, sleeping soundly on her back. S'bongile slowly turned her head to look at him, taken aback at his exclamation. He bent down slightly and brushed his dry lips lightly over her forehead just below her neatly plaited hair. He murmured 'It's good to see you again, 'Bongi. You are *so* beautiful! Come, let's sit over here.'

He led her away from the stairs, to a wooden bench further away opposite a narrow dusty window overlooking the courtyard. A dim ray of light pierced through the window-panes making that spot the only brighter area in the dimly-lit foyer.

He took out a piece of tissue from his coat-pocket, wiped off the dust from the sill and sat down facing her. He said:

'I'm very happy you came; I...'

'I *had* to come, Mojalefa,' she interrupted.

'I could not bear it any longer; I could not get my mind off the quarrel. I could not do any work, everything I picked up kept falling out of my hands. Even the washing I tried to do I could not get done. I *had* to leave everything and come. I kept thinking of you... as if it was all over, and I would not see you nor touch you ever again. I came to convince myself that I could still see you as a free man; that I could still come close to you and touch you, Mojalefa. I'm sorry I behaved like that last night. I thought you were indifferent to what I was going through. I was jealous because you kept on telling me that you were committed. That like all the others, you had already resigned from your job, and that there was no turning back. I thought you cared more for the course you have chosen than for Gugu and me.'

'There's no need for you to apologise, Bongi, I never blamed you for behaving like that and I bear you no malice at all. All I want from you is that you should understand. Can we not talk about something else? I am *so* happy you came.'

They sat looking at each other in silence. There was *so* much they wanted to say to one another, just this once. Yet both felt tongue-tied; they could not think of the right thing to say. She felt uneasy, just sitting there and looking at him while time was running out for them. She wanted to steer off the painful subject of their parting, so she said:

'I have not yet submitted those forms to Baragwanath. They want the applicants to send them in together with their pass numbers. You've always discouraged me from going for a pass, and now they want a number. It's almost certain they'll accept me because of my matric certificate. That is if I submit my form *with the number* by the end of this month, of course. What do you think I should do, go for registration? Many women and girls are already rushing to the registration centres. They say it's useless for us to refuse to carry them like you men because we will not be allowed to go anywhere for a visit or buy anything valuable. And now the hospitals, too...'

'No, no wait... Wait until... Until after this... After you know what the outcome is of what we are about to do.'

Mojalefa shook his head. It was intolerable. Everything that happened around you just went to emphasize the hopelessness of even trying to live like a human being. Imagine a woman having to carry a pass everywhere she goes; being stopped and searched or ordered to produce her pass! This was outrageous, the ultimate desecration and an insult to her very existence. He had already seen some of these 'simple' women who come to seek work from 'outside' proudly moving in the streets with those plastic containers dangling round their necks like sling bags. He immediately thought of the tied-down bitch and it nauseated him.

S'bongile stopped talking. She had tried to change the topic from the matter of their parting but now she could discern that she had only succeeded in making his thoughts wander away into a world unknown to her. She felt as if she had been shut out, aloof. She needed his nearness, now more than ever. She attempted to draw him closer to herself; to be *with* him just this last time. She could not think of anything to say. She sat listening to the music coming from the upper floors. She remarked:

Rockville

'That music, those two songs they have just been singing; I haven't heard them before. Who composes them?'

'Most of the men contribute something now and again. Some melodies are from old times, they just supply the appropriate words. Some learn 'new' tunes from old people at home, old songs from our past. Some are very old. Some of our boys have attended the tribal dancing ceremonies on the mines and they learn these during the festivities. Most of these are spontaneous, they come from the feelings of the people as they go about their work; mostly labourers. Don't you sometimes hear them chanting to rhythm as they perform tasks; carrying heavy iron bars or timber blocks along the railway lines or road construction sites? They even sing about the white foreman who sits smoking a pipe and watches them as they sweat.'

S'bongile sat morose, looking towards the entrance at the multitudes moving towards the centre of town and down towards Newtown. She doubted whether any of those people knew anything of the plans of the men who were singing of the aspirations of the blacks and their hopes for the happier South Africa they were envisaging. Her face, although beautiful as ever, reflected her depressed state. She nodded in half-hearted approval at his enthusiastic efforts to explain. He went on:

'Most of the songs are in fact lamentations — they reflect the disposition of the people. We shall be thundering them tomorrow morning on our way as we march towards the goals of this country!'

With her eyes still focussed on the stream of pedestrians and without stopping to think, she asked:

'Isn't it a bit premature? Going, I mean. You are *so* few; a drop in an ocean.'

'It isn't the numbers that count, Bongile,' he answered, forcing a smile. How many times had he had to go through that, he asked himself. In the trains, the buses, at work . . . Bongile was unyielding. Her refusal to accept that he must go was animated by her selfish love, the fear of facing life without him. He tried to explain although he had long realised that his efforts would always be fruitless. It was also clear to him that it was futile to try and run away from the issue.

'In any case,' he went on, 'it will be up to *you*, the ones who remain behind, the women and the mothers, to motivate those who are still dragging their feet; you'll remain only to show them why they must follow in our footsteps. That the future and dignity of the blacks as a nation and as human beings is worth sacrificing for.'

Her reply only served to demonstrate to him that he might just as well have kept quiet. She remarked:

'Even your father feels that this is of no use. He thinks it would perhaps only work if all of you first went out to *educate* the people so that they may join in.'

'No, father does not understand. He thinks we are too few as compared to the millions of all the black people of this land. He feels that we are sticking out our necks. That we can never hope to get the white man to sit round a table and speak to us, here. All he'll do is order his police to shoot us dead. If they don't do that, then they'll throw us into the gaols, and we shall either die there or be released with all sorts of afflictions. It's because I'm his only son. He's thinking of *himself*, Bongile, he does not understand.'

'He *does* understand, and he loves you.'

'Maybe that's *just* where the trouble lies. Because he loves me, he fails to think and reason properly. We do not agree. He is a different kind of person from me, and he can't accept that. He wants me to speak, act, and even think like him, and that is impossible.'

'He wants to be proud of you, Mojalefa.'

'If he can't be proud of me as I am, then he'll never be. He says I've changed. That I've turned against everything he taught me. He wants me to go to church regularly and pray more often. I sometimes feel he hates me, and I sympathise with him.'

'He does not hate you, Mojalefa; you two just do not see eye to eye.'

'My father moves around with a broken heart. He feels I am a renegade, a disappointment; an embarrassment to him. You see, as a preacher, he has to stand before the congregation every Sunday and preach on the importance of obedience, of how as Christians, we have to be submissive and tolerant and respect those who are in authority over us under all conditions. That we should leave it to 'the hand of God' to right all wrongs. As a reprisal against all injustices, we must kneel down and pray because, as the scriptures tell us, God says: 'Vengeance is Mine'. He wants me to follow in his footsteps.'

'Be a priest or preacher, you mean?'

'Yes. Or show some interest in his part-time ministry. Sing in the church choir and so on, like when I was still a child.' He smiles wryly.

'Why don't you show *some* interest then? Even if it is only for his sake? Aren't you a Christian, don't you believe in God?'

'I suppose I do. But not like *him* and those like him, no.'

'What is *that* supposed to mean?'

'What's the use of praying all the time? In the first place, how can a slave kneel down and pray without feeling that he is not quite a man, human? Every time I try to pray I keep asking myself — if God loves me like the bible says he does, then why should I have to carry a pass? Why should I have to be a virtual tramp in the land of my forefathers, why? Why should I have all these obnoxious laws passed against me?'

Then the baby on Bongile's back coughed, and Mojalefa's eyes drifted slowly towards it. He looked at the sleeping Gugu tenderly for a while and sighed, a sad expression passing over his eyes. He wanted to say something but hesitated and kept quiet.

Bongile felt the strap cutting painfully into her shoulder muscles and decided to transfer the baby to her lap. Mojalefa paced up and down in the small space, deep in thought. Bongile said:

'I have to breast-feed him. He hasn't had his last feed. I forgot everything. I just grabbed him and came here, and he didn't cry or complain. Sometimes I wish he would cry more often like other children.'

Mojalefa watched her suckling the baby. He reluctantly picked up the tiny clasped fist and eased his thumb slowly into it so as not to rouse the child. The chubby fingers immediately caressed his thumb and embraced it tightly. His heart sank, and there was a lump in his throat. He had a strong urge to relieve S'bongile of the child; pick him up in his strong arms and kiss him, but he suppressed the desire. It was at times like these that he experienced great conflict. He said:

'I should not have met you, Bongile. I am not worthy of your love.'

'It was cruel of you Mojalefa. All along you knew you would have to go, and yet you made me fall for you. You made me feel that life without you is no life at all. Why did you do this to me?'

He unclasped his thumb slowly from the baby's instinctive clutch, stroked it tenderly for a moment. He walked slowly towards the dim dusty window. He looked through into the barely visible yard, over the roofs of the nearby buildings, into the clear blue sky above. He said:

'It is because I have the belief that we shall meet again, Bongile; that we shall meet again, in a free Africa!'

The music rose in a slow crescendo.

'That song. It is so *sad*. It sounds like a hymn.'

They were both silent. The thoughts of both of them anchored on how unbearable the other's absence would be. Mojalefa consoled himself that at least he knew his father would be able to provide the infant with all its needs. That he was fortunate and not like some of his colleagues who had been ready — in the midst of severe poverty — to sacrifice all. Thinking of some of them humbled him a great deal. S'bongile would perhaps be accepted in Baragwanath where she would take up training as a nurse. He very much wanted to break the silence. He went near his wife and touched her arm. He whispered:

'Promise me Bongile, that you will do your best. That you will look after him, please.'

'I *shall*. He is our valuable keepsake — your father's and mine — something to remind me of you. A link nobody can destroy. All yours and mine.'

He left her and started pacing again. He searched hopelessly in his mind for something to say; something pleasant. He wanted to drown the sudden whirl of emotion he felt in his heart when he looked down at S'bongile, his young bride of only a few weeks, and the two-month-old child he had brought into this world.

Rockville

'I'm like a single minute cell in the living body composed of a million cells and I have to play my small part, for the well-being and perpetuation of life in the whole body.'

S'bongile came to his rescue. She said:

'I did not tell my mother that I was coming here. I said that I was taking Gugu over to your father for a visit. He is always so happy to see him.'

Thankful for the change of topic, Mojalefa replied, smiling:

'You know, my father is a strange man. He is unpredictable. For instance, when I had put you into trouble and we realised to our horror that Gugu was on the way, I thought that he would skin me alive, that *that* was now the last straw. I did not know how I would approach him, because then it was clear that you would also have to explain to your mother why you would not be in a position to start at Turfloop. There was also the thought that your mother had paid all the fees for your first year, and had bought you all those clothes and so forth. It nearly drove me mad worrying about the whole mess. I kept thinking of your poor widowed mother; how she had toiled and saved so that you would be able to start at university after having waited a whole year for the chance. I decided to go and tell my uncle in Pretoria and send *him* to face my father with that catastrophic announcement. I stayed away from home for weeks after that.'

'Oh yes, it was nerve-racking, wasn't it? And they were all so kind to us. After the initial shock, I mean. We have to remember that all our lives and be thankful for the kind of parents God gave us. I worried *so* much, I even contemplated suicide, you know. Oh well, I suppose you could not help yourself!'

She sighed deeply, shaking her head slowly. Mojalefa continued:

'Mind you, I knew something like that would happen, yet I went right ahead and talked you into yielding to me. I was drawn to you by a force *so* great, I just could not resist it. I hated myself for weeks after that. I actually despised myself. What is worse is that I had vowed to myself that I would never bring into this world a soul that would have to inherit my servitude. I had failed to 'develop and show a true respect for our African womanhood', a clause we are very proud of in our disciplinary code, and I remonstrated with myself for my weakness.

'But your father came personally to see my people and apologise for what you had done, and later to pay all the 'lobola' they wanted. He said that we would have to marry immediately as against what you had said to me — why it would not be wise for us to marry, I mean.'

'That was when I had gone through worse nightmares. I had to explain to him why I did not want to tie you down to me when I felt that I would not be able to offer you anything, that I would only make you unhappy. You know why I was against us marrying, Bongile, of course. I wanted you to be free to marry a 'better' man, and I had no doubt it would not be long before he grabbed you. Any man would be proud to have you as his wife, even with a child who is not his.'

He touched her smooth cheek with the back of his hand, and added:

'You possess those rare delicate attributes that any man would want to feel around him and be enkindled by.'

'Your father would never let Gugu go, not for anything, Mojalefa. He did not name him 'his pride' for nothing. I should be thankful that I met the son of a person like that. Not all women are so fortunate. How many beautiful innocent girls have been deserted by their lovers and are roaming the streets with illegitimate babies on their backs, children they cannot support?'

'I think it is an unforgivable sin. And not all those men do it intentionally, mind you. Sometimes, with all their good intentions, they just do not have the means to do much about the problem of having to pay 'lobola', so they disappear, and the girls never see them again.'

'How long do you think they'll lock you up, Mojalefa?' she asked, suddenly remembering that it might be years before she could speak to him like that again. She adored him, and speaking of parting with him broke her heart.

'I do not know, and I do not worry about that, Bongile. If I had you and Gugu and they thrust me into a desert for a thousand years, I would not care. But then I am only a small part of a whole. I'm like a single minute cell in the living body composed of millions of cells, and I have to play my small part for the well-being and perpetuation of life in the whole body.'

'But you are likely to be thrust into the midst of hardened criminals, murderers, rapists and so on.'

'Very likely. But then that should not deter us. After all most of them have been driven into being like that by the very evils we are exposed to as people without a say in the running of our lives. Most of them have ceased to be proud because there's nothing to be proud of. You amuse me, Bongile; so you think because we are more educated we have reason to be proud? Of what should we feel proud in a society where the mere pigmentation of your skin condemns you to nothingness? Tell me, of what?'

She shook her head violently, biting her lips in sorrow, and with tears in her eyes, she replied, softly:

'I do not know, Mojalefa.'

They stood in silence for a while. She sighed deeply and held back the tears. They felt uneasy. It was useless, she thought bitterly. They had gone through with what she had considered to be an ill-fated undertaking. Yet he was relentlessly adamant. She remembered how they had quarrelled the previous night. How, at first she had told herself that she had come to accept what was about to happen with quiet composure, 'like a mature person' as they say. She had however lost control of herself when they were alone outside her home, when he had bidden her mother and other relatives farewell. She had become hysterical and could not go on pretending any longer. In a fit of anger, she had accused Mojalefa of being a coward who was running away from his responsibilities as a father and husband. It had been a very bad row and they had parted unceremoniously. She had resolved that today she would only speak of those things which would not make them unhappy. And now she realised with regret, that she was right back where she had started. She murmured to herself:

'Oh God, why should it be us, why should we be the lambs for the slaughter? Why should you be one of those handing themselves over? It's like giving up. What will you be able to do for your people in gaol, or if you should be...'

She could not utter the word 'killed'.

'*Somebody* has got to sacrifice in order that others may be free. The *real* things, those that really matter are never acquired the easy way. All the peoples of this world who were oppressed like us have had to give up *something*, Bongile. Nothing good or of real value comes easily. Our freedom will never be handed over to us on a silver platter. In our movement, we labour under no illusions; we know we can expect no hand-outs. We know that the path ahead of us is not lined with soft velvety flower petals; we are aware that we shall have to tread on thorns. We are committed to a life of service, sacrifice and suffering. Oh, no Bongile, you have got it all wrong. It is not like throwing in the towel. On the contrary, it is the beginning of something our people will never look back at with shame. We shall never regret what we are about to do, and there is no turning back. We are at the point of no return! If I changed my mind now and went back home and sat down and deceived myself that all was alright, I would die a very unhappy man indeed. I would die in dishonour.' He was silent awhile.

'Bongile, I want to tell you my story. I've never related it to anyone before because just *thinking* about the sad event is to me a very unpleasant and extremely exacting experience.' He was picking his way carefully through memories.

'After my father had completed altering that house we live in from a four-roomed matchbox to what it is now, he was a proud man. He was called to the office by the superintendent to complete a contract with an electrical contractor. It had been a costly business and the contractor had insisted that the final arrangements be concluded before the City Council official. It was on that very day that the superintendent asked him if he could bring some of his colleagues to see the house when it was completed. My father agreed. I was there on that day when they (a group of about fifteen whites) arrived. I had heard my parents speak about the intended 'visit' by the white people to their friends and everybody with great expectation. Naturally, I was delighted and proud as any youngster would be. I made

Rockville

sure I would be home and not at the football grounds that afternoon. I thought it was a great honour to have such respectable white people coming to *our* house. I looked forward to it and I had actually warned some of my friends . . .

'After showing them through all the nine rooms of the double-storey house, my obviously gratified parents both saw the party out along the slasto pathway to the front gate. I was standing with one of my friends near the front verandah. I still remember vividly the superintendent's last words. He said: "John, on behalf of my colleagues here and myself, we are very thankful that you and your kind 'mosadi' allowed us to come and see your beautiful house. You must have spent a *lot* of money to build and furnish it *so* well. But, *you should have built it on wheels!*" And the official added, with his arms swinging forward like someone pushing some imaginary object: "It should have had *wheels* so that it may *move* easily!" And they departed, leaving my petrified parents standing there agape and looking at each other in helpless amazement. I remember, later, my mother trying her best to put my stunned father at ease, saying: "Au, oa hlanya, mo lebale; ha a tsebe na o ntse a re'ng, Ntate hle!" (He is mad; just forget about him. He does not know what he is saying!)

'As a fifteen-year-old youth, I was also puzzled. But unlike my parents, I did not sit down and forget — or try to do so. That day marked the turning point in my life. From that day on, I could not rest. Those remarks by that government official kept ringing in my mind. I had to know why he had said that. I probed, and probed; I asked my teachers at school, clerks at the municipal offices, anyone who I thought would be in a position to help me. Of course I made it as general as I could and I grew more and more restless. I went to libraries and read all the available literature I could find on the South African urban blacks.

I studied South African history as I had never done before. The history of the discovery of gold, diamonds and other minerals in this land, and the growth of the towns. I read of the rush to the main industrial centres and the influx of the Africans into them, following their early reluctance, and sometimes refusal, to work there. The subsequent laws which necessitated their coming like the vagrancy laws and the pass laws. I read about the removals of the so-called black spots and why they were now labelled that. The influenza epidemic which resulted in the building of the Western Native and George Goch townships in 1919. I dug into any information I could get about the history of the urban Africans. I discovered the slyness, hypocrisy, dishonesty and greed of the law-makers.

'When elderly people came to visit us and sat in the evenings to speak about their experiences of the past, of how they first came into contact with the whites, their lives with the Boers on the farms and so forth, I listened. Whenever my father's relations went to the remote areas in Lesotho and Matatiele, or to Zululand and Natal where my mother's people are, during school holidays, I grabbed the opportunity and accompanied them. Learning history ceased to be the usual matter of committing to memory a whole lot of intangible facts from some obscure detached past. It became a living thing and a challenge. Not I was in search of my true self. And like Moses in the Bible, I was disillusioned. Instead of having been raised like the slave I am, I had been nurtured like a prince, clothed in a fine white linen loincloth and girdle when I should have been wrapped in the rough woven clothing of my kind.

'When I did know most of the facts, when I had read through most of the numerous laws pertaining to the urban blacks — the acts, clauses, sub-clauses, regulations, sections and sub-sections; the amendments and sub-amendments — I saw myself for the first time. I found myself confronted by my naked identity. All frivolity fell away. The moment of recognition had come. I stopped thinking that I was a prince, descended from the noble proud house of Monaheng — the true Kings of the Basuto nation. I stopped going to the sports clubs and the church. Even my father's flashy American 'Impala' ceased to bring to me the thrill it used to when I drove round the townships in it. I attended political meetings because there, at least, I found people trying to find ways and means of solving and overcoming our problems. At least I knew now what I really was . . . an underdog, a voiceless creature. Unlike my father, I was not going to be blindfolded and led along a garden path by someone else; a foreigner from other continents. I learnt that as a black, there was a responsibility I was carrying on my shoulders as a son of this soil. I realised that I had to take an active part in deciding (or in insisting that I should decide) the path along which my descendants will tread. Something was wrong; radically wrong, and it was my duty as a black person to try and put it right. To free myself and my people became an obsession, a dedication.

'I sometimes listen with interest when my father complains. Poor father. He would say: "Mojalefa oa polotika". "All Mojalefa reads is politics, politics, politics. He no longer plays football like other youths. When he passed matric with flying colours in history, his history master came to my house to tell me how my son is a promising leader. I was proud and I moved around with my head in the air. I wanted him to start immediately at University and he insisted that he wanted to work. I wondered why because I could afford it and there was no pressing need for him to work. He said he would study under Unisa and I paid fees for the first year, and they sent him lectures. But instead of studying, he locks himself up in his room and reads politics all the time. He has stopped sending in scripts for correction. He is morose and never goes to church. He does not appreciate what I do for him!" Sometimes I actually pity my father. "My father (meaning his father) was proud when Mojalefa was born. He walked on foot rather than take a bus all the way from Western Native Township to Bridgman Memorial Hospital in Brixton to offer his blessings at the bedside of my late wife, and to thank our ancestors for a son and heir. He named him Mojalefa. And now that boy is about to sacrifice himself over for what he calls 'a worthy cause'. He gives up all this . . . a house I've built and furnished for R21 000, most of my money from the insurance policy my good old boss was clever enough to force me to take when I first started working for him. Mojalefa gives up all this for a gaol cell!"

There were tears in the eyes of S'bongile as she sat staring in bewilderment at Mojalefa. She saw now a different man; a man with convictions and ideals; who was not going to be shaken from his beliefs, come what may. He stopped for a while and paused. All the time he spoke as if to some unseen being, as if he was unconscious of her presence. He went on:

'My father always speaks of how his grandfather used to tell him that as a boy in what is now known as the Free State (I don't know why) the white people (the Boers) used to come and ask for permission to settle on their land clothed only in a "stertriem". Just like that, bare-footed and with cracked soles, begging for land. My father does not realise that *he* is now in a worse position than those Boers; that all that makes a man a man has been stripped from below his feet. That he now has to *float in the air*. He sits back in his favourite comfortable armchair in his livingroom, looks around him at the splendour surrounding him, and sadly asks: "When I go, who'll take over from me?" He thinks he is still a man, you know. He never stops to ask himself: "Take *what* over . . . a house on wheels? Something with no firm ground to stand on?" He turned away from her and looked through the dusty window pane. He raised his arms and grabbed the vertical steel bars over the window. He clung viciously to them and shook them until they rattled. He said:

'No, Bongi. There is no turning back. Something has *got* to be done . . . something. It cannot go on like this!

Strange as it may seem, at that moment, they both had visions of a gaol cell. They both felt like trapped animals. He kept on shaking the bars and shouting:

'Something's *got* to be done . . . Now!

She could not bear the sight any longer. He seemed to be going through great emotional torture. She shouted:

'Mojalefa!

He swung round and faced her like someone only waking up from a bad dream. He stared through the open entrance, and up at the stair leading to the upper floor where the humming voices were audible. They both stood still listening for a while. Then he spoke softly yet earnestly, clenching his fists and looking up towards the sound of the music. He said:

'Tomorrow, when dawn breaks, we shall march . . . Our men will advance from different parts of the Republic of South Africa. They will leave their pass-books behind and not feel the heavy weight in their pockets as they proceed towards the gates of the prisons of this land of our forefathers!

Bongi stood up slowly. She did not utter a word. There seemed to be nothing to say. She seemed to be drained of all feeling. She felt blank. He thought he detected an air of resignation, a look of calmness in her manner as she moved slowly in the direction of the opening into the street. They stopped and looked at each other. She sighed, and there were no tears in her eyes now. He brushed the back of his hand tenderly over the soft cheeks of the sleeping Gugu and with his dry lips, kissed S'bongile's brow. He lifted her chin slightly with his forefinger and looked into her eyes. They seemed to smile at him. They parted.

Rockville

Three Poems by Mandla Ndlezi

WHEN IT COMES

O, dig it
like a cave
and let me squat
inside and wait.

Snugged in
animal skin
ready to
get up and go!

Not in a grave
flat on my back
like a coward
in a coffin.

My ancestors
will praise,
care for my bones
and lick my soul.

IF

If I'd the Midas touch
I'd save the bigot kind
And die on my couch,
But sweeping my mind
Is his force to crush
The person in my kind.
Too late to douse
My liberty torch!
I must watch him grope
Piteously on his crutch.

A SALUTE TO THE PRIESTS

The tongues of church bells
in Soweto went stiff!
And for a moment I couldn't tell
whether they'd be able to spit
and stand with us in this hell
of the satanic blaze;
until solidarity's new faces
emerged from the smoke-kissed paths
and marched, stating their case.

Two Poems by Oupa Thando Mthimkulu

LET'S BOYCOTT DEATH

He is dead, certified, dead.
He has fallen from Naledi's
(first stop Ikwezi) train.
He is dead, certified, dead.
He has fallen at the hands of
Soweto midnight tsotsis
of Zola, Dube and Orlando.
He is dead, certified, dead.
He has fallen to riot squads
driving around Soweto
to keep 'law and order at all costs'.
He is dead, certified, dead.
He has fallen in love
with a prostitute.
He is dead, certified, dead.
He has fallen asleep at
his home (Selby Ntuli, a superstar).
He is dead, certified, dead.
He has fallen from the
tenth floor during interrogation
at J V square.
Another one is dead,
certified dead.
He has fallen into
the hands of border fighters
during patrol.
Young people let's
boycott death
and stop dying!

TRIBUTE

Tribute
to those
we shall never
see again.
To those
wandering all over
the universe
seeking a place
to hide and rest.
Tribute
to our friends,
to those who are
homesick,
To those
hes and shes.
Tribute
to our brothers
and sisters
far away,
we are missing you
so much.

Christopher van Wyk : Five Poems and a Playlet

COMING HOME

Rising
from a bed
of aberration
and coir
I greet
the
blinding white dawn
with pride
far deeper
than
the pores
of
my skin
saying
I
am a Black man

A SONG OF HOPE

Black brother
Your lips are parched
and your mouth gapes an anger
wider than a scavenged minehole

Black sister
Your skin bleeds a pus
from a long weary battle
for existence and we lick
your wounds with tears
as long as tongues

Black mother
Your nipples of nutrition
have clogged and droop
down towards kwashiokor

Black people
Our hearts beat to a lonely
~~scapelo~~
But one day it will throb
to the rhythm of a drum
And all of Africa will dance

AGRARIAN REFORM

I saw a black man
shake a beseeching voice box
at whites
crying for coins

And have you heard
of a place called Zombie
where people scream
like poltergeists
crying bread!
and water!
oh I have

But I have also seen
bullets soak into the heart
of a Soweto boy. Saw him
cleave fractured African soil
resuscitate it making foam
of long eroded Azanian earth

And I know now
the rigor mortis
has not set in
There is still time

WE CAN'T MEET HERE, BROTHER

(for Thami Mnyele)

We can't meet here, brother.
We can't talk here in this cold stone world
where whites buy time on credit cards.

I can't hear you, brother!
for the noise of the theorists
and the clanging machinery of the liberal Press!

I want to smell the warmth of your friendship, Thami
Not the pollution of gunsmoke and white suicides.

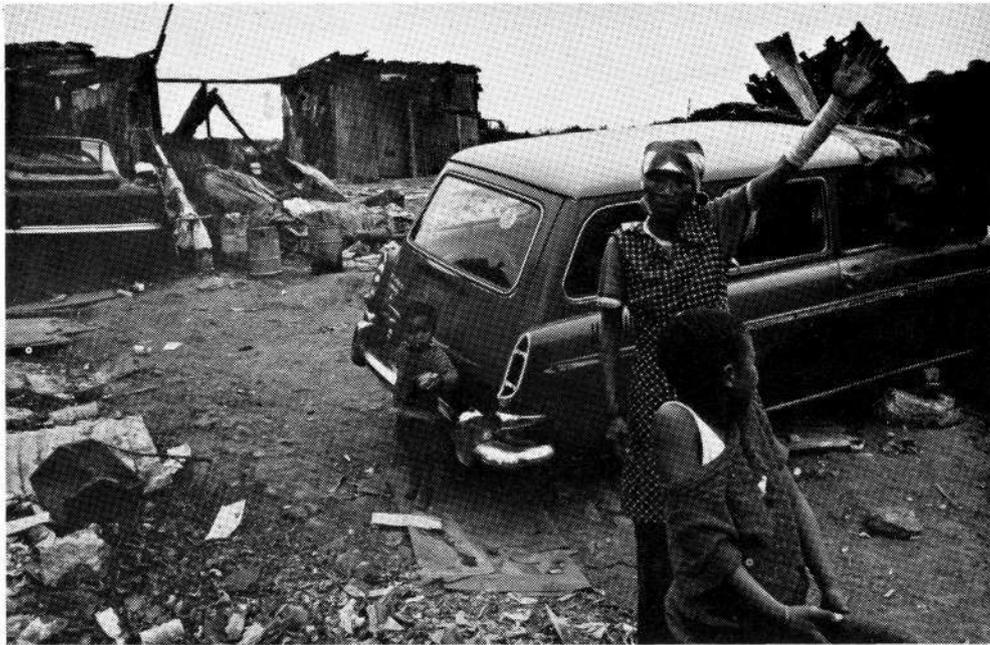
We can't meet here, brother.
Let's go to your home
Where we can stroll in the underbrush of your paintings
Discuss colour
Hone assegais on the edges of serrated tongues.

THEY WOULD'VE BANNED YOUR EYES, DON

They would've banned your eyes, Don.
Don, they would've banned your eyes.
They would've turned into hollow husks
those round brown arsenals
that have garnered dynasties of a myopic regime
and never blinked in its glare.

They would've banned your eyes, Don.
Don't they see how they never yielded
under the baton charges, the guns and the teargas.
When the only tears you ever shed
fell in the catchment areas of
Soweto
Western
Sharpeville
to rejuvenate the battle weary souls.

They would've banned your eyes, Don.
Don they would've banned your eyes.
If only they knew how they have pierced
my heart.
So much so that I want to draw blood from the bloodshot,
bury the afterbirth.
Give birth to a new Azania.



Port Elizabeth

Proof Photographs by

Terence Bloch

Night at Ebrahim's a playlet by Christopher van Wyk

EBRAHIM: Hi, Bob. Hi, Kiet. Come in, gents.
Long time no see huh.

BOB: How's it, Ebrahim.

KIET: Heit, fana.
Ek sê, who's the other bra?

EBRAHIM: Ag that's ou Colin.
But sommer call him Kop.

KIET: Heit, Kop.

BOB: How's it, Kop.

KIET: Ek sê, fana we want dagga.

EBRAHIM: Ja, okay. But it's by ou Blare's place.
He's less conspicuous than my timah
in case of a raid.

BOB: Can we have so two kachies, please ou Briampie?

KIET: Make it three, Bob;
I wanna get lekker blou tonight.

EBRAHIM: Okay. Let me sommer saal this ou.
Koppie, tell ou Blare to give
three kachies dagga.

KIET: Not majat, please.

EBRAHIM: Tell him, good dagga.

Dê here's the zak.

KIET: Say it's for me, Kiet.

He knows me, ou Blare.

BOB: Maak gou, bra.

EBRAHIM: Don't forget, good dagga.

COLIN: Good dagga
for Kiet.
Good dagga
for Kiet.
Not majat.

BOB: Where do that mr. come from?

EBRAHIM: Kimberley.
It's my uncle's laaitie.
He's staying here by us a bit.

KIET: He looks a bit . . .

EBRAHIM: Ja, sy kop vat nie reg nie.

BOB: That's why youse call him Koppie, nê.
Sis.

EBRAHIM: Ja. Ag, but he doesn't even make out
to say it's cruel.
He don't feel blind about it.

BOB: How can he?
He's mos mad.

EBRAHIM: Gents, Koppie and me
were just about to break our fast.
You wanna chow a little?

BOB: No thanks. I ate already.

EBRAHIM: Kiet?

KIET: Nay, ta.
Ramadaan again soon?

EBRAHIM: Ja.
You know, gents, I'm glad I'm off that stuff.

KIET: But you still sell then.

EBRAHIM: Nay, not me.
It's my timah's business.
He want me to sell when he's not here.
So, what can a man do?

BOB: Like in the Ten Commandments hey;
Honour thy father and thy mother.

EBRAHIM: Ja, something like that.

KIET: Heita daar. Here's the mr.

COLIN: Blare sê die dagga is klaar.

EBRAHIM: Sorry, gents.
Die boom is leeg.

BOB: Jislaaik!
What do we do now?

KIET: Not even a kachie?

COLIN: Die dagga is klaar.
No more good dagga for Kiet.
No more majat.

KIET: Okay, man. We heard you the
first time.

BOB: Jislaaik!

EBRAHIM: Anyway, how's the politics
going, Bob?

KIET: Jesus, good man;
so good in fact, that he hides
all his stuff by me.
You know that Black Power
stuff;
Sechaba, Saso, poetry, all that
nonsense.

BOB: He's like Blare, you see; incon-
spicuous.
When you want the stuff, it's
klaar.

KIET: Don't lieg, man, it's all still
there by the possie.

BOB: I know. I know.
But nothing in your head, you
see.
Nice times, that's all you think
of.

KIET: That's mos the life, fana.

COLIN: Ebrahim, die kers is kort?

EBRAHIM: Leave it alone!

Los die kers!

BOB: You're gonna burn your
fingers.

KIET: You too, with that politics of
yours.

BOB: Listen here, Kiet.
I do it because I'm tired of this
place, Zombie.
Fit for Zombies that's what it
is!

Mine dump, one room, dirty
streets, dirty laaities,
no lights, no hot water,
clevahs, Jesus, man!

KIET: Come with me to Melville, ek
sê.
To my lanie buddies.
There's a party there tonight.
There's lights, there's rooms,
streets
There's even better clevahs
there:
they shoot, man they don't
stab.

BOB: Come with.
Hear, Ebrahim?
Like Blare;

Nothing. Inconspicuous.

COLIN: Ebrahim, die kers gaan uit-
brand.

EBRAHIM: Los die dekselse kers man
Eet jou kos, dê.

BOB: I'm tired, gents.
I'm tired of hearing women
being raped there outside.
I'm tired of hearing trains the
whole bloody night.
Ebrahim, I'm even tired of
that mosque of yours;
that noise over the loudspeak-
er.

EBRAHIM: Believe in Allah, my bra
and that will no longer be
noise.

BOB: And what about the trains.
Must I believe in stationmast-
ers for that?
And 'rape!' every now and
then,
what about that?

EBRAHIM: I pray for them, bra. Ek bid.

KIET: If you ask me
I'll rather learn Arabic
to know what goes on over
that loudspeaker.

COLIN: Ebrahim, die kers is amper
klaar.

Johannesburg

KIET: Eet jou kos, Kop.
Moenie worry van die kers,
man.
Gents, I'm getting out of Dun-
kirk.

BOB: Hang on
I'll maar come with you.

KIET: Sweet.
You'll like my lanie bras,
you'll see.

BOB: Ag, shit, man
I'm not going there to like
anybody
I'm just going, man, just maar
going.

COLIN: Die kers is amper klaar,
Ebrahim.

BOB: Right, see you, Ebrahim.

KIET: Right. Check you, bra.

EBRAHIM: Hey, Bob! Kiet!
Maybe I go to Potchefstroom.

BOB: When?

EBRAHIM: Sunday.

KIET: For how long?

EBRAHIM: For good, man
For good.

COLIN: Ebrahim, dis donker hier.

EBRAHIM: Ja, ek weet, man
Ek weet!
Maybe Saturday, even,
If there's a train.

COLIN: Ebrahim, dis donker.

BOB: Okay, good luck, then.

KIET: Ja, see you.

EBRAHIM: Okay!

COLIN: Ebrahim, dis donker.
Baie donker.

Muhammad Omar Ruddin : Two Poems

* TOKOLOGO

Now when dirges

burst the monotony of our lives
when black hearts seek solace
in values foreign and false
and forsake the sanctity of old customs,
now, would I die for a new anthem
a deep and sonorous march:
plaintive yet plundering
angry yet committed
protesting yet personifying
our black cries.

A singing tree,
telling the turmoil of our time
our beginning
our destiny,
singing it in rich song.

O sing Afrika,
sing me a Freedom song
chant in the glow of sunset
in jungle frames
around the sacrifice
and yellow flames

Sing it Mother
in the ghetto
where laughter masks the black man's pain
where men move on bended knees
raped by colonial terror

Sing it in the prison cells
and tombs and dungeons
where martyrs lie thirsting
for the new sunrise

Sing me a Song of Freedom
that I may rise
from the quagmire of debasement
and take my rightful place
among free men.

* Tokologo is the Pedi word for Freedom.

WHEN I DIE

(a poem Sobukwe might have written)

When I die
may my funeral (like my life) be political
and serve the struggle
may my people
use my coffin as a platform
to raise the banner

When I die
may my body be used
to awaken the indifferent and complacent tribe
my eyes, to trace dreams and hopes
shattered by injustice
my ears be used as drums
to recall the cries
of the dispossessed and downtrodden

When I die
may fiery speeches and freedom songs
replace passive hymns
may the Green and Gold and Black
fly at every mountain

May my loved ones take up the torch
and destroy the lies
written into our history
so that a new Brotherhood may emerge
to embrace our land

When I die
may some poet
write of the agony
and deep pain
that followed my days
and the inhumanity
of my captivity.

DEBEGENI FALLS

Downward smoke Wordsworth called them
— or was that Livingstone at Victoria?
The Guinness Book has the facts about them.
I remember that the highest
is not the strongest.

Here at Debegeni the white gush
over black rock dins us into a
hush the roar is vast and inward
like a conch over the ear.

Here on the borders of Lebowa (I
met my true love on the borders
of Lebowa) in this government-
protected nature reserve we are
protected too from Blacks. The
only member of the homeland
nation asks us for our names
and car registration.

We are not equipped to meet the
Debegeni daimon the giant whose
visible breath fills the kloof
with a sifting slow-motion cloud
like *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. We
teeter and titter over boulders
trusty Polaroids suspended from
our shoulders. We aim our Insta-
matics and develop instant snaps
of the foaming falls whose force
has gouged out walls and pools
from rock.

Development
is somewhat slower here:
boys hold up fruit like votaries
at the roadside sell candelabras
of green bananas and women run in a
cloud of dust babies bobbing
to catch a lift
in a Mazda truck.

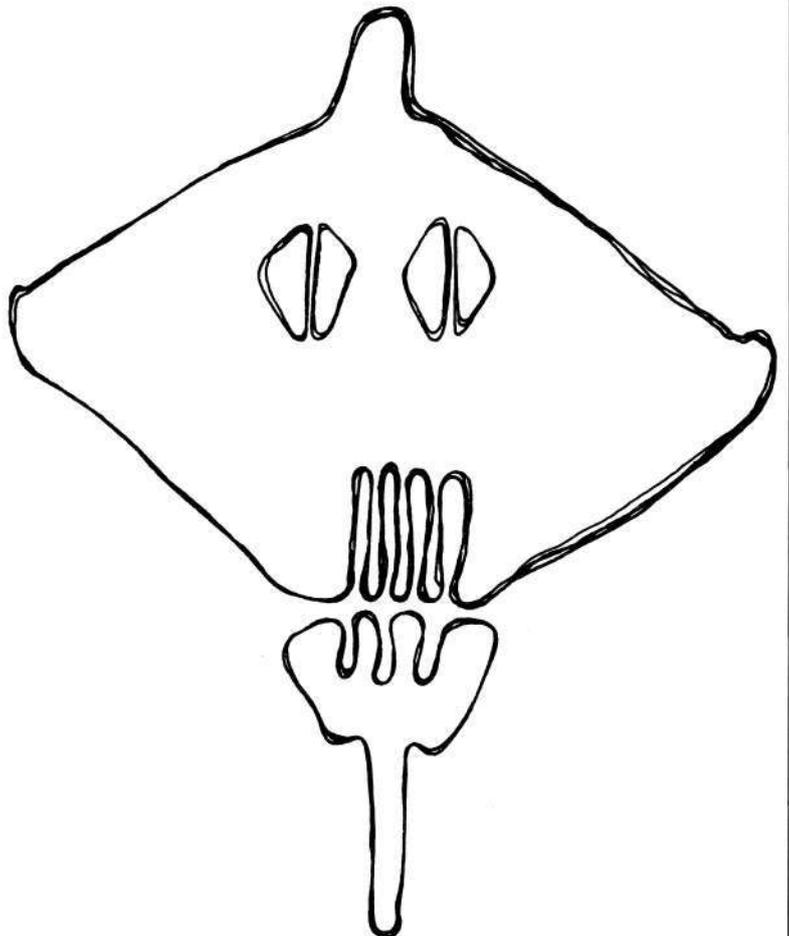
A waterfall is not a dam
a waterfall is not a rock
a waterfall is not a bridge (though
the one at Tzaneen is long enough
for trainfuls of dialogue) a
waterfall can only
run down
and so
down
it
f
a
l
l
s

TRANSVAAL WINTER HARVEST (Solanum or "Stinkblaar")

This winter trees
sprout black berries the birds
eat and drop again like
lumpy soot on lawn and
flowers. This winter
there is no ease no
showers of rain. This
winter my life my
land bears again its
ripe black bitter fruit.

LOVEKNOTS (or Songs for Liberation)

1. My lover's hands are warm
But they carry a knife
He promises no harm
then hacks at my life.
2. My lover says he loves me
But cannot love me only
My lover says he loves me
His loving leaves me lonely.
3. (If the music's loud enough
You cannot hear the rain)
If I can hate enough
I might not feel the pain.
4. Drive a stake through the heart
It is the only way
For love is the final trap
It lasts a year and a day.



Johannesburg

Poems: Lionel Abrahams, Reg Rumney, A. Spiegel

Graphic: Wopko Jensma

THE ISSUE

The enemy is clearly marked
in black or white.
Shades between confuse the issue.

You have to be against whom you're not for:
there's no neutrality,
no switching sides — the thought
compounds your treachery
with confusion of the issue.
Doubt, change, give-and-take,
contradictions, exceptions
and fine distinctions
brake the action and confuse the issue.

Humanitarians confuse the issue
through tolerance.
Moderates confuse the issue
through compromise.
Progressives confuse the issue
through optimism.
Liberals confuse the issue
through criticism of both sides.
Partisans of common cause
confuse the issue
through indiscriminate goodwill.

Those who defect from their known place
to mingle in unwalled markets
and barter inherited science
for whatever language they can learn
have yet to understand
their profit's futile
since they confuse the issue.
Understanding is not the issue.

The issue involves attack and defence.
If you're not for the victory
of your own sort, your country,
party, ethnic category right
or wrong, you count for nothing,
you only confuse the issue.
The question of actual benefits
confuses the issue.
Reason confuses the issue.
Hope confuses the issue.

The issue is, on the set day,
having prepared, having received
the clear final word of command,
doing what is to be done to the enemy —
and he is clearly marked.

Lionel Abrahams

HILLBROW

The yowling kid in the bus that labours
up the hill and traffic arrows
carving up lead-paralysed air.
Detail: the ragged edges of her painted nails.
Global mirrors which are your eyes
fill with reflections—
off glass of shop windows
off enamel of Volkswagens and Chevs.
Look. The vacant stands are multiplying things:
broken shoes, rusted cans, paper, rags,
corpses . . . but there's no point in naming,
it doesn't get you anywhere.
The pinball tables are singing
of unrequited love
till, KLAK, a free game strikes the heart
like a bullet or a successful fuck.

Reg Rumney

THE PRISON CELL AND ITS PURPOSE

Wrack of the spirit.
Shame self respect.
Degrade to brute level.
Hide Nature.
With-hold!
With-hold water; food;
freedom; laughter; life.
Two paces and turn.
Two paces and turn.
Two paces and turn.
Two paces and turn.

Rape of the mind.
Isolate! Deny!
Knowledge, books.
Destroy thought.
Nightmares
instead of dreams.
Two paces and turn.
Two paces and turn.
Two paces and turn.
Two paces and turn.

Rout of the body.
Torture; pain, and fear.
Beyond endurance.
Weaken! With-hold!
Deny the light.
Deny sleep.
But confine.
Two paces and turn.
Two paces and turn.
Two paces and turn.
Two paces and turn.

Wreck of the man.
Destroy the spirit.
Cramp the mind.
Violate the body.
Leave but the soul
weary, but whole.
Two paces and turn.
Two paces and turn.
Two paces and turn.
Two paces and turn.

A Spiegel

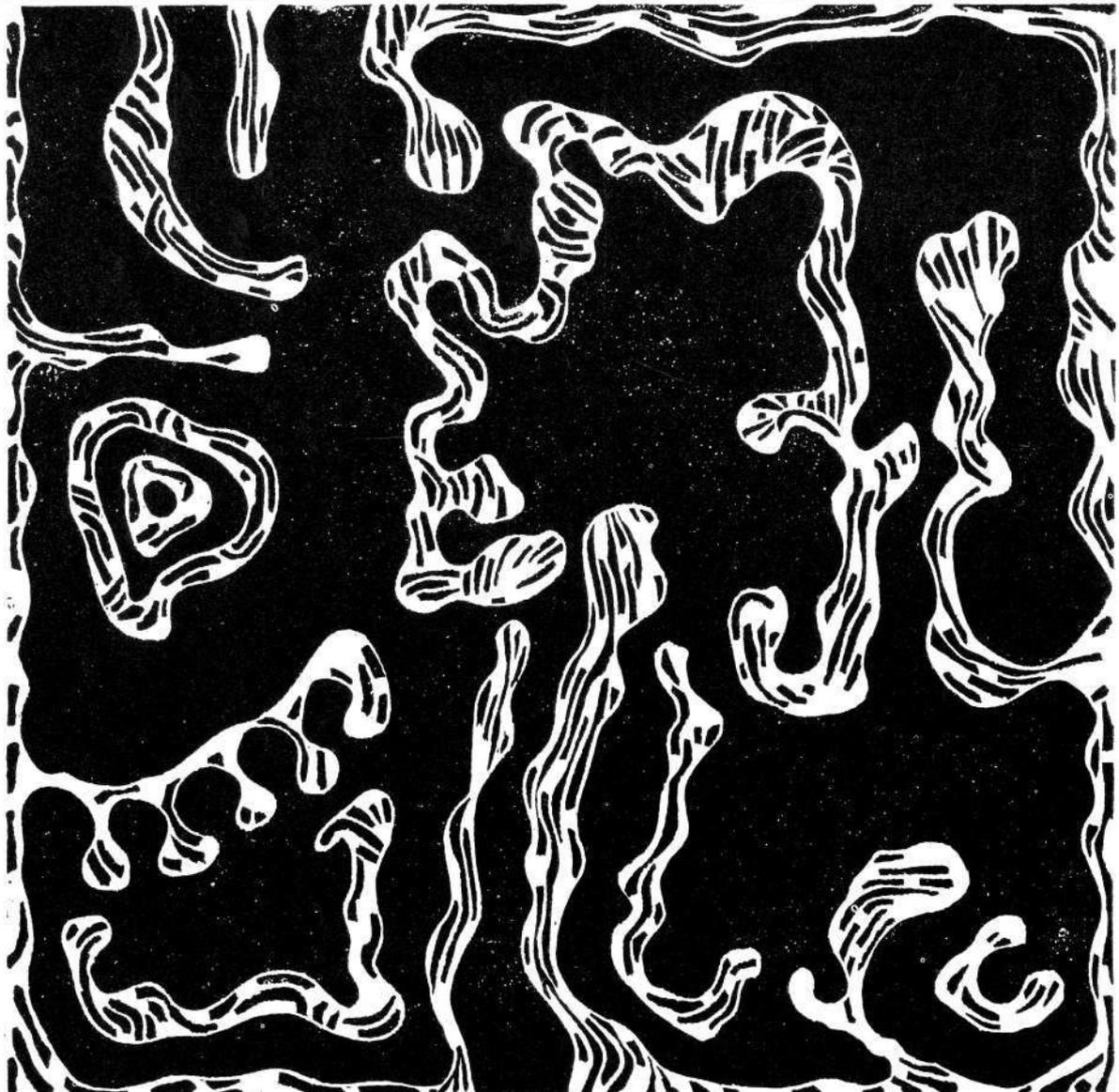


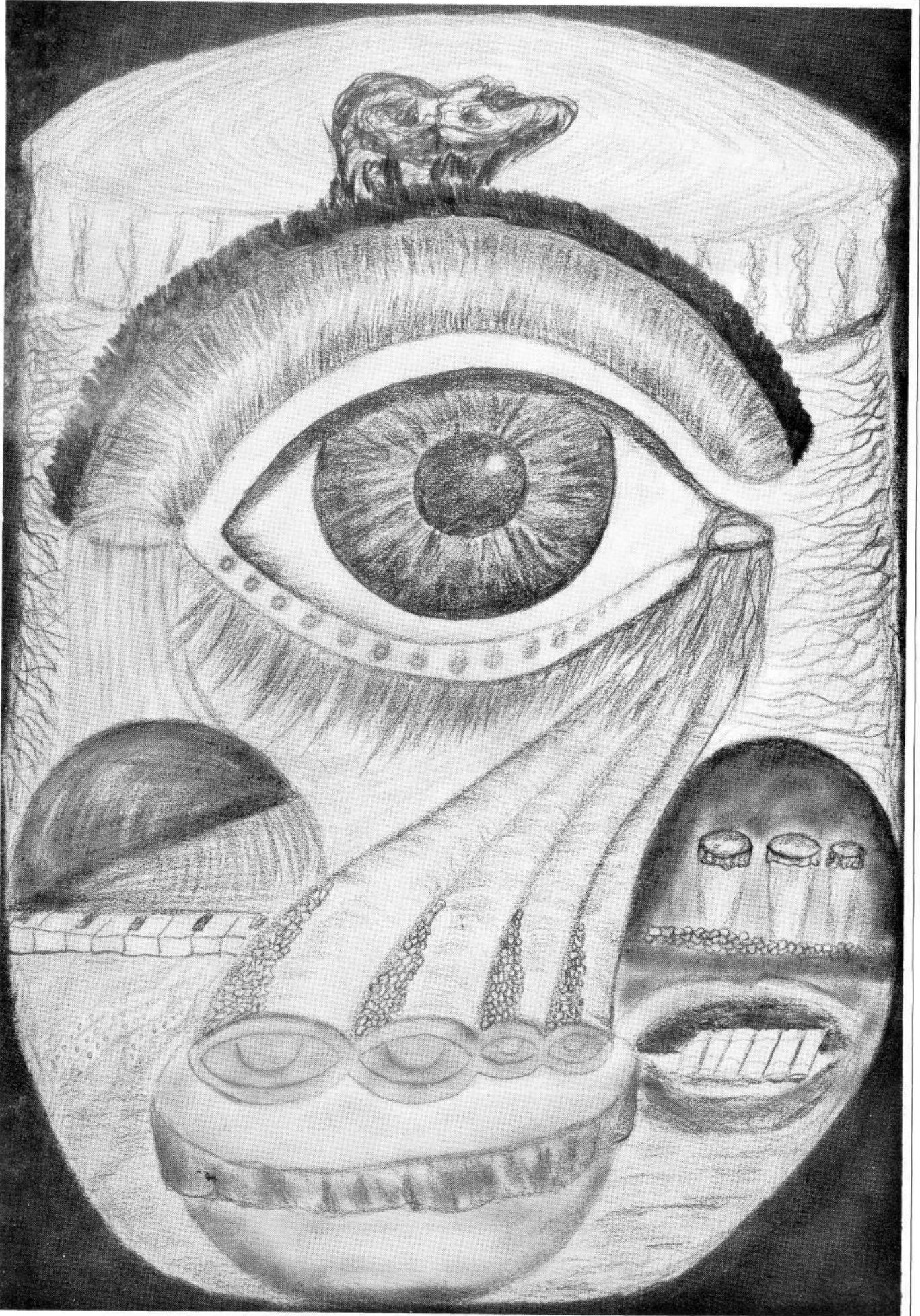
THE FUGITIVE

He stood behind me
with compassion and love.
As in a vision I saw
his face, the smile I had not known
from another —
yet like someone who had been there
a thousand years
he put his hand on my shoulder.
He spoke —
and his voice
was like a sound that travelled
across the distance
to reach me in my solitude.
His voice rang with deep sadness:
You have cried too long
with time against you,
but cry with me
I who am familiar with your feelings.
Tell me!
Why must you fret like this?
Your destiny and mine are one.
You and I together,

shall fight for your emancipation,
for ours is a union of peace and love.
Do you hear? Are you listening?
Follow . . .
follow me.
come, my brother
I will wipe your tears
and put an end to your fears,
fears that have held you down for so long
and made you a fugitive . . .'
Yes brother, I replied
you have fed me with hope.
I will walk beyond all this pain
and you shall be there,
for time moves swiftly
and peeps through dreams of sadness,
and motions me away
from this lonely path of subjugation.
Come with me,
or remain a lonely fugitive too,
forever searching
forever choked by fear.

This poem is written in honour of Don F. Mattera whose love for his people, black awareness, and his mother land, and his search for peace and love, was banned in 1973. To him I dedicate this poem as a bond of our friendship.





Matsemela Cain Manaka

CYA, Diepkloof, Soweto

EYES

Recreator of mankind, possessor of humour,
Observer of everything, doves and dung!
Known before the arrival of doves
(Linguistic dove who knew all the African languages!)
Within no time of his arrival in the kraal
EYES made brains to function as thoughts
emerging from the mental capacity of mankind.

Movement through the eyes. The ears balance.
And legs carry the naked body.

Errol Great Mpye

IT HURTS TO BE LONELY

Dawn breaks, a happy day born
seeing the one you sigh for
taking his tender love
giving your warm love

Remember his promise and yours
in those nights in his loving arms
dancing the night to its core
pausing for a warm kiss

Those sleepless nights
sipping Cinzano, rolling on the floor
whispering sweet words to each other
remember you can make it

Resist loneliness and temptation!
He vanished into thin air
evaporating like steam,
he is dead though alive

Express that love you had!
He vanished in the morning mist
a bitterness in life, empty inside
life is a disaster to me

I used to slide in the clouds
coming down like a pebble from the air
pride gone, gone with the setting sun
and now the world stands still.

Lady Nunu Ramohlokwane

REVENGE AT 4 a.m.

I hear the rain beating outside
beating as if on my genitals
beating on the house, the house
feeling like my body, gutters
of night streaming down me —
dark the night, and cold — oh God
I will let those men without rainsuits
wait a long time before I answer the door.

Gordon Khuvutlu.

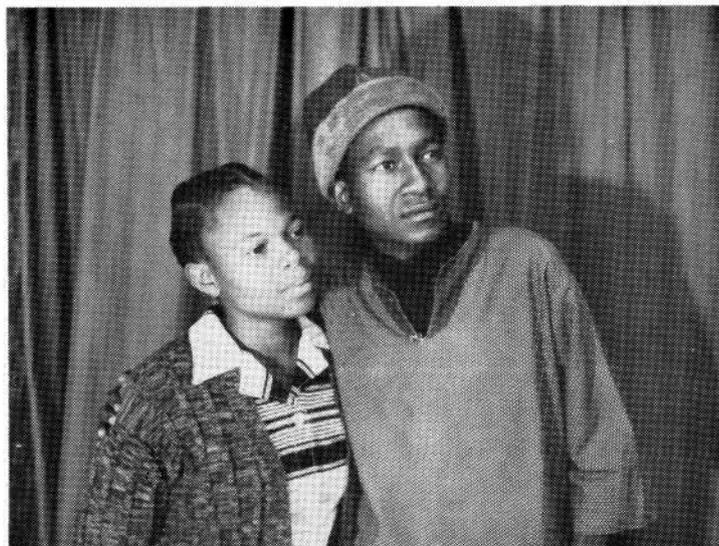
ALL THAT LIVE

My cup of tears is full:
I cannot cry anymore,
grieve anymore,
mourn anymore.
My cup of tears is full.

You hurt our souls:
swept our beloved from us,
enslaved our thoughts,
banished peace between us,
systematized us in servitude.
You hurt our souls.

But day dawns for all that live in it.
Let my soul and spirit live together.

Moalusi John wa Ledwaba



JOHN LEDWABA and SUSAN SHABANGU — together they can reach the star across the moon. Dark as they are, CYA picked them up in darkness, wandering through their talents, still with a long way to go in theatre. Both of them featured in 'The Horn', an art exhibition accompanied by music and dramatic poetry, playing the King and the Queen in this CYA production. Things always fall apart, and they have declared a temporary divorce. John will be appearing in a three man play called 'Live' and Susan in 'Imbumba', a play for five characters. CYA's progress in theatre continues.

* * * * *

In **STAFFRIDER No. 1** CYA featured work by Masilo Isaac Rabothata, Matsemela Cain Manaka, William 'Cheeks' Legoale, T. Maketha, Hanyane Nelson Shikwambane, Lebethe R. Lebethe, Manabile Lister Manaka, J. C. Kgaba and Icaboth Maubane. In this issue they step aside to introduce other members of this multi-talented Diepkloof group: Mualusi John wa Ledwaba, C. S. Gopane, Errol Great Mpye, Gordon Khuvutlu, and Lady Nunu Ramohlokwane. We hope to include work by A. M. Gamede and Darkie Moteane in a future issue.

AMONG THE LILIES (For Stoptlight Joseph)

Oh! merciless trigger
You're so merciless,
You're so blind,
You're so dumb.

Why, pitiless you,
You never look, you just leap,
You never ask, you just act.

Otherwise you would have known
That this is no foe,
But only a rocket
Among the lilies.

They can bear me witness,
Those in the neighbouring streets,
That you're self-disciplined
Among the lilies.

Those sweet, fresh lilies
Fresh like you
Kept asking why,
Why Joseph, why him.

Let not this change you
Stay as sweet
Stay as cool
Stay as self-disciplined
Just like you.

Through God's providence
You're still there
Among the lilies.

It's no luck, you know
But God's intent
When hope was lost,
By Mom and all,
The Lord God said,
'Remember, I'm your God!'

You wait and pray,
And back (and safe) I'll bring
Your self-disciplined Joseph
Home among the lilies.

C. S. Gopane

Open School Group, Johannesburg

Poems by Pat Seboko / Edmund Thengani / Elias Rakau Mphulo

THE GREAT PRETENDER

(Dedicated to all those who think they can trick modern youth)

The look in your eyes tells a story
A long story of your background
You cheated a thousand and got away with it
But brother don't try it on me.

Your sweet talks are sour to me
There's nothing wrong with my taste buds
There's nothing wrong with your vocal chords
It's just that I am myself.

Your broad smile is creamy to me
There's nothing wrong with my eyes
There's nothing wrong with your teeth
It's just that it is a surface smile.

In the name of Black Consciousness
You accumulated wealth
In its movement you were rejected
For you can't trick us for long.

The good in you I can't detect
There's nothing wrong with the way you treat people
There's nothing wrong with my scepticism
It's just that you are a great pretender.

Pat Seboko
Rockville

MY CRAZY-HORSE

Mr Crazy Horse
Of course I don't know his surname
Therefore I call him that
Why? Ah yes
because he owns a restaurant called 'Crazy Horse Steak House'

Yay! I laugh fella
Because on the window there is a portrait of a crazy horse
jumping head-down tail-up
I wonder why that horse is feeling so crazy
Does he give the customers a crazy horse steak with chips?
Heh! heh! of course not

When we pass his restaurant on the way to Flaxbro House
he likes to watch us
Even when going for a picnic
and going home too
I wonder what he's think of?
whether he's thinking
'I wish I was still young like these fellas
so I can enjoy life not a steak house.'

Edmund Thengani

JIGGS

Daar loop Bra Jiggs
Haai wena, ek ken daardie ou baie goed
Hy is 'n tsotsi van TJ
Hy was mos in 'n two-room in Nugget Street gebore
Nou het hy 'n huis in Doorie
Doorie is mos 'n multiracial 'kasië
Hy bly met die ander clever-bras daar.

Hy ken die hele spots van die Rand
Ek sien die hele professionals is hom bra
Las week het hy met die mayoress gedine.

Daar loop Bra Jiggs
Haai wena, ek ken daai ou baie goed
'n Man wat never kwaad is
Laat ek sê, van nou af wil ek hom studeer.

Pat Seboko
Rockville

FACE

A face with strained muscles
divorced from joy,
conspicuously sad
forever wet with tears
tears falling, falling
like intermittent rain.
Teeth that show when crying
skin cracked as parched earth
tears hanging like nimbus

A face stigmatising the actions
of people with paralysed feelings.

Elias Rakau Mphulo
(CYA, Diepkloof)

Four Poems : Stephen Watson

DREAM OF AN EXIT OF ME

The walls in darkness,
the old vessels of glass
near gone in their dark,
and I in their emptying
near done with a day . . .

And always there comes
the return as if haunted,
as if there never was
another place of beginning,
as if there never is
another point of an ending —
other than these hours
darkness is emptying
of time and of I . . .

And always the dream
that that cry somewhere
from a house just unheard
was not of I into me,
who like the vessels now nought
is emptied to no-one:
that nothing in here and out there
into which night
now everywhere pours.

POOR

The hungering eat me, I utter dust,
The unemployed who asked, I can't recall.
The grief of fat women unable to breathe,
I can't feel, I empty in their asking,
a fear, abstract, estranging in its gape.

And I'm alien from me, tip-toeing by
the hooves of raw eyes blacking the sun.
And I want to tear out, haul the spring
I've dirtied over me, to be rid of me.
For I'm thinking we've got it all wrong!
That I'm the poor one with no bread for the begging
and who therefore is not. Who is not am!

THE LOST

(for H. C.)

And now you wake to early frosts con,
as though the cold and sudden hurrying
had numbed you to its cause,
doped with what is lost
to which you swore before;
and I see you half-standing on a step
your hands harrying something futile
for a peace and meaning
that will not ask a faith.

And now with the dumb cavort of the days
leafing their questions into the sea,
with all the hands returned to their tomb,
the traitors safe in their faces and lies,
the schizoid nation beseeching its dream,
you can measure the walls
your sickness at night has made your own,
the face born of the burnt land,
the face of its lost.

And now that there was
some thing once you wished to know,
that crazed there was an endeavour,
you see the somethings of things
to which a grief or I belong.

DREAM OF BLACK

In the widowing dusk
the voices crisscross
like things shriven;
and I'm dreaming across
to with whom they go,
to the black forms that go
and who are not black —
whose black is the shadow
like the shadows of others
of the dreaming I am
in the empty house . . .

But whom is there
that there must be there
in the nothing,
so I want to shelter
with my hands
round all the things
that might break
and which don't break,
and which break me —
to the dreaming I am
in the widowing curse.

Forbidden Fruit : Pam Cox

'It's a miracle'.

A gardener myself, I leaned on the rickety fence.

'How on earth do you water this? The nearest tap is nearly a mile away'.

'I don't water it — the ground stays wet.'

'Then you must have been flooded out in the winter rains'.

'No, nothing has been washed away'. He stood at the side of the pondok, proudly displaying his zinnias, his mealie patch, and a fig tree, heavy with small green fruit. I wondered for how many years it had been rooted there.

People were beginning to gather for the service in the make-shift church nearby —

a Christian service in a Christian land. I went in with the others, for the pre-Christmas Eucharist.

'This is my Body which is given for you . . .' The words were in Xhosa, yet the meaning came through. In a strange environment, my mind wandered to the scene outside. There was an orderliness here that astonished me. Houses were neat, clean. People friendly. The noises one heard seemed happy. How free of smells the place was, though there weren't many lavatories to be seen.

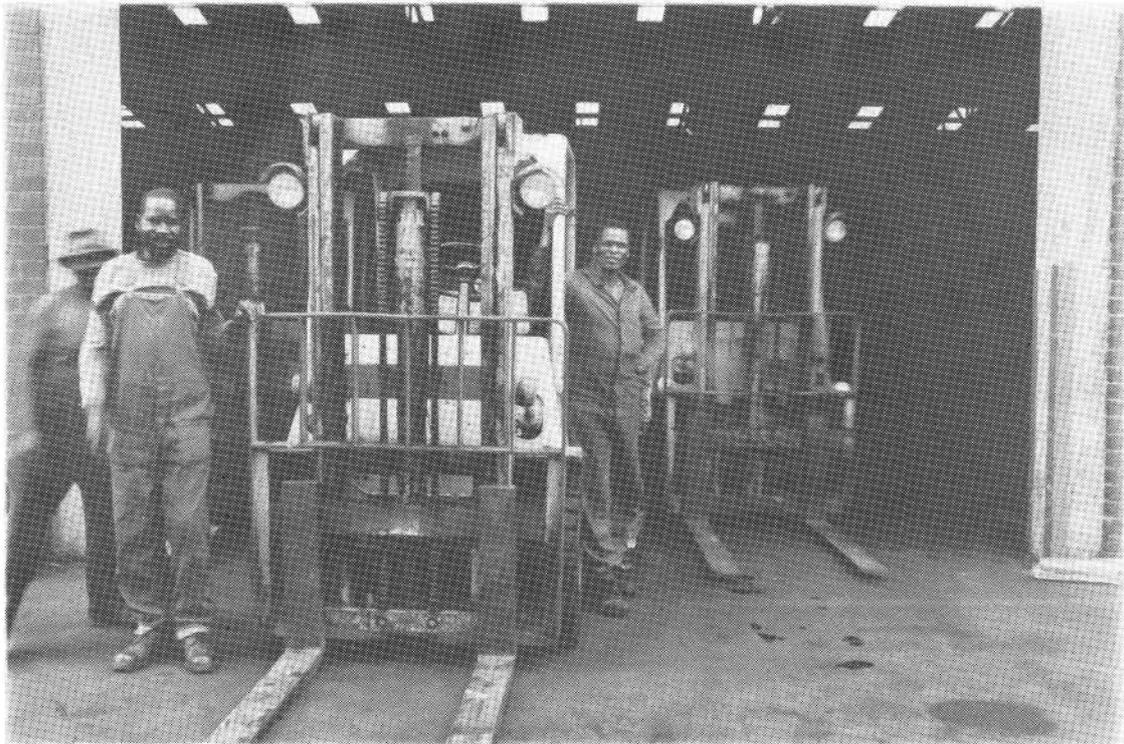
Rita seemed so different here. House-proud in her new abode, neatly wallpapering hardboard in a design of newspaper

and jam tin labels. Apricots, pineapples and peaches looked gaily down on the shining pots and primus, on the shining cheeks of the baby on her back.

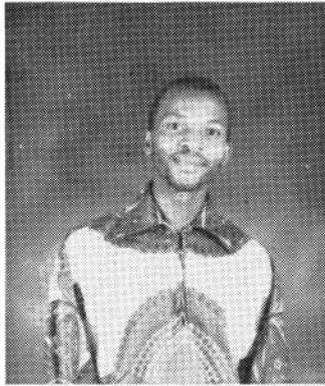
Among the worshippers I waited for the blessing. I was absolved from all guilt, and that included corporate guilt. The service ended. We walked through the thick sand into the setting sun, and to our cars.

January 1978

Dear God, a little prayer — faith-sized — let the fruit on that fig tree have been sweet in his mouth before the front end loader came to do its work in Unibell yesterday.



Photographs by Mark Lavender



Namhla ngu-Goodfriday

L. B. Z. Buthelezi
*was born at Esifuleni,
 Msinga district, in 1950.
 He is married
 and has two sons.*

Mangibona konke lokhu okwenzakala kuwena,
 Qhawe lase zweni lika-Moya;
 Enqondweni yami ngifikelwa ukuvuma.
 Ngiyavuma mntaka-Maria,
 Ukuba ngiyisoni.
 Nokuzwa lamazwi okuvalelisa kwakho emhlabeni.
 Awasikazi kepha ashaya emhloveni.
 Walomshikashika wejoka eliphezu kwakhe namhlanje.
 Linesisindo libe lingujuqu emzabalazweni womphefumlo.
 Lamazwi azimpophoma zomphefumlo,
 Ongenasici, namubandela wazizathu.
 Yingoba kumele nakanjani kufezwe,
 Okwasekushiwo umlomo ongathethimanga.

Ngiyazibona izandla ezihlathini.
 KuMaria nakuMaria Magadaleneni.
 Njengoba besinzile ijamile imisebenzi yobukhosikazi.
 Ibagabhile imihelo yokuzala,
 Nokuyotholela akuye muntu,
 Nekati lilele eziko.
 Lucimile ubhaqa lwezizwe.
 Nomhlaba uyasiketula, nendawo yokukhonza ivuleke umkhathi.
 UJuda Sikarioti udlala ngalo igazi elimsulwa.
 Ngiyayizwa iminjunju yokuzisola.
 Ngingomunye wabakukhaphela onqamlezweni.
 Bengikhona kwakhiwa uzungu.
 Bengikhona kulinganiswa ubude bezipikili.
 Bengikhona kucushwa isife.
 Elami iphimbo beliphuma phezulu.

Ngihlambalaza . . . zindala zombili!
 Ngisho ugodo nomuntu kubantu.
 Indlu yegagu iyanetha!
 Sengizuzwe imicibisholo eyisikhombisa.
 Othe ukhafula igazi ngomlomo phambi koquqaba,
 Ngavuleka amanxeba ayisikhombisa cishe ngafela eGestemane.
 Ngiyabona bekukhakhabisa.
 Bekufumba ngezimpama.
 Bekukhafulela ngezikhwehlela.
 Bakugwaza ngezinsungulo ebezicijwa yimina.
 Iyankenketha inhliziyo yami.
 Mayilale ngenxeba mntaka Tixo.
 Kukho konke phephisa anginaluthe lokuhlawula igazi lakho.

Ngingefunge ngigomele ngithi angikwazi.
 Ngiyakwazi ungu-Alfa no-Omega.
 Ungu-Lizwi kaTixo.
 Ngangikhona wenza izimangaliso.
 Mhla kuvuka izishosha.
 Mhla uvusa uLazaro.
 Konke lokhu Nkosi kungizuzile.
 Sengilungele ukuya nawe etilongweni,
 Ekufeni, eku Vukeni nase Kwenyukeni.
 "Kuqediwe".
 "Baba ezandleni zakho ngibeka umphefumlo wami."
 Musa Nkosi ukuhamba ngingakakuzekeli ngomzabalazo wami kulomhlaba,
 Ngingumhambuma kwelenkaba yami.
 Nesizwe sami ngithi ngiyasibumba basibhindlize labafowethu.
 Sifuzise ngofuzo lwakho, sicolisise ngobuqhawe.
 Singephucwa amandla okuvikela ukuthula, noxolo, nokunethezeka nobuzwe.
 Ngawe kudalulwe izimfihlakalo, kwavulwa indlela esohamba ngayo. Ameni.

Mothobi Mutloatse / Two Stories

The Night of a Million Spears

The young and brilliant Chief of Staff, Major-General Nkwenkwe had it all shrewdly planned while the boastful and lecherous Chief Minister — who called himself Prime Minister — was abroad. Gone to clinch another secret deal with the British Government in front of the world's television cameras.

Unaware that his 36-year-old army chief, B.Sc. graduate from the university of Fort Hare, was not the stooge or simpleton that the Chief Minister had thought him to be.

The lad had an urgent mission: to save his country from the curses of the world and continuous famine before it was too late.

So, to carry out his mission — from within — Maj. Gen. Nkwenkwe got in touch via the phone with his ex-university mates who had been posted in Washington and London by the CM. His plan had to take place without fail, on a specified date and time.

Seeing the men were both bored with their jobs, which entailed writing lengthy letters to the press defending the indefensible independence shambles, almost daily and nightly, they liked what they heard from their former classmate, and for the reason that they themselves did not understand fully what was meant by being independent, as they had first to report all matters to a certain embassy in Pretoria, prior to informing their head office in Lekhokho land.

Because the Chief Minister had a roving eye for pretty young women, it was arranged in London that a tall and sexy-looking Jamaican lass would lure the dirty old chief into a tender trap during one of his trips, and then hook him and hypnotise him until the mission was accomplished.

These preliminaries took four months so that nothing should go amiss at the last moment.

But there nearly was a postponement when the CM, without warning, sent Major-Gen. Nkwenkwe to London, to take part in a seminar on military intelligence lasting two months, which collided with the Big Day. By two weeks.

What had he to do? So as not to let the cat out of the bag by refusing to go to London, the army chief calmly jetted out, at the same time changing and re-arranging the plans in his head. He would return earlier than expected — by a week.

He would lie to the CM that he was not feeling well and wanted to recuperate in Switzerland.

With a week to go before the seminar ended, the army chief wasted no time in phoning the CM who unsuspectingly said: 'Fine, fine, Vuyo. Don't you worry about a thing. You really deserve a long rest as you are the most diligent of all the officials I have come across. I sometimes feel ashamed of myself when I see how dedicated you are to your work. Remind me to raise your salary when you come back. No, don't reply to that. It is just part of the new deal I have in store for you — a farm worth R40 000. Incidentally, tomorrow morning I will be flying to London for some business discussions with some acquaintances from Jamaica. Do you know that Jamaicans are some of our best friends? Ha-Ha. See you when I see you.

And, please take care of my cousin. Wine, women and song are too much for him. He'll be deputising while I'm gone.'

Then he hung up.

The next morning, as the CM landed at Heathrow Airport, the army chief did the same — but in Lekhokho's capital. And all the boys were there — ready for action. So without wasting much time, the army chief and two truckloads of armed men drove off at high speed for their hide-out over the mountains, where the whole mission was played through again and again until Major Gen. Nkwenkwe was satisfied that nothing could go wrong.

Thereafter — it was now nearly 5 a.m. — cryptic phone calls about the phrase 'curses come home to roost' were made to other contacts in the various police stations across the land.

Upon a certain signal from their leader, the whole army took up positions at strategic points in the capital, while Major Gen. Nkwenkwe and about six other men drove like hell towards the radio stations, arms at the ready.

'The CM's cousin was at a concubine's place, unsober, when he was startled by the radio announcement soon after his lover had switched on the radio for early morning music.'

Caught unawares, the radio people surrendered without a fight as the army chief took over the microphone and announced in a clear and semi-emotional tone, that Chief Minister Andazi was no longer in power. And that all government officials were deemed enemies of the people until they denounced the former regime and shared all that they had accumulated fraudulently with the country's poor people.

He explained briefly, however, that Professor Ndlebe in London, and Dr Ngcobo in Washington had helped overthrow the Andazi regime, and therefore, were friends of the people. The army chief, in his no-punches-pulled radio announcement, said all those people who had been arbitrarily banned and detained without trial under Proclamation R500, were with immediate effect, free men and women.

He said: 'The people shall starve no longer, though the next few months are going to mean sweat and toil to get the country back on its feet again. Our traditional heritage — communalism — will be reinstated. And all the bank accounts of all the officials, including the Chief Mini-

ster's, will be frozen and poured back into the community. The nation is entitled to know that the former leader amassed a lot of wealth and luxuries for himself at the expense of the people, and was at one time director of seven different foreign companies. His bank account is believed to have contained more than half a million rand, and that on this sea of poverty, malnutrition and ignorance that is Lekhokholand.'

As he was speaking, one of the soldiers handed him a note in which one of the contacts at the border post said the CM's cousin had skipped into South Africa and that two men had gone on hot pursuit in a bid to apprehend him before they were seen by the South African authorities.

The CM's cousin was at a concubine's place, unsober, when he was startled by the radio announcement soon after his lover had switched on the radio for early morning music. Like quicksilver, he had jumped out of bed, donned his trousers, jumped into his car, and shot off like a bullet for the border.

But there was already a roadblock.

In desperation, he crashed into it, knocking down two soldiers and was chased by two men across the border, in a land-rover. He was so scared of being caught that he rammed the accelerator to full power, increasing his lead and forgetting that because of the previous night's downpour, the mud roads were muddy and slippery.

Just then a stray goat appeared in front of him. But it was too late for him to avoid it, and as he swerved frantically to the left side of the road, the small car overturned and the Chief Minister's cousin was fatally crushed.

Meanwhile, the army chief was concluding his speech in the capital.

'I hereby formally declare all previous dealings between the former regime and the South African government, on the question of citizenship, null and void. Nobody has the right to enforce citizenship on anybody, and, with that, I wish to assure all our cousins in the Republic, that they have not been rendered reluctant citizens of Lekhokho. Nor have they been rendered stateless. They are as much part of South Africa as the Whites there.'

That same day, in another supposedly independent homeland, a coup took place, inspired by the Nkwenkwe one. But, it was short-lived as the army was crushed by 'outside' bullets. The move had been impromptu and unplanned.

On the other hand, Dr Ngcobo in Washington had gate-crashed the United States Secretary of State's home to present him with the true picture of the situation in Lekhokholand and assure him that no communists were involved in the coup. The US number one foreign relations man immediately summoned one of the air force's fastest jets to take him to Lekhokho that very day, so that he could study the situation personally and report to the President about what help, if any, the US government could give to the Nkwenkwe regime. Before the communists took advantage and yet another marxist government emerged in tense Southern Africa.

Without first informing Congress!

Pimville

In London, the Chief Minister was jolted into reality by a telephone call from Professor Ndlebe who bluntly told him to pack his bags and go and seek political asylum in Pretoria as he was a wanted man in Lekhokho from that day onwards.

'What do you mean?' he had shouted at his ex-London man.

'I mean', replied the professor, diplomatically, 'your government has been overthrown.'

Shocked.

'Overthrown? By whom?'

'Just take a guess.'

'Look here, I don't have time for pranks —'

'Yes, but you do have time for fun with women.'

Amazed.

'How did you — will you stop clowning.'

'Yes, your days of clowning are over!'

Run back to Papa Pretoria before you run out of breath.'

Thus he hung up on the lonely chief who had had a bad night — first the Jamaican lass disappeared soon after dinner at the Hilton; and then the nightmare of a million spears chasing him through the night.

Defeated, lost, and dejected, he did as he was asked, and flew back to his mentors, and like a child who has been naughty, confessed that he had lost his lollipop.

When he wanted to know whether a counter-coup was possible, he was curtly told not to be naive as under the circum-

stances, such a move would not only embarrass Pretoria in the end, but also result in its losing the little support it had from the three big western powers.

He was advised to wait awhile until something was raked out of the Pretoria diplomatic bag, hidden in the coal-box.

They had to play it safe here. One false move could boomerang.

Back in Lekhokholand, the Chief Justice presented the nation at a public gathering, with the duplicates of the applications he had posted secretly to the Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations, via the Chief Minister himself! In a sealed envelope addressed to the Chief Justice's imaginary lover in London, at a certain address which was really Professor Ndlebe's home address.

The Chief Justice knew that the CM was in such a hurry to get his arms around his Jamaican lover, that he did not have time always for any other business. He was under a spell from the West Indies.

And, that evening, the US Secretary of State, having conferred with the new Lekhokho leader, and convinced that he had done the right thing by by-passing Congress, sent a telex message saying: 'All things going according to plan. New regime friendly and welcomes US financial and technical aid.' The Lekhokhoans asked to be taught how to fish, and not to be given

fish. They were not beggars, they were people in need of technical guidance.

For the first time in its history in Africa, the American government committed itself to a Black African government, without even informing Pretoria first.

The State Secretary promised the Lekhokhoans that the US would help the new regime present its case for recognition as a free country, at the World Court in Geneva when the time came.

When the people heard this over the radio, they nearly went hysterical with joy. University students marched with placards praising the United States' bold step and its acceptance of the new Nkwenkwe regime.

Meanwhile, across the border, it was back to square one for all the old Lekhokho megalomaniacs euphemistically called envoys: back to the townships as they were no longer 'foreign bantu' with a following.

And ex-Chief Minister Andazi, paralysed by the curses of the people he had banished to oblivion, suffered two quick strokes when he was addressed as a 'kaffir' by a goods train driver after he had got into a Whites-Only lift at the headquarters of one of the administration boards.

And off he was taken, in a bantu ambulance, to a bantu hospital.

Until it was time to R.I.P.

All characters are fictional, any resemblance to any living person is coincidental.

Don't be Vague — Insist on Human Rights

I do not know why, but recently I have been getting this funny feeling. Some of those huge advertisements boards which greet us in the mornings on our way to work, and smile at us on our way home every day — could they be the work of ghetto-orientated copy-writers with a fertile sense of humour?

For instance, the other day I was aimlessly moving about the townships, nursing my unemployment blues in my own way, which is not the same as that of the ou from Westdene, when I bumped into a lady. She grabbed my eyes, my heart and my soul as well.

She was ordinarily dressed in black and white. She wasn't what they refer to as a country-bumpkin — you know, a sort of Jane-Comes-To-Soweto. Neither was she dressed in way-out gear — things like knicker-something... And she was smiling directly at me alone, though there were many other people in the area, some nursing babalas from lack of access to the lengthy waiting house list; or house waiting list; or is it housing waste list? Others nursing the fluctuating rents; while the rest nursed prospects of opening up paradise resorts in independent homelands, not by consent, but by agreement in absentia.

And now, dear reader, this vivacious lady-of-the-ghettos was wearing apparel sewn out of words which were simple, sincere, plain, pure, natural and honest.

The message was concise and clear. It was not complex, and neither was it too-ordinary.

It hit one who was a ghetto-dweller like me, directly between the eyes.

And I fell on my knees, reeling from shock and reality, if ever there be such an

ailment. If it doesn't exist, which I greatly doubt, then I must enter the history books (but not those of propagandists), as its discoverer. Thank heaven I didn't invent it!

When I got up, five seconds later, I was knocked down again by an unidentified left-hook that would have shamed Muhammad Ali on the rumble in the jungle — delivered by the lady with the message.

Correction: I was nearly knocked out by the message on the lady of the ghetto.

I could have sworn her dressmaker was a leftist, or activist, or communist or some undesirable element with a name and title ending in ist. But what I really could not understand was that the dressmaker must have got her licence in Pretoria: but how?

And after pondering over this for another few seconds, I then came to the silly conclusion that the dressmaker, in the main, had no ulterior motives when she designed the dress of the lady of the ghetto.

Simple reason is that, hers was the work of a poet. And, as we all know too well, poets are a harmless lot because they are dreamers — unlike yours truly.

Therefore, the message was legitimate, though it was meant for the booze-loving community.

And it was a witty one.

It said softly to me: 'DON'T BE VAGUE — INSIST ON HUMAN RIGHTS.'

Hau! I exclaimed to myself when I regained consciousness.

'It is true, the communists have arrived, like we were warned from the cradle to the grave.'

I again fathomed myself: surely, the designer must have been inspired by America's President Carter's emphasis on

human rights at the United Nations, and also his statement subsequently that the 'cold war' between Moscow and Washington had ended after all these decades of cockeyed priorities in foreign indabas?

Was the long-delayed 'miraculous' change on the way out? Or in?

Didn't I hear not so long ago a voice in the wilderness yelling: 'I won't die for petty supremacy signs?'

All the time, the lady with the message stood gazing at me fixedly.

She was putting me into a trance. She was hypnotising me. She was seducing me.

I battled with all my might to resist her, but because what she was saying is something I was born with, I gave in.

In short; I surrendered to her message. And I knew the consequences.

I was not going to be vague any more — I was going to insist on human rights, I promised myself. Because, I am really a fanatical boozier of inalienable rights and other spirits.

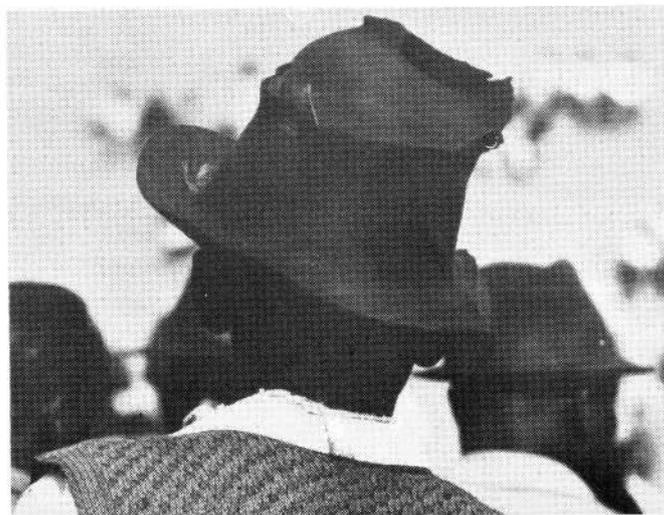
I immediately told the lady that, in the event of my sudden disappearance from this African soil, no matter what, she would know that the communists did it.

And that she must tell the people that communists hate people who speak out and want freedom, equality and brotherhood.

Lastly, I told my beautiful lover that she should be on the alert as both communists and the people-of-democracy have been kidnapped by Mr Vagueness.

And that the ransom is: JUSTICE FOR ALL CITIZENS.

P.S. Only cheques issued by the International Court at the Hague are acceptable.



One Man, One Hat

Photographs by Ralph Ndawo

Dube, Soweto

The Bicycle : Sol Rachilo

A piece of ingenious device
That is sold for a full price.
There's fine workmanship
That can praise one's ownership.
The bicycle!
I looked at it
Green with envy.
My heart filled with mixed emotions,
I remembered
How my uncle's limb was dismembered
As he rode down Maponya's way
On a bicycle;
How he related excitedly,
Events belatedly,
That caused his spiritual downfall.

The bicycle!
The last World War
Fought with great promise
Left men in awe
About one's demise
When your life was fickle
To your fellow comrades.
When hunger struck your family back home
And you were way up in Egypt
Where distance lent enchantment to that view
And crucially discarded
The burning thought that one had died back home.

The bicycle!
What a miracle!
Hooray the war is over!
It's an unbelievable spectacle
Of rejoicing, accepting the dower
And starting life afresh in sunny South Africa!
Alas!
The time drew nigh
For soldiers to reap what they were sowing.
Anxieties mounted on fortunes tenfold
And only a handful of fortune was bestowed.
All their pride that was to unfold
Was a beautiful piece of art,
Man made
Called
The bicycle.
For all the good services rendered
For the love of one's dear country.

Alexandra

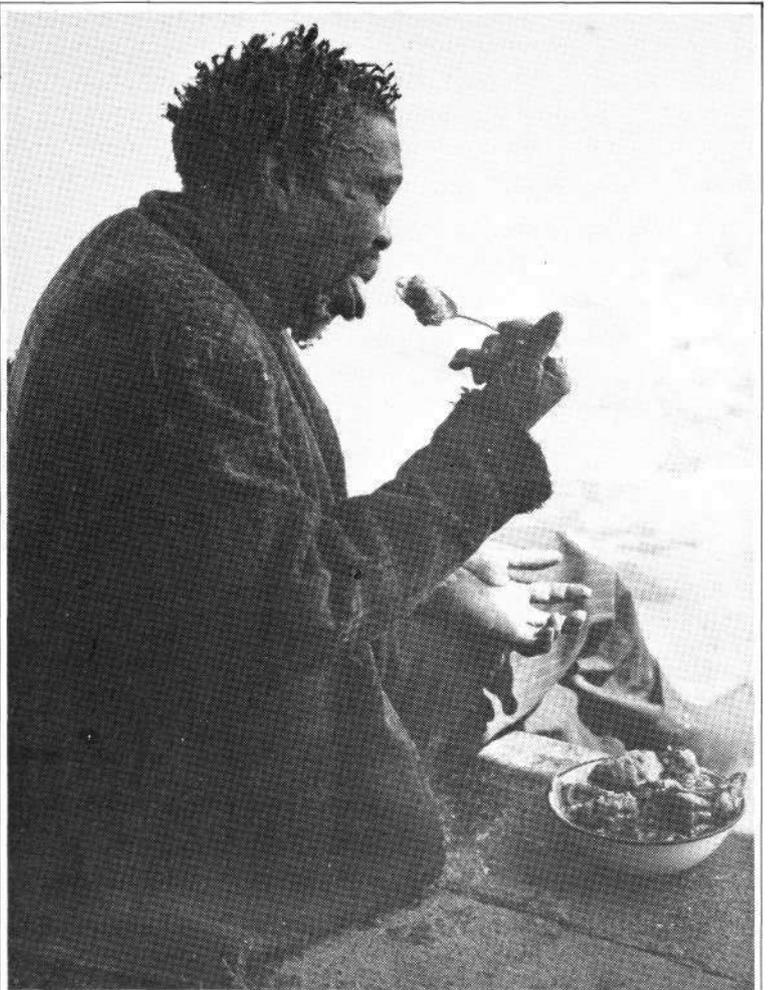
Black Egoism : Jackie Seroke

You are regressive,
You are isolating,
from life to nothing
you lead

Man for himself,
my interests first,
A lousy attitude
is what you possess.

Alone!
yes, alone you go
and never ever
will you gain maturity

Please mister Ego
Be a link
in the chain of relationship.



Photographs: Ralph Ndawo

Kimberley

It is the Storm : Noorie Cassim

It is quiet — so quiet that I hear the wind
I hear the leaves rustle —
I hear your footsteps —
It is frightening this stillness
like the calm before a storm
I hear you plod along your weary roads
Your footsteps are heavy — undemanding
I see your faces without expression —
I see you toil from day to day without question —
I see your candle-light burning in the darkness
like a million beckoning stars —
I see you curled up and cold — asleep
I see acceptance!
Like an explosion your dead township rockets into flames —
Yes, it is the storm —
The noise is deafening —
I hear cries that tear at me inside —
I hear angry, hurried footsteps —
I see your faces filled with hate —
as you refuse to go to work, but prefer to starve —
I see you awake!

Hammanskraal

Matshidiso : Thabo Mooke

We knew each other well.
She was beautiful, a rose newly sprung in a summer's December.
Her way of speaking was very soft and remote.
Tshidi — so she was called by those whose great hunger she satisfied —
Never knew how to purpose her hands for a living.

It was on a summer's morning, just before the hour of the rising sun.
I opened the window of my home to let the fresh air in.
I saw a group of people gathered in the street.
It was just opposite my home; I joined them.
Matshidiso was lying on her back as she did when she purposed her body for a living.

It was no pleasant sight at all.
The long knife used to strike her down was laid next to her.
She was bleeding below her left breast.
Her breathing was very low and soft.
I saw the eyelids of her big eyes close.
Then I knew Tshidi would not satisfy any man's hunger anymore.
But it grieved my heart that Matshidiso was no longer familiar with the sun.



Photo: Ralph Ndawo

Amelia House : Four Poems

SUNRISE

I'm tired
of watching
black clouds
roll across the sky
like Firestone tire advertisements
I raise my hands
beyond the clouds
the sun draws
my blood
to join its long fingers
to reach
through the darkness
Raise your hands
brothers and sisters
My blood
and yours
will make our
sun rise.

EXILE

is not leaving
capetown
or coming to
kentucky
or being in london
paris or rome
but knowing
there is no easy going
back.

HARD LABOUR

When we are condemned for planting seeds
of freedom
Pain
we must endure
And
when you bulldoze our planted fields
to destroy our freedom harvest
Pain
we must endure
But
when our deep rooted crops escape your
freedom crushing
And we tend them with back breaking labour
Pain
we
will
endure.

DELIVERANCE

Bear down
My Mother Country
Push
You who have carried the seeds
full term
Bear down
Push
Only you can give birth
to our freedom
Only you can feel the full
ripe weight
Bear down
We will stand by you
We must relieve your pain
Bear down bear down
Push.



Photograph: Terence Bloch



Casey Motsisi : Tributes

JULY 14, 1978 is going to be an important day for the literary scene in South Africa. That's when a book of the selected writings of the late Kid Casey Motsisi will be published by Ravan Press.

The book is edited by Mothobi Mutloatse and illustrated by Spider, regular cartoonist for The Voice newspaper and once a school-chum of Casey's — they were both taught by Can Themba!

The book, which includes nearly all the Kid's short stories and his famous 'On The Beat' columns from Drum magazine, will cost R3,00.

Casey Karabo Motsisi, born January 10, 1934, died at Baragwanath Hospital on September 3, 1977.

He is survived by his wife, Queen, daughter, mother and eight sisters.

His brother-in-law, Mr Joe Thloloe, ex-president of the banned Union of Black Journalists (UBJ), could not attend his funeral — he was in detention and still is, under Section 6.

In this issue of STAFFRIDER several of The Kid's fans and friends pay tribute . . .

THE LESOTHO UNION OF JOURNALISTS MOURNS WITH THE FAMILY OF CASEY MOTSISI AND THE UBJ OVER THE TRAGIC AND UNTIMELY DEATH OF THAT GREAT AFRICAN JOURNALIST STOP CASEY'S CONTRIBUTION TO AFRICAN JOURNALISM WILL BE REMEMBERED THROUGHOUT HISTORY FOR HE POTRAYED AFRICAN URBAN LIFE SO VIVIDLY WITH EXCEPTIONAL HUMOUR AND SATIRE MAY HIS SOUL REST IN PEACE JOE MOLEFI PRESE E E E
PRESIDENT LESOTHO UNION OF JOURNALISTS

Casey Motsisi : Tributes

AN ODE FROM AN EX-DRINKING BUDDY

'Yea! How are the mighty fallen!'

Kid Casey old feller — We've loved your adventures
Of Hajas, Beeyahs, Die Hardes, Shake the Contents;
Kid Handbags, Kid Ndambula, Kid Malalape, the lot.
Kid Casey on the Beat and your meccas to Aunt Peggy's
Were our favourite page and delightful to read.
All the 'kids' born of your fertile imagination
We've lived with them, cajoled them, and cried with them,
Indelible in our minds they'll always remain.
You surrounded our lives with a humour that's rare
Now all of a SUDDEN! With hardly GOODBYE!
You up and divorced from HAJA MAHOG!
HOW BAD! HOW SAD! HOW DEAD!
The Strange tricks of FATE have got me bamboozled
She's got to be having a belly-ache laughing
'Cause lately we've been sayin'
Kid lay off the boozin'
And so very like you
You've been ready and willing
To give A.A. the trying, — and ALAS!
When Death comes a' creepin'
The Cause of it, is reported to be
A word I could almost swear you could hardly pronounce
'MENINGITIS' they say is the cause of your demise
If you knew then, what you know now
Kid Casey Old feller what a Regular Ball you might have had.
Love to the Gang.

LINES FOR 'THE KID'

Coup de theatre
Was death's move
In the Motsisi family.

But now bold death holds
Black scribes to ransom
Who collect and write those untold
Memorable memoirs of old
And hand them to mankind
To laugh, grin and die with Casey.

In their work
May 'The Kid' live long
Wherever he is now.

Mandla Ndlazi

- 6 I regarded him highly as a journalist and person. He was the only one, as far as my knowledge about journalism stretches, who with his pen and capabilities, was able to penetrate through the dark wall of a drunk and show the nation that there is humanity behind that wall and its troubles. And with his 'Drum' magazine column of 'Kids' he described his characters so explicitly that you could realistically visualize the character. That brilliant writing actually helped many of our playwrights to characterize their plays.
His poems were read in many of the Dorkay House productions like 'Black and Blue', directed by Corney Mabaso and he was very helpful personally in an advisory role in most of these. We shall miss him greatly, and we sympathize with his family. ♣

Sam Stretch Williams

CRUEL DEATH HAS ONCE MORE ROBBED US ONE OF OUR BRILLIANT BLACK
JOURNALISTS AT THE TIME WHEN BLACK JOURNALISTS ARE FACING THE MOST
CRITICAL CHALLENGES OF THEIR TIMES STOP GONA BWIND CASEY SON OF THE
SOIL STOP FROM A DISTANT FRIEND = PARKS ALEX MANGENA

≡BULLS OF UN-EVEN AVERAGE HAVE BEEN CASTRATED INTO MEEK≡UNCHALLENGING HEIFERS IN
THE JOURNALISTIC SPHERE SHOULD YOU≡EREST IN PEACE GRANT US FREEDOM IDEOLOGIES IN
THIS OUR≡REPOSSESSED WORLD THE WHYFOR YOU ARE DEPARTED IS THE WHY-THEN YOU'VE≡
≡LEFT US A NAKED IDENTICAL BLACK NATION AS RELUCTANT ''KID-FOLLOW-SUITS'',≡WE
BESEECH THAT YOUR SOUL MUST≡GOOD-GUMPSHIN AHA SIX MABONE≡
BLOEMFONTEIN BLACK WRITERS AND ARTISTS' ASSOCIATION≡≡

Soweto Speaking

to Miriam Tlali

Mrs H. Konopi is a middle-aged woman who has been living in Rockville, Moroka for the last fifteen years. She is a widow who lives with her married daughter and two school-going sons.

‘**Y**ou look well. Garankuwa is really treating you alright. I did not know that you were back.’
‘Oh. Do you think so? I’ve been here two weeks now. Oh, I remember the last time I was at your place was when I came to say goodbye.’

‘You must be doing well. I see you now have another car, a Peugeot this time. Where’s your van?’

‘No. That Peugeot outside is not mine. It belongs to my daughter’s friends from Potchefstroom. They are attending a funeral of one of their colleagues here. Things are not going so well. As it is, I’m stranded. I came by bus from Pretoria. What could I do? I wanted to come and see whether there’s nothing I can do for myself. Also to see how the children are.’

‘Your van; where is it?’

‘It has been put off the road by the traffic department. They say there’s something wrong with the steering wheel.’

‘Then they probably saved your life. Imagine moving around in a car with a faulty steering wheel!’

‘Yes, but I’m used to moving in a car. What do I do now, what do I eat? And the children, what do I do with them?’

‘I thought you were thinking of leaving Soweto in order to make a living in Garankuwa because there were prospects there. How’s the “water” business? I thought you said your plot was situated at a place where there were many schools and you were going to make fat cakes and other things for school kids?’

‘The water. Everything went wrong. You know, that pumping machine I told you I bought for so much — a thousand rand. Well, something went wrong with it. It did work for a while and people came to buy water — people from the surrounding areas. But then it suddenly stopped working, I don’t know why. I got someone to try and fix it up and he’s still struggling with it. I do not think he knows anything about such a machine. These machines!’

‘It’s really bad. I’d send it back to where I bought it.’

‘Yes. And I paid so much. That’s another reason why I came. To try and see whether they can’t go and repair it. You know what they say to me? They tell me I bought it, what do they say — “voets” something?’
‘Voetstoets?’

‘Yes. They say that when I bought it, it was working. They tell me if I want them to look at it, then I must pay all expenses if they must go all the way to Garankuwa.’

‘I remember someone telling me that buying a second-hand car or machine is like buying someone’s troubles.’

‘Yes; but what can a poor woman like myself do? The children have got to eat. Now I see what it means to be a widow. My husband used to drink heavily and not give me any money, but here,’ (she says, pulling out both her hands from under her armpits, rubbing the palms together, then opening them in front of her) ‘oh here he was very good. He was a born mechanic. He used to

help all his friends and our neighbours here with their cars and lorries. He used to fix up their cars and there was no trouble. Even if he was jealous when I drove my own car and took days, sometimes weeks, to help me when there was something wrong with it. I used to beg him and nag him until he fixed it up at last.’ (She smiles.)

‘What can we say? Men are men and they’ll always remain men. He does not even see that the more you work, the more you help him. He’s still jealous and tries to stop you.’ (She sighs. After a long pause she continues.)

‘But I miss his hands now; I really miss them. And his tools. They are about the only things he really cared for, more than the children and myself. He used to take them out and clean them, arrange them nicely in little pockets and put them away. They are still there in that shack. Many tools. I wonder what I’ll do with them.’ (She points at a locked corrugated iron shack in the yard.)

‘Why don’t you take them to Garankuwa? Maybe someone can use them to repair your pumping machine and you can sell water again.’

‘What? My poor husband’s tools? No. They would just get lost. There’s that boy there. A useless thief. You know, there’s no use trying to be good to some people. I took him there to help his parents and let him earn a few rands for himself instead of sitting in the sun and getting into trouble. I’ve just got myself into a mess with a thief. He’s very good at doing the garden. That’s why I took him with me. To look after the place and clean up the plot. You see these stands of ours here in Rockville, well those plots there can take four, sometimes six of them. Very big. Just nice to plant vegetables. I was thinking I could transport vegetables to Pretoria at week-ends and sell them, but now this boy is just a nuisance to me. He works slowly and as soon as I am out of sight, he stops working. He has befriended a stupid boy who claims to be a builder but can only put one brick on top of another and says: “I am a builder”.’ (She laughs.)

‘You should see the house next-door to mine.’ (She twists her eyes and lips and squints, and we laugh loudly.)

‘I wouldn’t do that. Take a lousy stupid person and let him build for me? I wouldn’t.’ (She shakes her head vigorously.)

‘If I can’t afford to get a proper builder to build me a house then I die in that zinc “plattendak” of mine.’ (She shakes her head.)

‘Bagelo ba re: “mpotse tsa ko ke tswang teng, e seng tsa ko ke yang teng.” (The old people say: “Ask me about where I come from and not about where I’m going to”). If I had known, I wouldn’t have taken that boy. Just now I’m thinking seriously of returning him to Soweto. And I’m going to do it. You know, I had collected so many pans, pots, cutlery and crockery from the whites in the Johannesburg suburbs where I used to buy second-hand clothing. The ones I used to sell on the farms. Do you remember them? I had four big cardboard boxes packed full of these. You know what? Now those boxes are almost empty. As soon as I turn my back, he takes some of them out one by one and sells them, to buy

cigarettes and beer. Oh these children! Taking someone else’s child is just taking trouble. (A pause.)

I’m really helpless without transport. I went to see another woman — Theresa. We used to go out selling together. She now sells vegetables and fruits near Dube Hostel. And the woman works, I tell you. She’s really a hard worker. Oh, you can just sit and wonder! Some people are gifted. She’s not lazy. Four o’clock she’s gone. Off to the market. When factory people go to work, she’s already selling.’

‘Does she do the driving herself?’

‘No. Her husband drives. Only when he becomes funny and stays home does she do the driving herself. Most of the time she lets him drive. He’s lazy. Never helps his wife with the packing of vegetables on the tables. Very lazy. “God never gives you with both hands.” I don’t know why that is the case. Theresa’s husband is educated but lazy. He sits in the driver’s seat and reads newspapers the whole day. Sometimes he sits and types the whole day on an old typing machine.’

‘What does he type?’

‘I don’t know. Any rubbish. Sometimes letters, love letters.’

‘Love letters! To whom?’

‘To us. The other women who are sitting there, selling. He passes the letters over to us behind his wife’s back. (We both laugh loudly.) What can you expect? He’s lazy. Doesn’t want to go and work like other men. You see, I think because the wife works hard, he has become lazy. He knows he’ll eat and drink; so he plays. She tells me she sometimes persuades him to go and work and he does get work. Some of his old friends get him jobs, but he never works long. Works only for a short while, and all of a sudden he leaves. He quickly gets fed-up when a white person says something he does not like. He just walks out and never goes back again. Oh he’s useless; gives Theresa a headache. (A long pause.)

There’s nothing one can do in Soweto now. The children have fixed up things and they have spoilt them. I remember how I used to make a lot of money with the wigs.’

‘Wigs?’

‘Yes, wigs. I used to make them. All kinds of wigs. You know, the first car I bought was with the money from wigs. Soweto women used to buy wigs, I tell you. You know the “R50” one sold like hot cakes. But now, nothing. These children have changed everything. People now hate wigs. Most children say they are white-man’s rubbish. They say they prefer their own hair. . . . (She puts her fingers into her hair and pulls out a strand)

This very one. The very kinky one. That’s the one they want. They plait it and style it so nicely. But — no business!

Miriam Tlali has been on a family visit to Lesotho. This interview was completed shortly after her return.

Readers who would like to be interviewed in ‘Soweto Speaking’ should contact Ravan Press, Box 31910, Braamfontein, Johannesburg.

*This article came to us from Tembeka Mbopo. The extracts were written many years ago by her father and describe his visit to the World Youth Festival held in Prague in 1947. Because we believe that our country is richer in memories than many people suspect, we are asking other readers to unearth those buried recollections and make **Yesterday, Yesterday, Now** a regular feature in this magazine.*

The Opening Ceremony was the highlight of the first week. It took place on Friday 25th July at the Strahov Stadium, capable of holding over 100,000. Here thousands and thousands of young people from all the countries represented marched proudly round and round the arena to the music of the local city band. Imagine the various groups, mostly in distinctive garb, bearing their national flags, banners, streamers, carrying many a slogan, marching round in true festive mood. What gorgeous colours were there! What various national songs were sung! It would need the pen of a practised hand to give an adequate picture of that memorable Ceremony.

In the evening, the streets of Prague were one mass of humanity, the crowds that were winding their way to the Strahov Stadium. By about 8.00 p.m. the pavilion was full.

And as the crowds of young people in the arena went past marching and singing, the group in the pavilion stood up, shouted and waved at them. The Greeks proudly marched in front.

We South Africans were a small band of some twenty odd, mostly Indian and European students studying in Great Britain.

The Festival

After the Opening Ceremony the programme of the Festival proceeded in all earnestness. And what a programme it was. Singing, swimming, dancing and many sports activities. The daily programmes were so arranged that they suited the tastes of nearly everybody, for you could just choose what you liked and then go there. And all this for the asking, for delegates. Here indeed was a Festival. When comes such another? In the morning, starting at 9.30, there were usually competitions in the various sports activities, in dancing (folk-dances), and swimming. In the afternoon there were music competitions. But the best part of the day was the evening. There were concerts and performances of national art in some four or five theatres at one and the same time.

As it was summer and the weather was warm and balmy, some performances took place in open sports stadia. There was a special built-up large open air cinema where shows usually started at 11 p.m. in order to allow people to come from the different concert performances. Such names as Sokolovna, Rudolfinum, Vinohrady and Winter Stadium became as familiar as household names. Each delegation had to give at least one performance, and competition in this soon became as keen as if points were awarded.

For my part I liked the music, the folk dances and the ballets, for I have always had a soft spot for music, and here was a festival of music. What with Indonesian and Indian dances? What with the folk-dances of Slav Nations, the Yugoslav Sword dance 'Moreshka'? What with the Italian Opera and the Russian Ballet? Oh, how well I remember how the Soviet Union performers quite swept all before them.

Who can have forgotten Olga, their ballet dancer? Or the Mongolian acrobats? To appreciate the wealth of talent that was displayed I have only to think how many thousands of miles I should have had to travel, and how much money I should have had to pay in order to see as much as I saw of different national arts in the short space of one month.

The Exhibition

On the third Sunday of the Festival, August 19th, on the same Exhibition ground was held a great Carnival of Music, folk-songs and folk-dances. There were no less than 4 specially erected stages where performances went on simultaneously. Performers appeared either in national costumes or in fancy dress. Again this was a colourful sight.

The grand finale came on the last Sunday, August the 17th, with a huge procession of no less than 100 000 Festival participants. During the last week over and above the 15 000 Czechoslovak youth who were already in Prague, 62 000 young Czechs and Slovaks arrived from the country districts. You may well imagine what the city looked like, and the ability of the Organisation Committee was fully extended.

This was the Closing Ceremony of the Festival. At 9 o'clock in the morning the participants, singing their songs of liberty, carrying their national flags and banners with many slogans, marched across the famous Charles Bridge to the National Theatre. From here the streets were lined on both sides by so many people that I wondered if there was anybody remaining behind at home.

Unfortunately the South African contribution to the Exhibition was a slight disappointment.

I was the only one on the delegation who had come direct from South Africa. I had come by plane, with all the restrictions as to passengers' luggage. So all I could bring was a few photographs. Nothing was shown of the contribution South Africans, black and white, have made to art and culture. The photographs were one-sided and showed only the effects of the 'colour-bar' laws. This gave quite a negative effect. Granted there is colour discrimination in the country with all its attendant evils, none-the-less the oppressed sections have made some positive contributions to the culture of their country. To mention but a few, I think of the wonderful bead-work of all the African races in South Africa, the clay-pottery of the Sotho women, the beautiful work in basketry and mats of the Ndebele women in Northern Transvaal. I have not said anything of African folk-lore and music. The African has always been known for his love of music and dancing.

II IMPRESSIONS OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

It is only too natural that what impressed me most in Czechoslovakia should have been the utter lack of colour discrimination. Here I could walk leisurely in the beautiful parks, and be greeted by no in-

scription at the gates: 'Natives not allowed.' I could step into a tram, and sit where I liked. I could walk into any restaurant or pub and enjoy a snack. Here was a life of 'freedom from fear' which I had never known in my country. No fear of being pushed and jolted about on the pavements. No fear of a hundred and one oppressions which beset me daily at home. I had often been told that in Europe if I was in any difficulty about finding my way in town especially at night the policeman was my best friend. I confess it took me more than a month to approach a policeman for such assistance. And what fine fellows these police are; in London I found they knew practically any street.

And ah, the Czechs and Slovaks were so very hospitable. It was a tradition on the Continent to give preference to foreigners, and I can certainly testify to that. In Prague if I was looking for any place the tram conductor would come off with me and make quite sure that he had directed me correctly to find the place; meanwhile the whole tram would be waiting and none of the passengers expressed any impatience. On the contrary if one of them knew English he would climb down to assist the conductor in his directions. It was the same everywhere, someone was always ready to dash out of the crowd if you walked, say, into a shop and wanted something. 'May I help you, sir, I speak a little bad English.' And this was the experience of many a Negro or Indian in Prague.

The same thing would take place at cinemas and restaurants. On my very first morning in Prague I went to have lunch with an Indian friend at a restaurant. The place was crowded with people, who all stared at us as we moved around, looking for a spare table.

At one table were seated two gentlemen, and we decided to join them. Incidentally one of them knew English. They readily helped us to read the menu, and soon a lively conversation had developed among us. They of course asked us questions about S.A. As we had not much time to spare, as soon as we had finished our meal we asked them to call the headwaiter that we might settle our bill. They called him and, as we thought, they first paid their own bill. When the waiter thanked everybody and departed we tried to beckon him back, whereupon our friends told us they had settled the bill for all four of us! The one who could speak English explained to us that in Czech there was a saying that could be literally translated: Not mountain meets mountain but man meets man, that is, one good turn deserves another. What has been even more surprising is to find that upon comparing notes with our other Negro and Indian friends they too had similar experiences in Prague.

These people always had ready smiles for me. If I jumped into a crowded tram I was quite embarrassed to see some two or three gentlemen offer me their seats. For the life of me, where had I seen a white man stand up for me as a matter of respect and courtesy? This was as good as putting a premium on my black colour.

Jonathan Paton reviews *Mashangu's Reverie and Other Essays* by N. Chabani Manganyi (Ravan Press)

Noel Chabani Manganyi, author of *Mashangu's Reverie and other essays*, is currently Professor of Psychology and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Transkei. The four essays in this collection are clearly the work of 'a highly intellectual and articulate black man', to quote the publisher's blurb. These essays are unlikely to appeal to readers who enjoy only thrillers or the latest book-club selected novels. They are more likely to appeal to academics, particularly to psychologists, sociologists and political philosophers. They are controversial and will possibly be challenged by anti-Freudians, Marxists and verkrampes, to mention only a few of their potential opponents.

The first essay, *Mashangu's Reverie*, is most readable and is the only one of the four that isn't, strictly speaking, an essay. It paints a vivid picture of the life led by visiting African academics to university circles in New England. The central figure is Dr Mashangu, a refugee from South Africa. After visiting his psychiatrist, Mashangu makes a long entry in his journal. The entry, partly in prose and partly in verse, culminates in the line: 'To-day I say yes and no being ablaze with affirmation.' On his second visit to his psychiatrist Mashangu explains that what he needs is not analysis, but action: 'Something more creative... less primitive than a sexual offensive.' Interwoven with the account of Mashangu's introspection, of conflicting emotions of love and hatred warring inside him, are descriptions of encounters with other Africans who inhabit the American university world. The most exciting of

Mashangu's encounters is with Okike, an attractive married woman from Nigeria. Mashangu has a passionate affair with her. Okike represents to Mashangu 'that part of his nature which was fanatically attached to love, tenderness and the necessity for creating new life instead of destroying it.' But equally powerful in Mashangu are feelings of hatred, violence and destruction.

In the second essay Manganyi, the psychologist and philosopher, takes over and the narrative framework of the first essay is discarded. The second essay is entitled 'The Violent Reverie: The Unconscious in Literature and Society.' The author draws a parallel between ambivalent attitudes to the father figure in childhood and the symbiotic dehumanisation that occurs in master/slave societies. The oppressed adult in these societies has ambivalent attitudes towards his oppressor and there is a conflict between his fear of losing this ambivalence and his desire for violence as a social act. For the rank and file the path from subjective violence to violence against others is a very short one. On the other hand, the oppressed writer has expressed his 'violence' in writing. There is a 'radical positivism' (Sartre's phrase) in the literature of the oppressed which achieves a long-term unmasking of 'false consciousness'. (According to the author *false consciousness* consists of 'the proverbial smile of the colonised, the expressionless face in the wake of intense provocation and the unconscious collusion with superordinates in the former's dehumanisation'.) In conclusion the author argues that the violent reverie can be used *constructively* by oppressed writers:

— 'It has become imperative to bridge the gap between Negrophobes and blacks... From the violent reverie must be allowed to emerge a literature virile enough to touch us where it matters most — the innermost core which informs our relations in public.'

From such literature the author hopes that the 'superordinate victim' will 'recognise and appreciate the subordinate victim at a more profound level than was possible before.'

The two remaining essays in this volume are entitled 'The Baptism of Fire: South Africa's Black Majority after the Portuguese Coup' and 'Universalism, Particularism and Africanisation.' The first of these essays deals with the issue of subordinancy and superordinancy and multiple-siege cultures. The second is a fascinating study of the debate involving the nature and functions of South African Universities. Should our universities have a universalist approach (as seen in our English language universities), should they be *volksuniversiteite* or should they become 'Africanised'? The author supports the third approach, but in so doing does *not* equate 'African' with 'black'.

This is an important collection and one that should be examined closely by readers who seek constructive solutions to the problems of Southern Africa. One hopes that its author will play an important role in the years of change that lie ahead.

(Prof. Manganyi is also the author of the successful *Being Black in the World*, published by Ravan Press in 1973.)

Xolile Mavuso reviews *The World of Nat Nakasa* (Ravan Press)

The book was published a decade after the untimely death of Nathaniel Ndazana Nakasa. He committed suicide by throwing himself off the sixth floor of a New York apartment. The cause might have been — in his own words — that '... it happens to be true that my experiences in this country (meaning South Africa) are steadily dragging me into the darkness of despair... to that extent, the powers that be have won a battle over me.' Perhaps the thought that he would never be allowed to enter his native South Africa again did contribute to his committing suicide. When he was offered the Niemann Scholarship by the United States to study journalism at Harvard Uni-

versity, the S. A. Government refused him a passport. Instead he left South Africa on an exit permit. Thus he unwittingly became a 'foreign native'.

The thirty-nine pieces of his writing, contained in the book, were taken from the time when he was a journalist with *Drum* and *The Rand Daily Mail* in Johannesburg. They were written in the early and mid-sixties. Nakasa is satirically humorous and original, presenting the life of a black man — his lifestyle and the injustices perpetrated against him — in a manner that is unlikely to 'rub salt into the wound', so to speak. He tells of his coming to the Golden

City from Durban (his birthplace) in 'Johannesburg, Johannesburg'. He makes mention of Spokes Mashiane and his flute — Spokes tells of the white families who asked him to teach their children the pennywhistle. He writes of Soweto — that conglomeration of monotonous rows or 'matchboxes' — and its inhabitants. His was a world of knifemen, shebeens, 'beeshops', taximen and VIPs. The world of the small and big fry.

This book makes wonderful and one-of-a-kind reading. This reviewer is now reading Can Themba (*The Will to Die*, Heinemann) as a follow-up.

Copies of the following books have been sent to Staffrider readers for reviewing: Muriel at Metropolitan (Miriam Tlali), Hill of Fools (R. L. Peteni), Petals of Blood (Nguzi wa Thiong'o), No Baby Must Weep (Wally Serote). See our review list for titles still available.

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Ayi Kwei Armah: **The Healers**. *An exciting historical novel set in Ghana.*

S. Ousmane: **God's Bits of Wood**. *A novel by a Senegalese writer about a railway strike in 1947.*

José Luandino Vieira: **The Real Life of Domingos Xavier**. *Angola under the Portuguese.*

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K. Awoonor: **This Earth, My Brother**. *A Ghanaian novelist describes his voluntary exile from Ghana.*

M. Dikobe: **The Marabi Dance**. *A novel about Johannesburg in the thirties.*

J. Ngugi: **A Grain of Wheat**. *The classic novel about Mau Mau.*

R. Maran: **Batouala**. *One of the earliest African novels which caused a sensation on its publication in 1921.*

L. Kayira: **The Detainee**. *A Malawian novel about dictatorship in an unspecified country.*

L. Vambe: **From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe**. *A journalist's view of his country.*

L. Honwana: **We Killed Mangy-Dog**. *Short stories from Mozambique.*

In This Issue

Stories by Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Miriam Tlali, Ahmed Essop, Meshack Mabogoane, Wessel Ebersohn, Mothobi Mutloatse, Mango Tshabangu, Stanley Mhlongo, Sekola Sello, Mashadi Mashabela, Pam Cox.

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On the way! Staffrider No. 3 is coming in July/August.

Poems by Mafika Pascal Gwala, Mandla Ndlazi, Christopher van Wyk, Fanyana Mokaleng, Douglas Livingstone, Siphon T. Molale, Noorie Cassim, Amelia House, Len Morgan, Pat Seboko, Edmund Thengani, Elias Rakau Mphulo, L. B. Z. Buthelezi, Sol Rachilo, Cherry Clayton, Bonisile Joshua Motaung, Oupa Thando Mthimkulu, Thabo Mooko, Jackie Seroke, Zakhele Mtsweni, Lionel Abrahams, Moalusi John Ledwaba, Lady Nunu Ramohlokwane, Gordon Khuvutlu, Errol Great Mpye, C. S. Gopane, Setsepe Sedibe, A. Spiegel, Julius Chingono, Stephen Watson.

Columns: Soweto Speaking/Yesterday, Yesterday, Now.

Reviews: Jonathan Paton, Xolile Mavuso