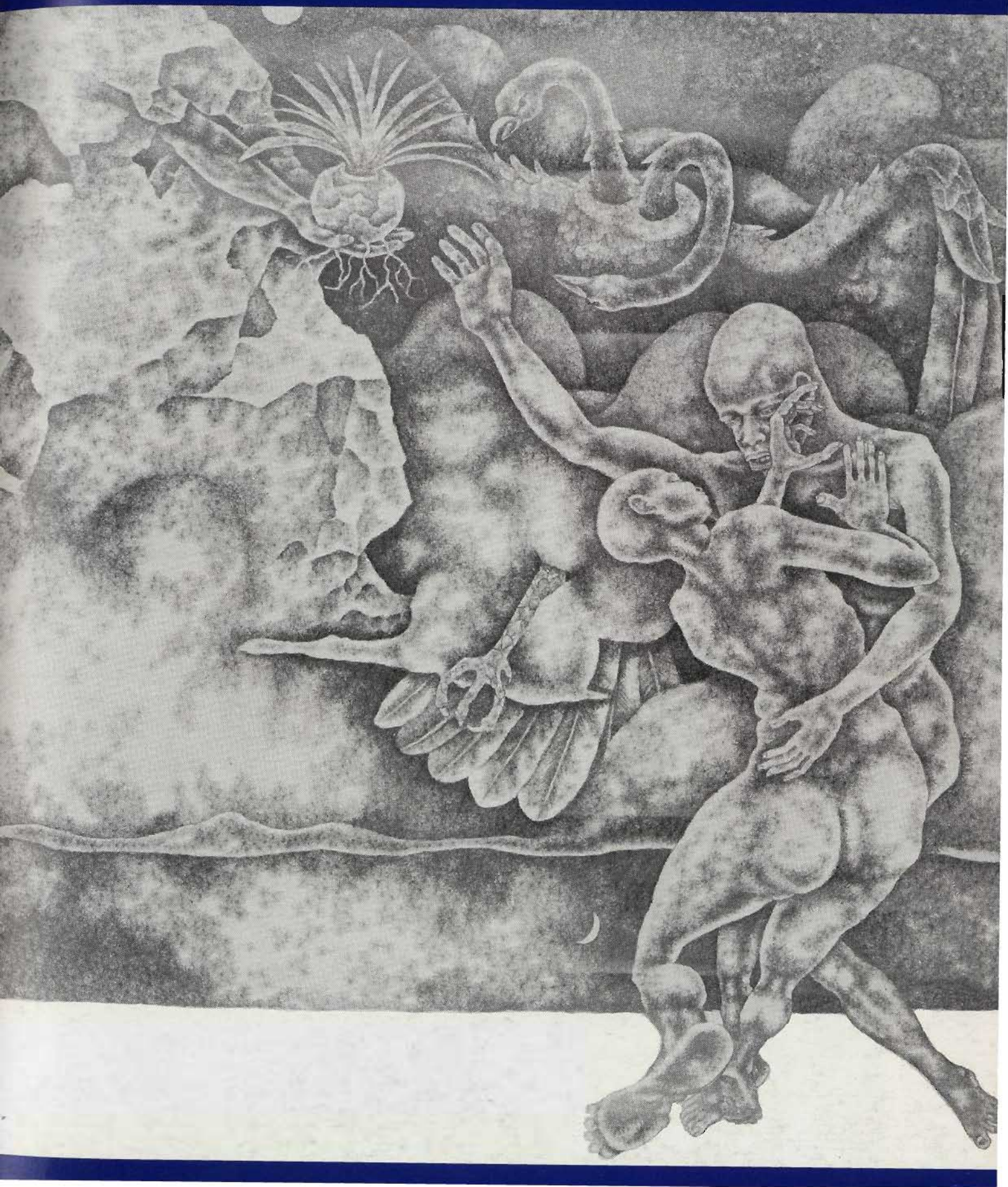
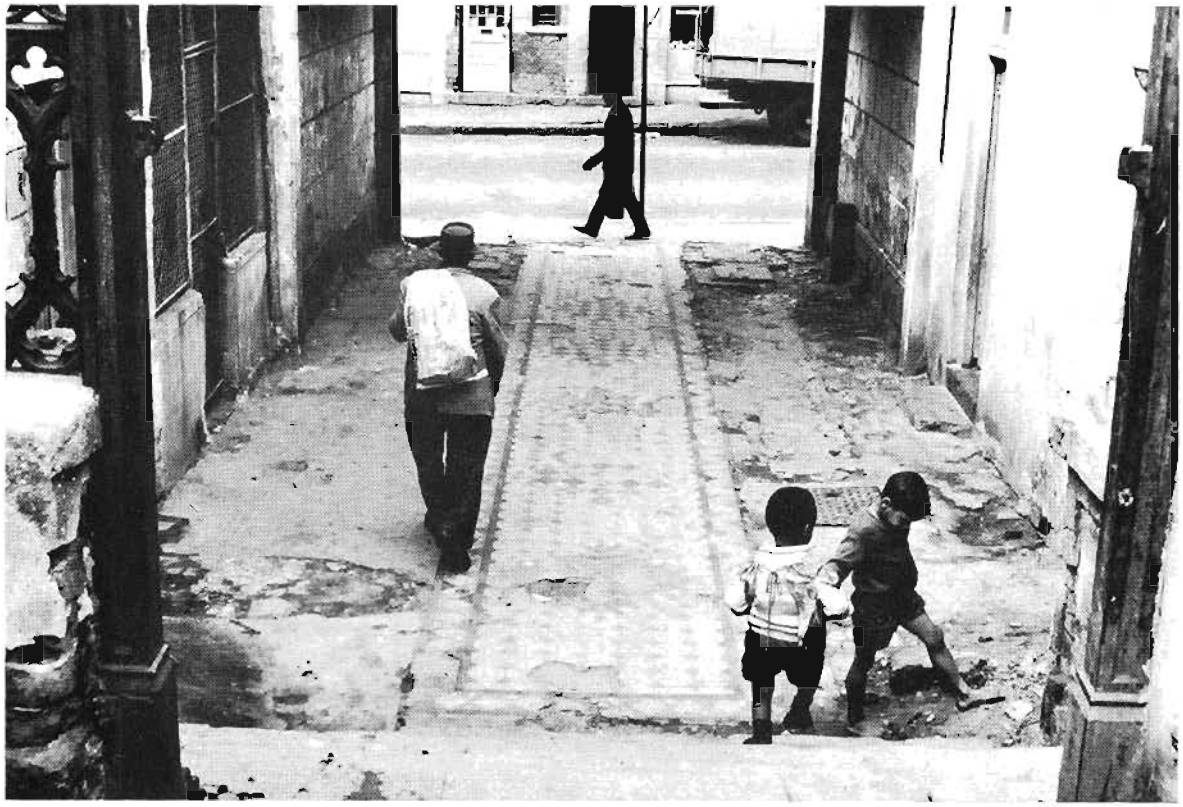
Staffrider

Vol. 2 No. 4 November/December 1979



images

Images – by George Hallett, are faces and places which he was familiar with in the past. He left South Africa in the late 60's to first settle in London. He, with his wife and baby daughter, is now resident on a small farm at the foot of the Pyrenees in France. Readers familiar with the Heinemann African Series will have come across samples of his work which featured as covers for some of the African Writers' Series.
Images – BLAC Publishing house, P.O. Box 17, Athlone 7760. Price R6.00 plus 24 c GST and 15 c postage.



we, the dispossessed, *welcome you to share* *the nothingness we own* *the meek shall never inherit the earth*

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Soweto Speaking to Miriam Tlali

No. 9 (contd.) MY TWENTY DAYS IN THE DESERT – Sergeant Moloi.

I escaped from the German camp with one other soldier. His name was Shawa. We walked and walked. At night we realised that we had walked into an Italian camp. The Italians were drunk. They were talking loudly and jollying around. They were singing and they did not even look to see whether there were intruders or not. We saw sandbags lying around, and we lay down beside them and hid ourselves. The Italians didn't see us. Some came near where we were and walked past us. They did not notice us lying there near them. They just kept on walking and looking ahead of them. God was with us. They passed.

Shawa goes East, Moloi goes South.

I kept moving on and on until one day I went into another hole – a big black one. It was really huge and I could sense the smell of wild animals. I looked around it and saw nothing. It was dark inside. I thought I'd go in and sit and have a rest. I went in. When I was inside, I had doubts. Something inside me said: 'Hey, get out of here!' I sat thinking. Again, the 'voice' came to me. It said: 'Hey, get out of here!'

Then I stood up and left. I climbed the wall and ascended. When I was up there, I slept. I woke up and looked yonder. I saw things like lakes, mirages, far away. Then I slept again.

While I was still wondering, I heard a sound. *Tht, tht, tht*! I didn't know what that was, and when I woke up, I saw an animal like a big ram or a springbok, a *tsèpè*. Like these mountain goats which jump around.

I wondered where on earth this animal came from. A *tsèpè* in a desert. I wanted to climb on its back and let it carry me. '*Balimo ba heso ba na le nna.*' (My ancestors are really with me, I was thinking.)

When I tried to get onto its back, it leapt speedily away. I moved on in the direction in which it had disappeared. I trudged on and on. It was nowhere to be seen.

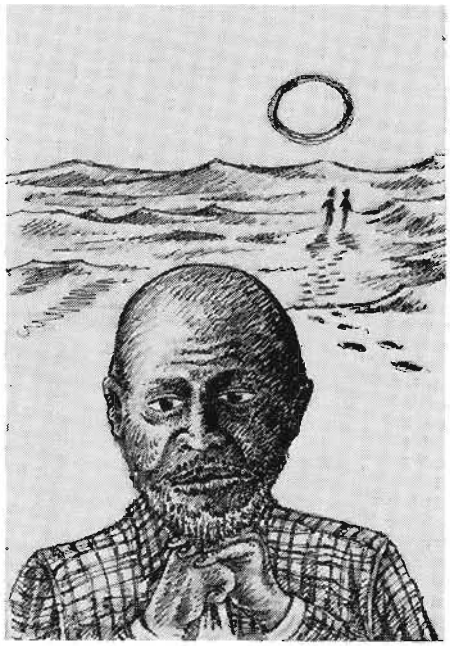
Then one day at a distance, I saw camels and an Arab. I went nearer, and then I noticed that the man had vanished. I was surprised. I had the idea that I must go nearer to the camels and stop them, because I knew that they have water. I went closer to one. Hey, the camel fought! It wouldn't let me go near it. The Arab appeared again – this time with a gun in his hand.

I was brave, and I approached him thinking, what should I be afraid of? I said to him: 'I'm asking for some water, please!'

He said: 'That's the last thing I shall give you.' He wouldn't listen to me.

I said: 'I shall give you money then.'

He shrugged his shoulders and explained: 'Here in the desert, money does



not work. Here, here's some!'

He held out his hand and showed me some coins.

'Here, take it. I'm giving it to you. I'm giving it to you because here in the desert, money doesn't work. It means nothing!'

After a while, he softened up. He went nearer to the camel and called it. He spoke to it and it went down onto its knees. There were tins fastened onto the camel's back. He drew some water from one of the tins and gave it to me. I thanked him and drank a good bit. Then I filled my bottles. I left and continued walking.

A good distance away, there stood a palm tree. I looked at this tree and walked slowly towards it. They grow big, these trees in that place. When I got nearer, I saw that there were people sitting under it, drinking. I noticed that my shoes left wet prints on the sand. It meant that there was water there. These people were drinking the water in the shade of the palm tree.

I moved on a little then knelt down to drink. The water tasted salty. It was exactly like sea water.

I was in a big hole in the desert that had once been a seabed. I would now have to climb to the top of the edge. *Ao*! It was high.

I looked up. I tried to climb. It was not easy. You see, I had with me a small hooked piece of iron.

I tried again and again to move up, but every time I kept sliding down again to the bottom. So I thought of using the piece of iron.

I walked up, and when I was high up, I struck the sand *hard* with the hook. When the sand moved, I lay down. The hook anchored and stuck. I held onto it. You see, when the sand moves down, only the surface layer does; the bottom sand does not move down.

I repeated the process, going higher and higher. I went on like that all night. It was a very, very difficult climb. I lay down, tired. I even thought that I was dead. I tried again and again. *He-e-e-e-e* . . . It was a deep donga! I really felt that I was already a dead man. I thought I saw the mountains of Zion.

As I lay down there, I saw a vision. In that vision, I 'saw' two boys wearing sandals on their feet, and long robes. They wore metal helmets on their heads. It was as if I was falling asleep. I looked away because I didn't want to look into their faces. I went past them. In the morning, at four o'clock, I got to the top.

I was just about to go in the direction from which I had come, when the man shouted, 'Who goes there?'

I stopped. I shouted back, 'A friend!' I hesitated and tried to run.

He yelled, 'Stop! Advance to be recognised!'

I stopped, doubtful. I didn't move.

He repeated the order, and I did not answer. You see, he could see that I was a black person. His 'blood' was already relaxed, because he could see that I was black. But *I* saw a white person. The Germans are also white. They are Europeans. There was no way I could tell an enemy from a friend. For him there was no risk. Besides, there were many blacks who had escaped, whom they had accommodated.

Continued on page 36.

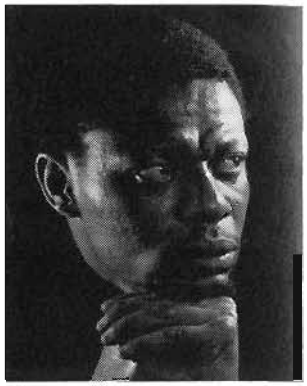
Staffrider Gallery

'No Nothing', lino-cut, Mpathi Gocini/Community Arts Programme, Cape Town

'The People', lino-cut, P.C.P. Mallimse/Rorkes Drift

TIME HAS RUN OUT

Mongane Serote



the bright eye of the night keeps whispering
when it paves and pages the clouds
it is knowledgeable about hideous nights
when it winks and keeps winking like that
it is like a breathing burning wood –
i feel looked at
walking and silent like this in the night
in this strange land which mutes screams.
the night
with its vague and bright eye-ball
which bears boot-prints and flags
eats away into the bone of the distance of my life
this i know,
and the night knows it too
so
the bright eye of the night keeps whispering and whispering
and the stars with their distance
keep whistling and whistling
throbbing on my memory about the distances we made
yes –
we did make distances
whose milestones are, as we all know
broken droplets of blood which are now splashed
and are scattered on the streets
on fences
and on walls of houses we live in
and on ceilings
on floors and on desks
even on floors of land-rovers.
i said i feel looked at
walking this silent night like this
alone –
cars, with their treacherous big eyes
stare –
and speed past me, leaving their red glow with me
leaving me with the night
whose thick darkness touches my eye-balls
and keeps dancing into my face
with every foot-step i make;
i walk the night of this land
i hear crickets chirp
and see prostitutes at street corners
feel shirt and underpants stick to my flesh
and i count the red lights along village road
smell the green of the tall grass
i'm all over this little town
and,
the stars keep whistling and whistling.
listen –
these fucking stars
whistled like this once long ago
when one man
walked like all of us do
and then he was naked
and then he was chained on the leg
and then he was on the floor covered with a blanket
in a landrover
destined to make 1,000 km in that state
to another cell
where he woke up one morning
naked
chained
alone
with brain damage, his blanket wet
his eyes strange as they said;
and i dare say
his damaged memory told him now, that he was going to die
in a cell
chained on the leg
wet and naked
alone
the 45th to have made it
into the hands of mad men who believe in God
yet these men did not know
that this man knew
he would make it for his funeral
that the people would claim his battered remains
that he would not be counted among the countless
who were stolen by these men
from their homes,
streets
fields
huts
and disappeared as if they were never born
except that they now float like a rotting corpse would on
water
on the memory of the people;
steve knew this
he had to, he was a bright boy
there was a funeral in kingwilliamstown
there have been many many funerals in my country
funerals
of bright babies
whose fresh and young blood was spilled in the streets
by fire-power of God's children
there are commemorations all over the world
of my countrymen
some of whom fought and lost
some fell defenceless
we in my country fought and fell and keep fighting
ask blood river
and soweto will answer
that:

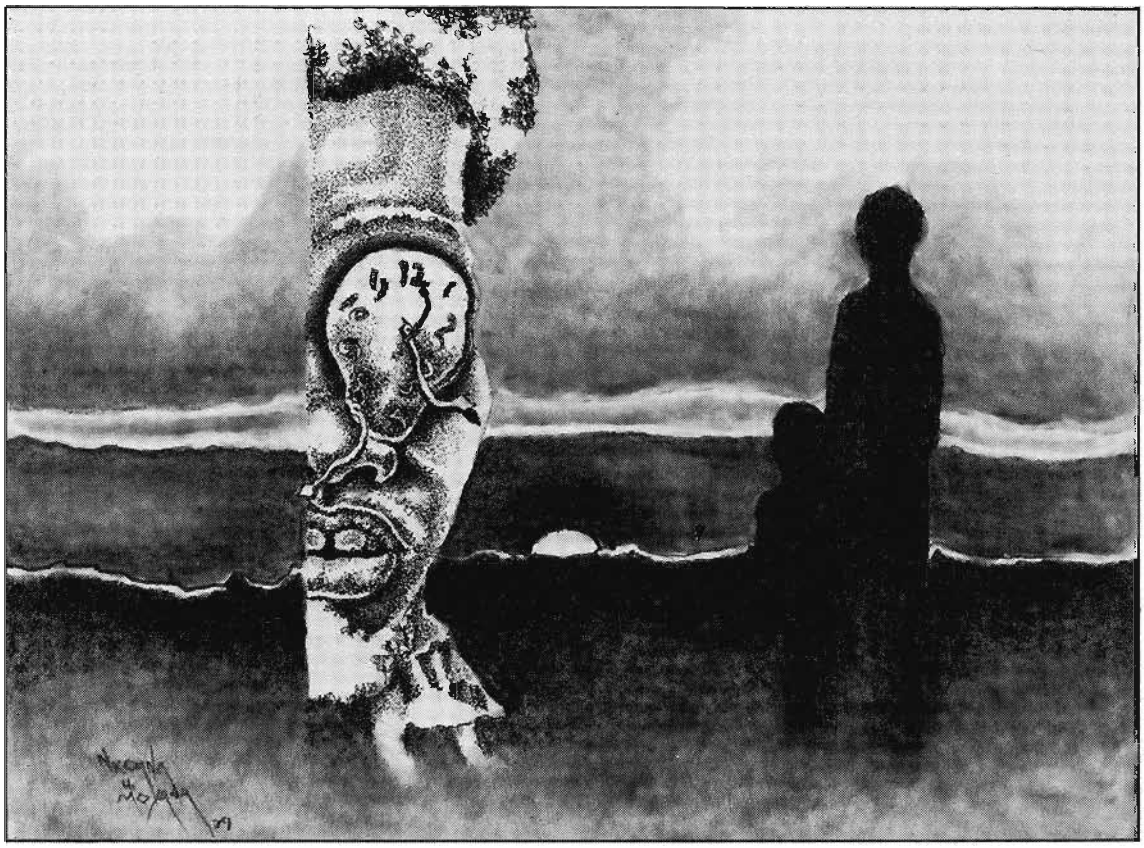
> school children took to the street one day, there will never be another soweto. nor, south africa. there are many kinds of deaths, and soweto knows them all, south africa too, and southern africa. you cannot kill children like cattle and then hope that guns are a monopoly. we were born like everybody else, and like everybody else, we know when it is too late or, to put it another way, when there is nothing any longer to lose. we made love in strange places: ghettoes. that is, we gave birth in these holes. we learnt from the pain and sorrow of having lost our children to so many and such cruel deaths as malnutrition or murder or sadness even dying while throwing spears or stones and being shot dead. we can now say, while we claim our land and die in the process· our history is a culture of resistance.

ask southern africa
mozambique
angola
zimbabwe
which we read while some men believe in god
and we know trouble
and say so, by scattering bloody milestones in places
where nobody would ever intend to die

since the types of deaths which are died in these places
ask us the price of liberation
and we ask ourselves nothing nice now
and south africa answers:
    europe took it from us. we fought and lost. the wheel
    kept spinning, slowly at first, whipping, as it spun us into
    position: landless. into mines. factories. tribes. race.
    ignorance. poverty. cogs of a machine, whose wheel spins
    and spins, ejects: insane, sick, ignorant, poor men and
    women, whose children were now caught, in a fast
    spinning wheel, which whipped off more and more
    landless, uneducated, poor people. bloody. fast. insane.
    the wheel keeps spinning and spinning. it spins. had spun,
    and the union of south africa was born, whipping
    thousands and millions of landless, underpaid,
    ill-educated. men and women, who build cities day and
    night and rest in ghettoes, if they ever do, poor, playing
    hide and seek with all types of deaths.
yes —
we did make distances
from blood river
to sharpeville to soweto
we know now
that oppression has been unmasked and will act true to our
                                                expectations
we ask, why oppress us
to exploit us
why exploit us
and now we learn, and that is because we are born so that we
                                                should live,
that the chain must be broken
whatever the fuck this chain was made for:
    days go by like everyday. we bury the dead who died cruel
    and strange deaths. yet, like we said, memory is like water
    which shores up rotten corpses.
yet,
that isn't enough
memories don't break chains
nor does dying like dogs or cattle
or throwing stones and bricks at mad armed men
nor do lies at the U.N., or anywhere else.
my people, tell me:
what does, what breaks the chains?

the bright eye of the night keeps whispering and whispering
when it paves and pages the clouds
it is knowledgeable about hideous nights
when it winks and winks like that and the stars keep
                                                whistling
it will see us one day
when children, mad at us, will spit and kick us in public
they had their trouble; they ask us about the love we made
                                                so that they could be born
for what?
soweto?
please, can someone, my countrymen, say a word of wisdom.
we need the truth not fiction
when we ask why;
we need to hear words
which, if the lips which make them, do tremble
they do so only because they know
they understand the perilous billows of our country which
                                                we've learnt how to ride
not because they fear our stare
or they are angry because we do not believe their report.
alas —
time has run out:
    too much blood has been spilled. please my countrymen,
    can someone say a word of wisdom. it is too late. blood,
    no matter how little of it, when it spills, spills on the
    brain — on the memory of a nation — it is as if the sea
    floods the earth. the lights go out. mad hounds howl in
    the dark; ah, now we've become familiar with horror. the
    heart of our country, when it makes its pulse, ticking
    time, wounds us. my countrymen, can someone, who
    understands that it is now too late, who knows that
    exploitation and oppression are brains which, being
    insane, only know how to make violence; can someone,
    teach us how to mount the wound, and fight.
time has run out —
period.

Mongane Serote/Botswana



'Time Has Run Out', drawing, Harry Moyaga/Hammanskraal

A Conversion

A Story by Michael Siluma

Illustrated by Mos's Petlo and Napo Mokoena

A heavily bandaged head; a puffed-up shiny black face with swollen black eyes reduced to mere slits; a mouth with swollen lips and broken front teeth.

This was the picture in Mxolisi's mind when he entered the bedroom, trying to imagine what his cousin John looked like after what had reportedly befallen him three days before.

John lay on the bed. He was not asleep, his eyes opening immediately as Mxolisi entered the room. At least his mouth was not where the ear was supposed to be, or vice versa. He did, however, have a slightly swollen face, one black eye, a bruised cheek and a plastered left arm.

John's face was distorted with agony as he turned to face Mxolisi, who sat on a chair. The visitor waited until the tortured look on his cousin's face had disappeared before greeting him. And then, unable to contain his curiosity any longer, he asked him the inevitable question: 'Say, man, what happened?'

The injured young man did not reply immediately. From the table next to the bed he took a glass of water and sipped slowly. He put the glass back on the table, licked his wet lips and sighed. Mxolisi just stared at his cousin. He was not going to repeat the question.

Finally, John broke the silence: 'You know, Mxolisi, strange things are happening to me these days. I don't know where all this is leading.'

Mxolisi said nothing. His eyes remained fixed upon John.

One of the 'strange' things that John was talking about was that two weeks before, he had lost his pass, and applied for another one. The people at the office of the Plural Relations Commissioner (formerly Bantu Affairs Commissioner, formerly Native Affairs Commissioner) had referred him to the office of the urban representative of the former Bantustan of Transkei. The reason advanced was that he was a citizen of a 'foreign country': he was umXhosa.

John was born and raised in Soweto. He had gone to school in Soweto and the only time he had left the Transvaal was when he was studying for a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Fort Hare in the Cape Province. Neither he nor his parents had ever been in the Transkei. Why then would anyone want to link him to a piece of arid land he had never been in? A link with the implication that his children, his grandchildren and his great grandchildren would be made foreigners in the land of their forefathers?

This 'strange' thing Mxolisi already knew about. He was interested in the other 'strange' thing which had caused him to visit his sick cousin on this Saturday afternoon.

'This is the last thing I expected to happen to me, Mxolisi, the very last,' John said, aware of his cousin's uncompromising stare.

'Will you please stop circumlocuting, John, and tell me what happened?' Mxolisi's patience was running out.

'Okay then, listen.' John's voice was tired.

'On Wednesday I'd taken a day off from work to see ntatemoholo (grandfather) where he works at Jeppestown. Ma had told me that ntatemoholo knows of a relative of ours who works at the office of the Plural Relations Commissioner. The idea was that I should get the relative's address from ntatemoholo so I could contact the relative and see if he couldn't help me out of this reference book mess.

'At ntatemoholo's place of employment I was told he was on leave. Then on my way home I felt thirsty and entered a café to buy something to drink.'

The moment he started talking, the events of that day came flooding back into his mind so vividly that he himself was left bewildered.

'The shop was full of African workers out on lunch, most of whom were labourers from a nearby construction site. They were pushing and jostling in their baggy overalls, and I waited until some of them had left before I advanced towards the counter.

'The man behind the counter was banging on the counter with his pink, hairy, beefy hand. "Next! *Funani wena*? (What do you want?)", he shouted at me in the broken Zulu of a European who had been satisfied to learn a few words of the language and never taken the trouble to learn the correct pronunciation.

'When he brought the bottle of Coke I'd ordered I gave him a five Rand note, which was all the money I had. The man had not given me a straw. I thought he had perhaps forgotten, and when he turned to his cash register I asked for a straw. He turned around and with eyes wide with contempt or annoyance, said curtly: "No straws." I pointed to the ones on the shelf behind him. The man then barked: "You pay two cents for the straw, right?"

'I'd never liked drinking cool-drink directly from the bottle's mouth, so I nodded. Besides, I was irritated by this man who failed to master not only isiZulu but also the English language.

'I was mistaken if I thought I'd receive my change quickly, drink the Coke and leave the 'Bantu Restaurant' owned by this morose white man.

'When he finally gave me my change it was three Rands short. I reminded him that I'd given him a five Rand note. Again his eyes widened, and this time I saw immediately that the man was incensed, or pretended to be.

'For a moment the man with the pink face, the shiny pitch-black eyes, the matching eyebrows and neatly trimmed moustache — for a moment this man fixed his cold eyes, full of malice, on me. And then I remembered

"Ungahambi buti. Ijwayele ukuropa abantu lento,"
(Don't go, brother. This thing is used to cheat people), I heard one of the women say.

-earing, while still a young boy in the ownship, that the most unwise thing a lack person could do was to argue with Portuguese or a Greek – I can't re-nember which of the two – in his shop, s he might get angry and shoot the lack man dead.

'With that my eyes shifted away rom the pink face and the man barked gain, his eyes becoming wider: "You ome to play here, heh?"

"But I gave you five Rands," I told im.

'Service had now stopped and there were still a few of the overalled workers nd a number of African vomen waiting to be served. They silently looked on in he tension-filled café.

'At that point my hands nd armpits started to sweat nd my legs felt numb. *'Ungahambi buti. Ijwayele ukuropa abantu lento,"* (Don't go, brother. This hing is used to cheat people,) I heard one of the women say. I am not really ure whether this is what nade me decide against going. But I stayed in the afé, much against the wishes of the café owner.

'A second white man merged from what I ima-gined to be a store-room. He jabbered to the one behind the counter. The latter replied in the same unintelli-gible language and I de-duced from his gesticula-tions that he was telling his brother about me.

'Then the café owner turned to me again: "Now, don't make me angry, you hear? Go, go!" he said, and this time he bent over the counter menacingly. I backed away a tep or two. I didn't pay much attention to the other white man. I was concerned with this man who was trying to cheat me of my money.

"I want my money," I told him.

"When I say go, you go. Right?" he burst out, red in the face.'

John is a computer programmer with an American company and they pay him so well that to him three or even five Rands is not a lot of money, cer-tainly not an amount over which he would come to blows with anyone. But in the background he heard the wo-man's voice again. This time she was whispering to the small crowd of on-lookers which had gathered in the café, ostensibly to buy something. (The café owner would not allow any Plural who was not buying anything to hang around in the café.)

'The voice was whispering in Zulu: "He mustn't go until he's got his money, he mustn't!" By now the angry man had come out from behind the counter and was gradually moving in my direction. His intention was clear, and his next move was predictable.'

"Seeing that the man was angry and knowing very well that you are not "the fighting type" – why did you not leave the café?," Mxolisi interrupted for the first time.

'It is true that I saw he was angry, and that given the amount of money I earn, losing three Rands would have been losing next to nothing. In fact at that point I was dead-scared, having heard all I had about these people. But how could I let myself be cheated of my money in front of so many ordinary labourers and women factory workers. Illiterates. What would they think of me?

'Step by step the café owner kept coming towards me, his finger pointing towards the door. "Go!" he demanded for the umpteenth time. Again I told him I was not leaving the café. The last straw came when he said to me: "Go, stinking bastard!" Hell, how could he say that to me when I was claiming what was rightfully mine?

' "You bloody cheat! You come all the way from Europe to cheat me of my money! You think it will make you rich? And if you dare touch me I'm going to get you arrest . . . "

'But the warning in my last sentence came too late. For two strong hands seized me from behind and pulled me backwards. My legs were blocked from behind so that I lost balance and was down in a split second. The white man from the store-room was towering over me, and before I knew what was happening he kicked me in the face. Another kick followed as the café owner joined in in what I consider the greatest beating of my life.

'Once, during the ordeal, I'd caught a glimpse of the labourers looking on, their eyes wide with horror. The women were screaming and some of them were hurrying out of the door. The two men continued assaulting me until I passed out. When I came to I was drowned in the droning engine of the ambulance taking me to hospital. '

When John had finished his story Mxolisi sat trans-fixed on his chair. He then sighed a long sigh at the end of which he just said: 'Ja-a!'

Up to now John's voice had been somewhat tired.

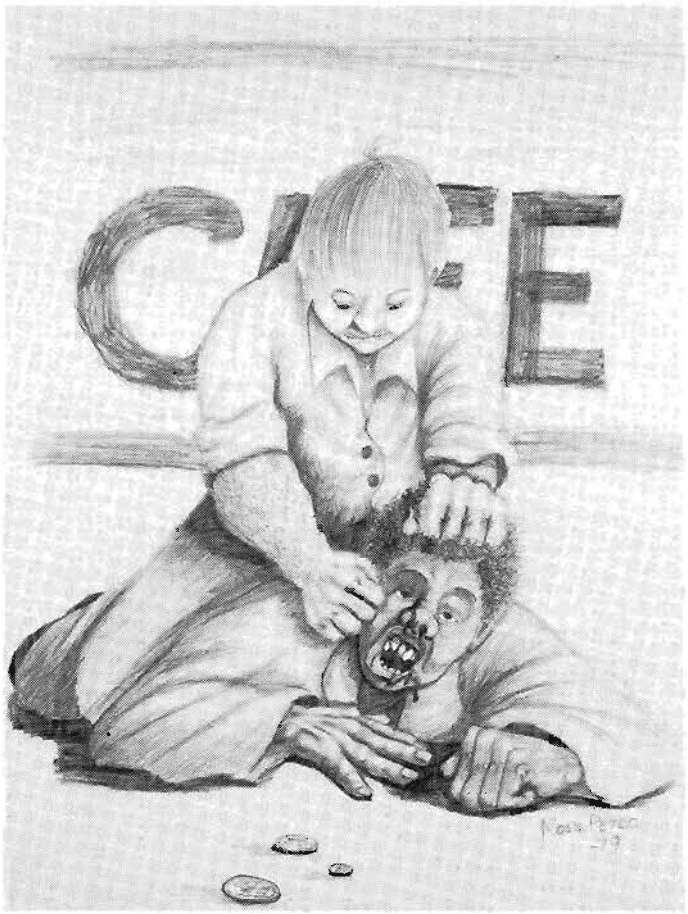
'You know, I feel like going back to that bloody white man's café and smashing all the windows. Then he could do his damn-dest,' John thundered, for a moment forgetting the pain in his body.

'What if he calls in the police and you are arrested and charged with mali-cious damage to property?'

'Mxolisi, do you think I'd break the windows and just stand there waiting for the police to come and arrest me? By the time they reached the café I'd be long gone . . . '

'Sometimes you amaze me with your way of thinking. Didn't you give your particulars to the people at Baragwanath when you were admitted there?'

'Or if I had a gun I'd go straight to



him and blow the brains out of his head.'

'Now you really make me laugh, John, because you and I know that you do not have the guts to do all that you've been talking about.'

That seemed to take some of the steam out of John.

Mxolisi continued: 'Alright then, for argument's sake let's say you succeed in what you want to do, and you don't get caught. That might satisfy your desire for revenge, but do you think that would have solved anything?'

'Yeah, sure. That would teach him that he can't do what he did to me and get away with it.'

Mxolisi could not contain his anger at John's naiveté.

'You argue like a child, John. Look, man. There are thousands and thousands of white people with mentalities like that café owner's. Smashing his windows might, according to you, serve the purpose of teaching him a lesson. But the others like him might still do the same thing he did to you, perhaps even killing you this time. Apart from satisfying your desire for revenge I still insist that your smashing his windows cannot solve the problem.'

'Maybe I'm being too emotional. But, Mxolisi, how do you think the problem can be solved?'

'Unity, my cousin. Only when we are united as people who are discriminated

'Tell me,
how does one join?'

against can we manage to solve the problem. We must never think that because we are B.Sc. or B.A. graduates and can earn lots of money that we are immune from the sufferings other Black people are forced to endure. We must remember that it is only a matter of WHEN we shall come face to face with these problems, just as you have now.

'Only a few months ago I invited you to a Hero's Day commemoration service and you told me you were not a politician. I hope that what has happened to you knocks some commonsense into your so-called educated head.'

During the silence that followed John never uttered a word, as if waiting for Mxolisi's words to sink into his brain. Then he looked blankly at the snow-white bedroom wall, ruminating over what his cousin had said. After a long while John turned to Mxolisi and asked him: 'How does one join your struggle?'

'It is not my struggle. It is the people's struggle, you and I included. For it is you and I who are going to be free, not only a selected few.'

'Okay, how does one join the people's struggle? You might have a solution. I'd really love to join the struggle, if only to eliminate the injustices perpetrated against us, even though I've lost my South African citizenship. Tell me, how does one join?'

'Just pledge to yourself that you will fight the injustices perpetrated against your people at all times, wherever you may be. That you will always collaborate with those who fight the injustices and oppose those who are for the injustices.'

The room was now dark. Mxolisi looked at the clock on the table and saw it was half-past six. He rose to leave for soon it would be dark outside and the Makgotla people would start patrolling the streets.

SOWETO

I THOUGHT IT WAS CLEAR ENOUGH

I thought it was clear enough
When I said, 'Away with bantu education'
I thought it was clear enough
When I continued with my protest
Amidst your torture

You turned a deaf ear
Your answer was my brother's death
Your answer was my brother's gagging

My disability cannot be compensated
By electricity in our schools
My brother's death cannot be compensated
By high fences around schools

Your answer made my teacher quit
Leaving me in the wilderness
Can he be replaced by soldiers
From the border?

I thought I was clear enough
If I wasn't I am now

Maita Ramaphosa
Phanaa-ma-Afrika Arts, Chiawelo.

TO UTHU AND NINTU

Sibongile.
Thank you master-minds!
For the thoughts . . .
Flowing into each other's otherness,
Forming thought.

Thank you makhosi,
For this strength . . .
These busy brain-cells,
Scurrying back and forth,
Gathering,
Garnering;

Just as they did,
As you made them do,
In the alert minds of
Your 'black-headed people'.
The denizens of Ur.

This small sacrifice,
These bits of a mellowing mind,
May they be acceptable,
To Baba Uthu,
And my Great-grandma,
His daughter Nintu.

Buntu Mfenyana

behold my son

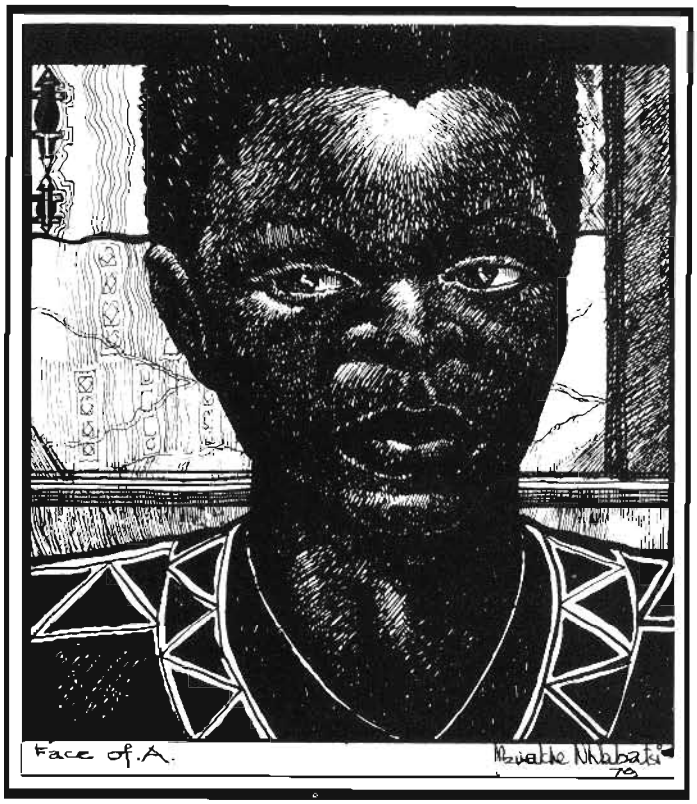
fragment of an epic poem by

ingoapele madingoane

behold my son
behold
and hear man's anxious call
awakening the new reality
behold the ancestors' wish
that a day shall dawn
in the annals of creation
to be known as afrika day
and before you have counted on your fingers
the onrush of the coming years
man's anger will emerge
the volcano will come to life
with africa day
as its background
behold my son
behold the last eruptions
of emergent afrika
with anger as sharp as Shaka's spear
sharpened on the pavements
of freedom road
where some of your brethren died
behold, let your stride
be set on a sure footing

behold my son
time is a device
made by man
with a sound like your heartbeat
copied from nature's
chronological set-up
to register his downfall
and the time of your reign
behold my son
take note of the seconds
that were once my parents
your gods
take note that from them
i the minute was born to give way to you
as the hour of today
behold my son
for this hour
that is you
with the impulse
of your heartbeat
will come to be reckoned
as afrika day

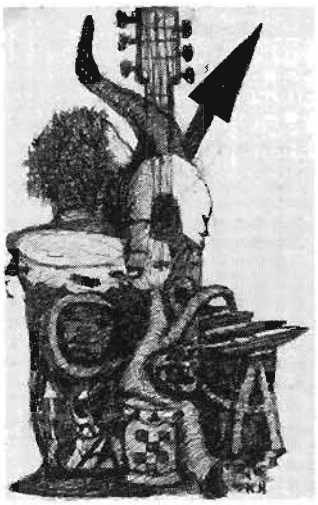
behold my son
behold
'cause freedom is a distance
like a bridge too far
high above the tombs
of your ancestors
monuments
clustered on afrika's peak
like the pain that burned her neck
depriving her of
the right to navigation
rivers filled with tears
tears flowing like
mandela's sweat
as he crushed the stone
to tame afrika's
stubbornness



'Face of A', drawing, Mzwakhe Nhlabatsi/Zola, Soweto

behold my son
behold the road
from nature's mould of creation
en route to the shelter
of existence
a place known to man
as home
take note my son
for you are the look of my love
lest you forget
that the road of life is called experience
and relax not my son
after freedom comes
'cause freedom
is not free without you
freedom is the land that fills you
even after dearth
go explore my son
the avenues of reason
before you enter
the last shelter
and i'll be your witness
when the spirits of mangaliso
refuse you entry.

Ingoapele Madingoane



REPORT FROM THE ART CONFERENCE IN THE CAPE

We were there
blowing our lungs out
to sharpen their appetites
so they could gulp down the wine better
and fill themselves of the cheese
while they relaxed comfortably
in their clean cosy park of intellectualism.
Never mind, we were there
we belched our complaints aloud to them
in lamenting song and crying verbatim
we did not fail to create the desired mood.
No! not in the slightest did we not manage
to arouse feelings that we also mattered
that we want to play a part too
in the running of our own land!
It's a shame, brother; as someone did say
a disgusting shame I'd say
that there still exists in some people
such a big lump of naiveté and ignorant complacency
The rod and the bazooka shall not be spared
And since we should, when we die, we will die!

Masilo Rabothata

DEAD MAN IN THE STREET

I saw him in the early hours
Of the morning
As the sun crept slowly to dispel
The coldness.
Even the smell of death could not wake
The people.
The soul parted lonely from the flesh
And quietly he lay in the deep ditch
Intended to bury the telephone poles.

As the sun's rays melted darkness
People woke to perform the day's chores
Passers-by saw him
Lying cold
Their arms folded behind their backs
Eyes dilating
Their mouths open
Only drops of dismay
Trickled slowly.
Those he left behind: dark clouds gathered in their
Eyes
And tears drenched their faces.
They have lost their beloved one.

Rakau Elias Mphulo

LOST BROTHER (DIED IN THE MINE)

It's dark in front of me
Dark like in winter or mid-may
I plead for the light of men
I pray for the mercy of heaven
I beg to God for freedom

I mourn for my parents
While I have no relatives
My younger brother was my only hope
For it was his hand I used to hold
He was my comfort and appetite

We shared one bath when we were young
We bore the same pains in living
But like a wet piece of soap
He slipped from my hands
Like a cloud of smoke diffusing into air
He vanished from my eyes

His vision is always there
Like a woman forsaken by her lover
It idly tosses from here to there
My imagination sees him forever
Though the Golden City of temptation
Has conquered his vivid heart.

I've waited too many days and weeks
Too many months and years
Waiting from sunrise to sunset
But my heart is continuously upset:
Like a fading flower in winter
My eagerness dies bitter

My heart grows fonder with absence
My mind has been strained by grief
The heart drips blood
The eyes shed tears
The brains don't stop hoping

He went a long time ago
I could hear his voice in an echo
When he and I parted never to meet
To share delicious meals of meat
From the hares we trapped in the forest
While earth is crying for its lost member
I cry for my lost brother.

Hamilton Silwane

BARE OF RIGHT ALL MAN'S DELIGHT

Ripe with hatred, cooked too long
In the pot of oppression,
The young stride away from home.
Bare of right, all man's delight.

Wrinkled faces of parents
Weary of receiving too little,
Troubled by sons gone
To come back ready to die.
Bare of right, all man's delight.

Inspired men rewrite
Chapters of a Bible
That quotes, 'Give unto the givers
Gifts received from them.'
Bare of right, all man's delight.

Joas Makobe

THE MARATHON RUNNER

i have run in the race
from the south to the slaves
and i won the pace
from the slaves to the kaffirs
then i showed my face
from the kaffirs to the bantus
but there was still the chase
from the bantus to the plurals
after which i took first place
from the plurals to the co-ops

the only time i was wrong
was when i was right
i thought i was the loser
when i was the winner;
this was in the race
from the plurals to the co-ops
and was considered optional
from the co-ops to the nationals
and in the next race
from the nationals to 'asazi'
you can rest assured
that however pressured
even though for no gain
i won't be a sucker for the bargain
history will maintain
victory is certain

ask me not
how i know
for i romped over the highlands
from the newlands
to the meadowlands
then from the meadowlands
to the so-called homelands
i was dubbed a kudu
while man was phudufudu
but i broke the record
when i beat the concorde
in the flight from vacancy
back to vagrancy

experience being the best teacher
i learn from the escapades of cheaters
i have watched the races
from the Blacks to the 'non-whites'
from the Africans to the 'non-europeans'
from the Swahilis to the 'foreign bantus'
from the Afro-americans to the 'niggers'
from the Chinese to the 'honorary whites'
from the Indians to the 'coolies'
and
from the People to the 'coloureds'
to name but just a few

allow me to participate
in the greatest race
where marimba, daughter of lumukanda
she, who has loved me through propaganda
shall be ululating in Swahili
shouting, 'ilililililiiiiiiiiiiii !'
tshini
mfondini
aikuaz'ukuya
izobuuuuuuuuuuuuya
run man run
black man run
run man run
defy the gun
let me win the race
or run if i shan't win
or watch if i shan't run
from bo-botha-mangope-venda-nzimba-kae
to one destination in one race
so come on black nationals
let us co-operate and develop.

Peter Setuke
Maluti Arts, Meadowlands

SELLING COAL

People awaken
A voice very hoarse
Dark skinned
Shouting 'Mashalaa-boo!'

People lunch
A face very sweaty
Empty stomach
Yelling 'Mashalaa-boo!'

Children mock
A humiliated expression
Patience prevailing
Screaming 'Mashalaa-boo!'

Workers home
A distorted figure
Hope gone
Mumbling 'Mashalaa-boo!'

Maswabi 'a Legwale
Zamani Arts Association, Dobsonville

MY VOW

On the soil was I born
By the soil
For the soil
Leave, I won't.

Be it for
The promised land
Of honey and milk
Leave, I won't.

Africa was created
For Black
And Black for Africa
Leave, I won't.

Be it at gunpoint
Promises of wealth
Kingdom elsewhere
Leave, I won't.

Onthatile Lebajoa
Zamani Arts Association, Dobsonville

BUSINESS

It is no businessman's business
To curb the business of busy Africans
Who strive with courage for freedom.
Businessmen mind their own business
And when mankind in bondage cries
Bondage seeks rest in mankind,
Freedom is the business of courage
And courage that of freedom.

Molefe Kenneth Mosime

BLOODY TEARS ON MZIMHLOPHE

No breath of wind over Mzimhlophe,
No crack of sound in the gloomy atmosphere,
No whispering echoes on that dark Tuesday,
No bursts of laughter and delight on that crucial day.
Only death glows in the eyes of Azanians.
Only graves open jaws for the struggling Blacks.
But the power behind enjoyed the battle of Blacks against Blacks.

Songs of the Zulu impi roared,
Residents crawled for safety,
Screams and deaths pierced through hearts,
Spear of brother penetrated brother,
Cries and deaths mocked the innocent.
Life was a toy of circumstances,
Death was a close alternative in the din.
But the power behind rejoiced at the sight of Blacks against Blacks.

Sound of the menacing foe echoed.
Women with children on their backs,
All fighting for a place of safety.
Crying were those whose feet denied them.
Packing and spilling out their goods,
Collapsed in their channel to peace.
Men and boys shivered with fear,
All turned cowards in the face of death.
Scattered were all in the neighbourhood.
But the Man behind enjoyed the plot of Blacks against Blacks.

As night follows day, every aspect changes,
As wind changes direction, every order changes,
Man on the Black hand side,
Struggled back with confidence.
With love and understanding,
They maintained their existence.
Brothers destroyed one another with hostility.
Mighty men of the nation died unnecessarily,
Suffocation claimed life a nonsense,
Killing of man by man as ants grew fat.
But the Man behind boasted the deaths
Of Blacks against Blacks.

Burned, swollen and frozen corpses
Lay scattered in the gloomy cosmos,
Waiting to be thrown into police-vans
v the master who had used us as instruments
Nenafile – Zulu.'
Words rolled rhythmically
And eventually burst into laughter
While the Black nation,
Was enveloped in a blanket of tears.
But the power behind
Scored a victory over Blacks against Blacks.

Landi A. ka Themba/Mzimhlophe

FRIDAY NIGHT

The usual routine is come
Friday night
We rejoice to forget our mourning
We drink
Let us sing beautiful night
Lion Lager our happiness contains
Friday night
We are not frustrated
Friday night
Shebeens house-full
The beautiful night once more is come
We drink
Baas liquor
Baas prison
Waters of immortality

In Lion Lager our lives enclosed
We search
Black Label joyous we drink
In shebeens white ghosts rejoice
Our misery
Friday night
We drink we are high
Smiling faces all around
We celebrate this day
The birth of happiness mingled with misery
Friday night
We rejoice
With liquor, we are men
Baas prison
Waters of immortality

Friday night
Our routine is here
Dead: everything is still tranquil
Green trees look ghastly
Life brought to stillness
Deadly night Soweto routine
Majitas the only moving bodies
In shebeens we laugh
We scream
Hehhh!!!
We are happy
Together we rejoice lest reminded
We are frustrated
We are confused
Baas liquor
Baas prison
Waters of immortality

Our death waits around corners
Friday night beautiful night
One had no girl to love
He has no one to date
To the cinema he can't go
At shebeen he falls into company
They sing smiling faces
They receive their peanuts
They rejoice to hide the truth
They are happy
The following day
A girl is raped and put to silence
Baas toxin
waters of immortality

Friday night children are crying
Father Sizwe the session is on
At Sis Betty crying drums
Father Sizwe is over drunk
At Sis Betty
Children do not know
The following day
Father Sizwe Banzi is late
Saturday morning
Father Sizwe is dead
He was highly drunk
Baas liquor
Baas poison
Waters of immortality

Friday night disco malady
We dance our blues away
Tomorrow we might be no more
Our bells ring dusty
Together we dance
Together we rejoice
Our eyes red blind dusty smoky
Baas toxin
Waters of the white man.

Monyele Matome/Orlando West

IT EXISTS

A Story by Denis Beckett, illustrated by Mike van Niekerk

Hell, the trouble we went to!

I mean, normally we didn't make a big issue of dinner parties. We just invited people to come around, and that was that. We'd generally have the same sort of meal as if we had been on our own, just more of it. And we'd have some wine around, and some beer. All very simple.

So this time we tried to keep it the same way. We tried to pretend nothing was different. But it was a pretty phoney pretence. Sue knew I was pretending. I knew she was, but we kept it up anyway.

It started on about the Wednesday morning. 'What would you like for dinner on Friday?' said Sue.

Since when had I set the menu? The first I ever knew about what we were eating was when I ate it. Even when I got roped in for grating the cheese or whatever I never knew what I was grating it *for*.

'Oh, well . . . ' I said, 'you know . . . anything you like . . . '

Then we had one of the longest non-conversations of our married life, each of us pretending it was a purely routine issue. What it really boiled down to was. But what are *they* going to like? If we have a slap-up meal will they be offended by our opulence? If we have a humble one will they think we've chosen it because they're Black?

We finally settled on beef stroganoff, with mealies for starters.

The mealies was my idea. 'Mealies?' said Sue, 'Won't they think we're trying to bend over backwards?'

'The hell with it,' I said, in a sudden burst of phoney definiteness. 'I like mealies.' (Which was true enough.) 'We often have mealies. If mealies are what we eat, then they're good enough for our guests too.'

Sue accepted the point, with some relief that I had put my foot down. But all the way to work I was thinking: 'Will *they* realise that we eat mealies even when we've only got Whites?'

Then on Thursday night, Sue asked if I'd bought grog.

'What do you mean, bought grog?' I said. 'We've got about 10 crates of beer and five bottles of Tassies.'

'Oh. Well, okay,' she said. Then, after a pause: 'Won't they think we're trying to keep them away from hard tack?'

'Listen,' I said, 'it's eighteen months since I had any hard tack in this house.'

She went on with preparing the meal, while I sat in the kitchen chair looking (I hoped) like I was concentrating on the paper.

'Whatever happened to that bottle of cane spirits that someone left here a couple of years ago?' she suddenly asked.

'I don't know,' I said, nonchalantly. 'I suppose it's still around somewhere. It's probably grown seaweed by now.'

Ha Ha.

'It'd have to be pretty hardy seaweed to survive in that.'

Ha Ha.

Friday morning I went up to the bottle store before work. I got brandy, whisky and rum. I got back in the car and drove halfway home. Then I turned and went back. I got another bottle of brandy. I mean, you never know. I'd heard about Black drinking habits. It wouldn't do to look stingy.

Friday was a wasted day. It had been bad enough when we'd asked the other people. Should there be other people at all? If there were no other Whites, would *they* think we were ashamed of having Blacks at our house; that we were scared of inflicting them on our friends? If there were other people, would *they* think they were really there to be conversation pieces, 'token Blacks'?

It was very unfair, finally. I'd been at least as uncertain as Sue, but out of the blue I mustered a strong whiff of the 'everything is the same as always' philosophy. 'What is all this bullshit?' I demanded. 'It's a Friday night, isn't it? There's plenty of people we owe a dinner, just pick out a few.' *(Made it all sound so simple, huh.)*

The picking-out process was excruciating.

The Barnetts? . . . Linda was bound to put her foot in it.

> ‘What if they pitch up in suits and I’m wearing jeans and bare feet? They think we don’t care. We think it’s because they’re Black that we’re looking like tramps. What if they come in jeans and I’m wearing a suit? They think they’ve committed a *faux pas.*’

The Mitchells? . . . What would *they* think of his XJ6?

The Van Zijls? . . . They’d been asking for a long time to meet some real live ‘educated Blacks’, but that name! Even I had been hesitant about Gerrit until I really got to know him.

Finally we’d settled on the Levinsons, a highly intellectual couple of academic mid-lefties; the Smithsons, honest, concerned and questing; and the Wallaces, fiery and outspoken radicals. *(Owen Wallace even had the unbeatable credentials of a minor criminal conviction for a quasi-political offence.)*

But the choice had been on my mind ever since. The Smithsons, particularly. Had we tried to range too broad? Weren’t the Smithsons a little too close to the patterns of unquestioning orthodoxy?

During the Friday, I did no work at all. I had a huge sheaf of impressive-looking papers on my desk, but my mind fixed firmly on the telephone. Should I put the Smithsons off? What would I tell Sue? Should I put the whole damn thing off?

Around lunchtime, Vusi strolled in to discuss a routine work problem. *(A surprisingly small problem, I thought. He usually fixed matters like this without asking me.)*

I gave every impression of tearing myself away from an important train of thought, or tried to, making a couple of quick notes on my pad to reinforce the impact.

As Vusi left after we’d sorted the matter out, I called out: ‘Okay then, be seeing you tonight.’ *Ewe kalm* and casual, you notice.

Vusi stopped. ‘Oh, yes,’ he said. ‘Tonight.’ Equally *kalm en* casual. As if it had just happened to almost slip his mind. ‘Tonight. Yes. I was going to mention. We have a transport problem. My car’s in the garage.’

Whew. They weren’t coming. Thank God. Oh no. What a pity. What a relief. Would we have to go through it all *again*? What about the stroganoff, I’d have leftovers for a week. I could breathe again. It was great. It was terrible.

‘I’ll have to bring a friend,’ he went on. ‘He’s got a car. Is that okay?’

Omigod. A friend. Who I didn’t even *know*.

‘Of course,’ I said. ‘No trouble. He’s welcome. No trouble at all. It’ll be nice to meet him.’

‘Okay, then,’ said Vusi, leaving. ‘See you tonight.’

A friend. Hell. But what was my problem? Since when had we objected to friends? We *liked* our friends’ friends. We liked the nice casual situation where people brought friends. It was no problem at all, like I’d said. No problem at all. No problem at all . . .

‘Vusi’s bringing a friend,’ I told Sue, over my shoulder, while I hung up my suit.

There was a short silence.

‘A what?’

‘A friend. You know. F.R.I.E.N.D.’

‘Okay, okay. You don’t need to get sarcastic.’

‘Well, why do you sound so scandalised? Lots of people bring friends.’

‘That’s true,’ she said, very cuttingly. ‘But they don’t all let us know on the evening, when I’ve spent the whole day making the right number of crepes suzette.’

She was on the point of tears. I (wisely, but belatedly) dropped the *sang froid* stance and became good and husbandly and comforting. More like the ole me, as she said. When the crisis was over we both went to the kitchen to make another crepe suzette. I provided the unskilled labour in the task — more of a hindrance than a help, but it was the thought that counted.

Twenty minutes into the new crepe suzette she suddenly asked: ‘Does the friend have a wife?’

‘How the hell should I know?’

‘Because you should have asked, you bloody idiot.’ And the veneer cracked up again.

After the next patching job we started again on a new crepe suzette. Just in case. *(I suggested leaving it, and said if there was a wife or girlfriend I’d go without. No. she said. They’d see. And guess, and it might make them feel bad.)*

After a while Sue suggested I stopped getting in her way, and went to fix the drinks up. I didn’t even argue. We never ‘fixed the drinks’. People just went to the kitchen and got what they wanted, but I got out the bridge table and set up the beer, and the wine, and my brand new bottles of spirits, and I bustled around trying to find glasses that weren’t cracked. All the while I was persuading myself that it didn’t matter a damn if the glasses *were* cracked. They couldn’t possibly be so paranoid as to think that the cracked glasses . . . well . . . meant anything. But I dug through all the far furthest corners of our old pile of unused wedding presents anyway.

Oh, the long sad story. 7.00 p.m. finally rolled around, and we went to dress. By this time I was heartily wishing it was the next morning. I wished I lived in Antarctica. Or perhaps in Groblersdal. But at least all this ludicrous preparation was over.

Then Sue said: ‘What should I wear?’

Aaaaaaggggggh! What do we wear? *No more.* Please. *Perlease.*

‘I told them casual.’

‘Well, what do *they* mean by casual? What do they think *we* mean by casual? Maybe they think lounge suits instead of dinner jacket, for all I know.’

True, true. Now what? What if they pitch up in suits and I’m wearing jeans and bare feet? They think we don’t care. We think it’s because they’re Black that we’re looking like tramps. What if they come in jeans and I’m wearing a suit? They think they’ve committed a *faux pas.* They think they’ve offended me. They think I look down on them because they don’t know the conventions.

Roll on the revolution — let’s all wear Mao-suits and *know.*

Ten minutes of debate and finally we opt for a compromise. I wear sports-jacket and cravat *(easily discardable).* Sue wears long skirt and blouse, with necklace and earrings at hand *(she looks smart with them, casual without.)*

We dressed hurriedly, as 7.30 was upon us.

7.35. A car draws up. We put on a Judy Collins — sets a nice comfortable tone. We put it on halfway through, so it doesn’t look as if we’ve just put it on.

7.37. The doorbell.

It’s only the Wallaces.

Whew. Welcomes and smalltalk.

Then the Levinsons. Then the Smithsons. Much more smalltalk. Tottering along at its usual amiable pace. Children, dogs, jobs, the parking problem, the state of the nation — all the usual. Sue and I are limited participants.

The phone rings. We both jump up. I’ll get it. No I’ll get it. Wrong number.

The people’s stomachs are beginning to rumble. Mine too.

‘Who else is coming, Sue? I see you have twelve places . . . ’

Very tactful.

‘Oh, a chap who works with Duncan. With his wife and a couple of friends.’

I chime in. It’s one thing to play it natural, but these things can be taken too far: ‘Yes, A Black chap actually. Vusi Mdlalose.’

‘Oh,’ from Jimmy Levinson.

‘Er . . . um . . . ah . . . yes,’ from Judy Smithson.

'How *do* you pronounce that name?' from Pete Smithson.

A little about how nice, and the need for contact, and what exactly does Vusi do, and back to the smalltalk. *Everybody* playing a limited role now, and all ears cocked for the doorbell.

9.00 rolls by. 'Did you give them a map?' asks Sue.

(Of course I gave them a map, fool, with the phone number too).

9.30, and the matter hasn't been mentioned again.

9.45, and I'm starving. 'Oh well, it looks like Vusi has run into a problem. He must be stuck in a place where there isn't a phone. Perhaps we should eat, Sue, when its ready.'

When it's WHAT? Sue has been diving into the kitchen every three minutes for the last hour and a half to try and stop the food from burning.

10.05. Halfway through the stroganoff. The doorbell.

Vusi. Looking a touch unnerved. 'Sorry we're late, Duncan. Um. This is my wife, Thandi. And this is Julius, and this is Margaret, and this is Sipho, and this is Sydwell.'

Hi. Hi. Howdjado.

The people stroll in. Sipho is one whole lot the worse for wear. He asks for the loo before he heads for any other place. Vusi ushers them past, he waits till they've gone. He looks at me as if to say: 'Well Duncan, I hope this doesn't cause any complications,' with one eye, while the other eye is saying: 'Listen Whitey. If you don't like *our* customs you can get stuffed.'

The eyes come together again. He takes a deep breath. 'Well,' he says, 'here we are. What a nice house.'

(What does that *mean? Enjoy your White privilege while it lasts, you bastard? No. It means warmth, and fellow-feeling.)*

Thandi says, stammering slightly: 'How nice to meet you, Duncan. I have so looked forward to this evening.'

She is sweet. She is truly terrific. Demure. Highly attractive without being a raving beauty. I warm to her in about one second flat. I know that I like her, and will always like her. I am proud of her, proud of Vusi that he has her. What a warm contented glow she casts.

Then Sipho vomits in the lavatory. *(He hadn't closed the door – it kind of echoes.)'*

Yeccch. As everybody was feeling. Vusi seemed to shrink an inch or two.

But finally we got all the introductions through, and everybody was seated at the table. *(With all the Whiteys' beef stroganoff damn cold by this time.)*

Sue. She's brilliant. She had decided somewhat unilaterally, while Sipho was doing his trick in the john and I was still greeting and smiling and thinking of pleasant glad-you're-here-type platitudes, that the remaining mealies were a little inappropriate in the circumstances *(especially since I'd eaten three, and there were only two left)* and she had amended the table layout accordingly so that it looked as if we had always been expecting another six people – since birth, almost – and that there had never been anything but beef strog.

So we got seated, and we got started. My food was cold, and if there is one thing that makes me mad (next to drinking warm beer) it is eating cold food. But I forgave everybody everything, because I was sitting next to

Thandi, and I was thinking that the chances of there being anyone in the whole world who exuded better vibes than this small shy little lady were practically zero.

Conversation wasn't exactly so very vibrant. Sue was asking Sydwell if he wanted the salt. I was asking Thandi what she did. And the Black guys were climbing into the beer as if it were in danger of turning into the fairy princess's gossamer wings.

Somehow the whole shipwreck seemed to be salvaged.

And suddenly I noticed that the reason none of the other Whites weren't talking wasn't because they were too busy eating. It was because they were all fixated on Thandi. But something in their eyes told me that they weren't concentrating on the beauty of her soul. The focus seemed to be a little lower. I followed the gaze.

Thandi was eating her stroganoff with a spoon in one hand, and the fingers of the other. She'd ignored the knife and fork entirely, and was using the dessert spoon as a kind of shovel, to gather up stuff to her fingers.

Egad!

I could imagine the Smithsons finding the experience a little unorthodox. But the Levinsons! And the Wallaces! The Wallaces! The famous Lefties. Whose name had appeared in the *Guardian*. Who'd dined out on Owen's prosecution for five years! Who'd publicly refused to collect a parcel at the GPO because they'd have to walk through a 'Whites-Only' door to do so.

Suddenly it struck me that the Wallaces were as artificial as we were. We'd always assumed that the Wallaces had Black guys around every second night. We'd always assumed they were in close and intimate and permanent contact. Just as a lot of the Righties at the office tended to assume that because Vusi called me by my first name I was a raving lunatic 'liberal' *(which was right, whatever it means)* and that I knew all about Black people and Black society and Blackness in general *(which was a whole lot wrong, although I had never actually specifically said so.)*

Only now did I realise that in all the years we had known the Wallaces we had never yet met a single genuine Black African Bantu, a native of the continent of Africa, at their place. Sure, Indians by the dozen, and Coloureds. But nary an African. And there were Owen and Bev Wallace staring at Thandi Mdlalose's digestion service as intently as if Raquel Welch had dropped her tits on the table.

This was an eye-opener. There was something to be learned from it. The trouble was: while I was trying to figure out precisely what was to be learned, Thandi also suddenly felt the eyes upon her.

She felt it, did Thandi. She looked around, and saw that everyone else was using a knife and a fork. She quietly put her spoon on her sideplate, wiped off her right hand on her serviette, and took up her knife and fork. I went on with the stimulating conversation we had embarked on. I went on, in a slightly half-hearted way. Thandi nodded and mmmd, and was horribly, awesomely silent. And a little bit of potential accord between the races withered and receded, and died.

So did a little bit of my heart, and/or mind.

Sue was sending over some desperate thought-waves. I caught her eye. She stared intently and meaningfully at the table in front of me. At . . . ? At . . . ? At my dessert spoon! Then at hers.

What now? Did we discard knife and fork, with ninety percent of our plate already done, gone and masticated, and resort to spoon and fingers? Did that make a point? Was it the right point?

Was it patronising? Was it condescending? What other unmentionable things might it be?

Sue stared on, waiting for a nod or a shake. But I procrastinated *(I'm good at that.)* And then it was too late, and I was regretting having yet again left undone a thing I ought to have done, maybe.

Conversation had begun to pick up a bit, in a kind of hiccuppy way, by the time Sue started clearing the plates. Old Sipho was pretty much out of it. I won't exactly say he was *silent*, strictly speaking, since he was snorting and slurping like a grampus. But for purposes of verbal communication he was a non-starter. The only thing he had said was when I had come round with the wine bottles. 'Red or White?' I'd asked. 'Huh?' 'Red wine or white wine?' 'Brandy'. I gave him a tot-sized tot, which he knocked off in one gulp almost before I'd put it down, and then straightaway got up, took the bottle from the 'drinks table', poured himself half a pint, and put the bottle down in front of him. Since then it had become almost possible to ignore him. *(Pete Smithson, who was sitting next to him, had spread his serviette very fully over his lap and edged his chair away a little. My own parsimonious nature was giving me a sneaking sense of regret at the rate the bottle was diminishing and I was wishing I'd laid in 'Klipdrif' instead of 'KWV'.)*

But for the rest, a smoothness of sorts prevailed. Well, nearly. Sue was sensitively drawing Thandi out of herself again, into a reasonably real discussion about the pros and cons of Occupational Therapy *(they were both O.T.'s it turned out.)* Vusi and Pete Smithson were on Muhammad Ali *(I knew that neither Vusi nor Pete had the vaguest interest in boxing, and from what I had overheard I gathered that Pete had thought the subject up on the grounds that all Blacks were bound to be interested in Ali. Still, they were trying, both of them.)*

Margaret, the friend's wife, or friend's friend's wife, or whatever — a tall woman with a rather blank face but a ready smile — was dutifully nodding yesses, noes, maybes and ummms to a battery of questions cum propaganda from Mary-Ann Levinson on the Role of Women in Black Society. Owen and Bev Wallace were pounding Sydwell — a young and extraordinarily good-looking man, with a permanent sneer so pronounced that for a while I thought it might be a mild hare-lip — with the fantastic evils and iniquities of the White man and everything he had ever done, and dissociating themselves totally from the race. Judy Smithson had the last Black guy, Julius, all to herself. Her cup was running over, with sheer drivel. Her expression was glorious. She looked as if she had just been introduced to Prince Charles (she makes no bones about her royalist obsession) and he had turned out to have halitosis.

In my mind's eye I could visualise the illicit delight with which she would phone her mother the next morning: 'Can you imagine? Last night I sat next to a *Black Man* . . . '

There was a kind of even hum of chitterchat. I contemplated my wine glass, swilling it slowly to see if I could get the wine to run all the way round the edge without spilling over, feeling on the one hand that if this was interracial social intercourse we'd be better off without it, and on the other that at least it wasn't a disaster.

Then there was one of those odd moments, where everybody stops talking at the same time except for one person. Statistically, if six people are talking in the same room at the same time, the chances of five of them pausing for breath at exactly the same second are negligible. And the chances of that happening at exactly the wrongest possible second are so near to zero as to make no difference. Which all goes to show what you can do with your statistics.

Judy Smithson was the one person who didn't pause.

In the surrounding silence her voice was magnified to the volume of a megaphone. Her immortal phrase must have echoed to heaven and hell. And to the past and the future. And resounded throughout Soweto, and Mamelodi, and Guguletu, and Katatura.

And it bust the eardrums of my soul. And Sue's. And Vusi's. And Thandi's. And all the rest of those lost souls sitting through that Walpurgisnacht in the unlikely setting of our cosy dainty middling-chic corner of Suburbia.

She was in mid-sentence, when the power got switched on:

' . . . how exciting to meet an *educated* one. I mean, you're so . . . so . . . *human*. Not at *all* like my garden boy . . . '

Then Judy realised through her euphoria that it wasn't only lucky educated human Julius' ears that she was holding, but the rest of the congregation as well, and she tailed off, evidently realising that something was wrong, but like a child who says Balls in front of the bishop, not knowing quite what.

None of the other conversations got resumed. Sue's assiduous cultivation of Thandi's self-confidence was clearly destroyed — Thandi retreated almost visibly into her shell, more so even than after the fingers issue. Sydwell's sneer shot so high it practically disappeared into his nostril. Human Julius, a sane, sound feet-on-the-ground sort of guy, it seemed, looked as if he was wondering whether it would be worthwhile replying, or whether the gulf was just too vast.

I was thinking that I couldn't let it go, but I didn't know what to say. Vusi seemed to be in something of the same position.

Finally Julius said, quietly: 'Your garden boy is my father.'

Judy, the nincompoop, started prattling something about: But how do you know? Oh you must be mistaken. He can't be more than ten years older than you . . .

But she was drowned out by Sydwell, who drew himself up to his full and rather imposing height and thundered menacingly across the table: 'It is your attitude as much as that of the government which will shed the blood of the Whites.'

Pete Smithson sure as hell didn't know what Sydwell meant, but he did know that a gentleman always protected the honour of his wife, and that in some indefinable way this scornful uppity Black bastard was impugning that honour.

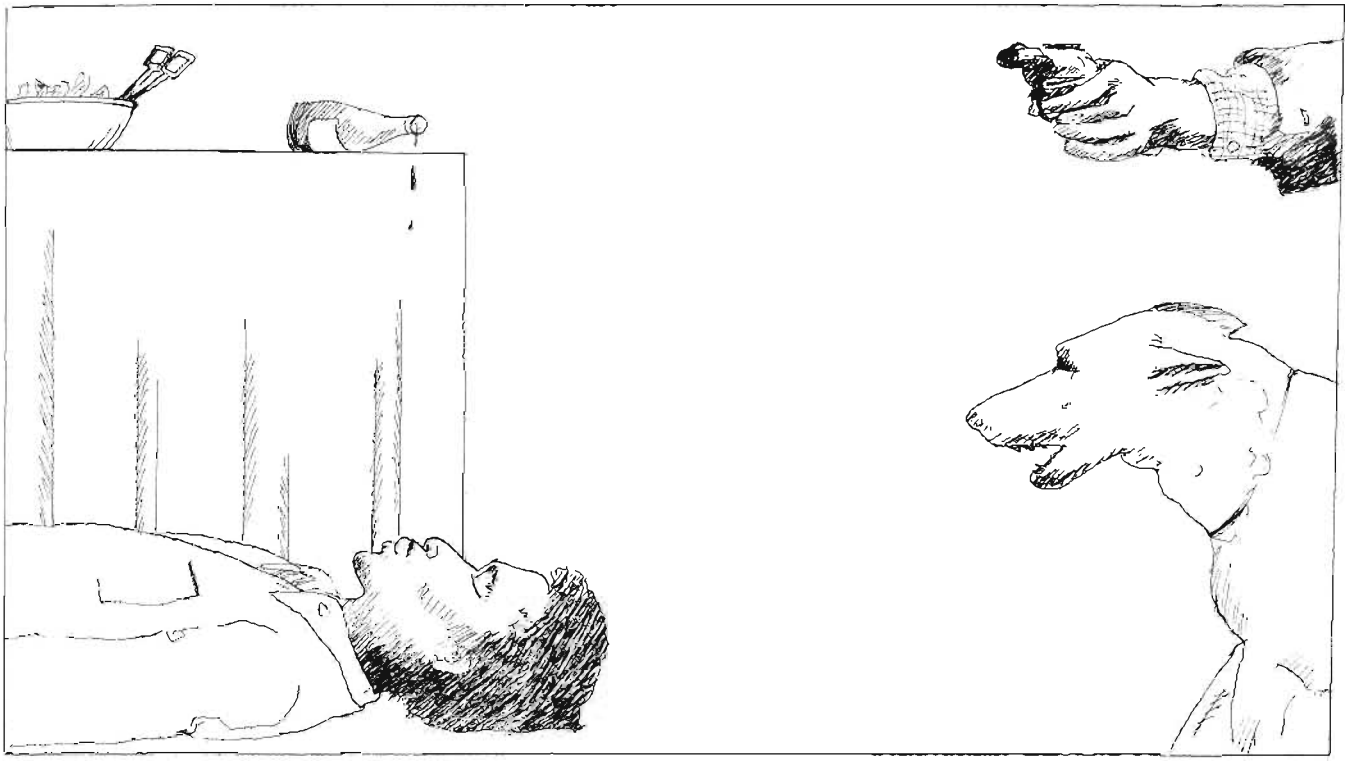
'Now, here, here,' he said, taking his serviette off his lap and beginning to stand up, in the best early-Victorian style.

At that very moment, as soon as Pete had whipped the safety-blanket serviette from his check worsted trousers, Sipho gave a sudden lurch, puked all over Pete's lap and fell head first into his own puke.

Well, that was a Godsend! It was God expressing his appreciation of our efforts to bring the races together, as I said to Sue afterwards. *(Don't be blasphemous, she replied.)*

Of course, it lost us the Smithsons, for all time. But that was nothing. I'd lost friends before, because of this strange weirdity in South Africa by which it becomes controversial and 'political' to practise sheer human decency. And I'd lose more in the future, if I didn't lose my guts first.

'In the surrounding silence her voice was magnified to the volume of a megaphone. Her immortal phrase must have echoed to heaven and hell. And to the past and the future. And resounded throughout Soweto, and Mamelodi, and Guguletu, and Katatura.'



But by the time we'd washed Sipho off a bit, and laid him out on the floor *(I was damned if I was going to risk him puking all over the bed, no matter what the other Blacks thought — long afterwards it turned out they thought I was crazy to even give him floor space)* and seen the Smithsons off, it all seemed like a tremendous joke. It seemed that we'd been through a common experience. Their embarrassment over Sipho was neutralised by our embarrassment over the Smithsons. The artificiality had gone — or had it? Diminished, anyway. By rights the incident should have driven us apart. In fact it did the opposite.

'Did you see the expression on his face?' Haw Haw Haw. Much imitations and mimicry. Which kind of Logically led on to Van der Merwe jokes (the Black guys knew a whole lot more than the Whites did) and humourous anecdotes.

Thandi was in mid-swing on a new upsurge, which pleased me considerably. Sydwell's sneer was hovering indecisively around mid-moustache level, and at odd moments seemed to disappear almost entirely. Julius was the best raconteur in the room, and Vusi was benignly casting a ray of approval over the whole charade.

But that was what it was. A charade.

It was as hopeless to imagine that the Wallaces and the Levinsons wouldn't get back to the Black/White issue as to imagine that Sydwell was going to leave off with only two Whiteys down, out of eight.

We were marking time, with all the laughter and jokery. It couldn't last.

And it didn't. I could see that Owen and Bev Wallace were on tenterhooks, waiting for the opportunity to expiate afresh, just in case any of the Blacks hadn't yet figured out that they, the Wallaces (and as a matter of grudging courtesy the four other Whites present), were different from all the other Whites in the country, *empathised* with the Black man (that was a favourite word of theirs), and had never even for an instant ceased to curse the cruel fate which had maliciously afflicted them with that most foul of all evils — a White skin.

In fact the Blacks would have to be either deaf or morons not to have taken the point, which the Wallaces had been making ever since they opened their mouths. But they were obviously about to make it again.

Why? Was it because they thought (subconsciously?) that the Blacks might not see what they meant the first ten times? Was it in a compulsive hope that they would be spared the knife, when the knives were out all around? Was it simply that they couldn't think of anything else to say, or thought that everything else was irrelevant?

There was a fair amount of support for that last possibility. What the Wallaces were saying now was not removed from what they said constantly in Whites-only company, and from what a lot of our other White friends, too, were pretty well obsessed with. Sue and I had ourselves been involved in interminable conversations about the faults of the Whites. But while in the past these conversations had contained a certain unconstructive sameness, they had never seemed quite as negative as now, when the audience consisted of Blacks.

I was becoming rather riled by the Wallaces. I was beginning to feel that I would discard our friendship with them with as little reluctance as I had just departed from the Smithsons — although until tonight we would have counted both couples amongst our closest friends.

Finally the Wallaces got the opening for their next bout of apologies. It was a Van der Merwe joke that did it for them.

Julius had been telling it. Not so much a joke as a sad illustration of the 'South African Way of Life.'

The joke, such as it was, was this:

Van der Merwe was a road-digger. A champion one. The city council's best road digger. One day he got sent off to England to study British road-digging methods.

When he came back the mayor and all the brass were there to meet him at the airport.

'Well, Van,' they said, 'what did you think of the British road-digging methods?'

'Ag, man,' he said, 'They're not up to much. Yissis, I spent two hours watching a group of ten men digging a twenty-yard stretch of road. That's no blerry good, man. I tell you, you give me half an hour and forty kaffirs and I could do the job *myself*.'

Wow! Did the Wallaces pile in. They both started up, fourteen to the dozen, about how the Whites ignored the individuality of the Blacks, refused to see them as people, etc.

I don't think anyone there rejected the actual content of what they were saying. It was just that they were saying

it in such a futile, don't-think-of-*us*-as-Whites way.

Sydwell's heavy, even tones cut across their protestations.

'The one thing worse than the Nat who calls us kaffir,' he said, to no-one in particular, 'is the Prog from Houghton who wants to see us move into Mayfair, and take the jobs of the mechanics and bricklayers.'

A conspiratorial, happy smile of accepted approval flitted across the expressions of the Wallaces.

But Sydwell wasn't finished. 'The one thing worse than the hypocritical Prog is the radical who licks our arses so we can't bite his head off.'

Well, that was the end of the line. Normality finally shattered, and shattered good. For a moment Bev tried to feign support, pretending that was yet another group of Whites which she and her husband would condemn along with all the rest. But Owen was more realistic. He did not try to avoid the unavoidable. The attack was aimed at him, and he knew it. He responded with strings of counter-accusations, which became more and more racist as he became more and more desperate to find something really crushing.

For a while Sydwell just sat, impassive and indifferent. But his very impassiveness spurred Owen on to greater extremities, and when Owen started on about how the Blacks had never done anything for themselves, and their only advances had been through the efforts of the White radicals, Sydwell rose to the bait and sheer pandemonium broke out.

The rest of us had to physically hold them apart. A few glasses and a bottle of wine met a premature end in the scuffling, and a fair amount of stroganoff got trodden into the carpet. It looked like we'd be there forever, holding the contestants ineffectually away from one another, until Vusi suddenly took the necessary decisive step and hit Owen on the head with a salad dish, knocking him out cold. *(I don't think this was so much because of aggression towards Owen, but simply to put an end to the screaming — and Owen was probably selected as victim on the eminently rational ground that he was less likely to beat the shit out of Vusi at some later stage than Sydwell was.)*

That reduced the decibel level sharply. Except that Bev was having very loud hysterics and our dogs were going crazy outside the back door. I was sorely tempted to try the salad bowl trick on Bev, but then suddenly our neighbour barged in, leashed Alsatian in one hand and pistol in the other, and started trying to line the Black guys against the wall. 'Palms against the wall,' and all sorts of other dumb tricks he'd picked up from the movies or maybe his Civil Defence classes.

The only thing he succeeded in doing before I hustled him out was to shut Bev up — she stopped in mid-shriek when the pistol waved past her for a moment — so he wasn't in fact entirely unwelcome. *(From that day to this he hasn't stopped talking about his unnatural and treasonable neighbour, and how I learned not to go hobnobbing with the Bantus.)*

I was sorry for the Wallaces, in a way, as we watched Bev drive off — slightly erratically, with Owen bundled into the back seat. Unlike the Smithsons it wasn't merely a matter of a bad evening. For the Wallaces it went much deeper. Identification with Blackness was nine tenths of their reason for living. Their credo had been put to the test where it counted, maybe for the first time, and had failed.

I assumed at the time that the incident would have a huge effect on their lives. I was wrong. A couple of weeks later they were back to scratch, talking loudly and firmly at White dinner parties about the evils of Whiteness and the beauty of Blackness. Only then did I realise how fully their reference group consisted of Whites, and how little it mattered whether or not they were accepted by Blacks. It was Whites they were talking to, and Whites they wanted to be able to shock. Together with their charmed circle of like-minded friends, all White, they would go through life in haughty disdain of White attitudes and in total disregard of whatever was happening amongst Blacks except insofar as it gave them a lever to prove their exclusivity to other Whites.

The Levinsons? They took off at the same time as the Wallaces, hurriedly and quietly, while all attention was focussed on shovelling Owen Wallace into the car, and with scarce a word of goodbye. I suppose they figured that they were next in line — which was reasonable enough: Sydwell made a couple of comments about intellectual Lefties after they had gone which made me suspect he was a little sorry he wasn't going to get the chance of another two notches on his fuselage.

That was all a year ago. Sydwell is in detention now. Julius was killed in an abortive attempt to blow up John Vorster Square. The Levinsons are in Canada, permanently. The Wallaces still revolve around their self-negation axis. Pete Smithson has become a police reservist, and a pillar of the civil defence movement. Me and Sue and Vusi and Thandi have seen each other a couple of times — once at their place in the middle of the third spate of riots. We got there lying on the floor of Vusi's car under a blanket. Our relationship hasn't grown greatly. But it exists.

It does something for me.

For example, when I get appeals to help with Black charities I turn them down more easily than before.

It exists.

JOHANNESBURG

HOW LONG!

Through the rain
the night descends,

the occult darkness
balms the eyes,

the land in all its blackness
sings freedom songs
around the brazier.

How long!
before we sharpen
the blades of the hurricane.

How long!
before the dawning
of the black-green-golden sunrise.

Essop Patel

Essop Patel's first collection of poems, *They Came At Dawn,* is to be published by Blac Publishing House, Cape Town, at the end of November. His poems have appeared in previous issues of *Staffrider* and he edited the selected writings of the late Nat Nakasa, *The World of Nat Nakasa,* published by Ravan Press.

Poems and drawings by Andries Oliphant

MARAT DE SADE

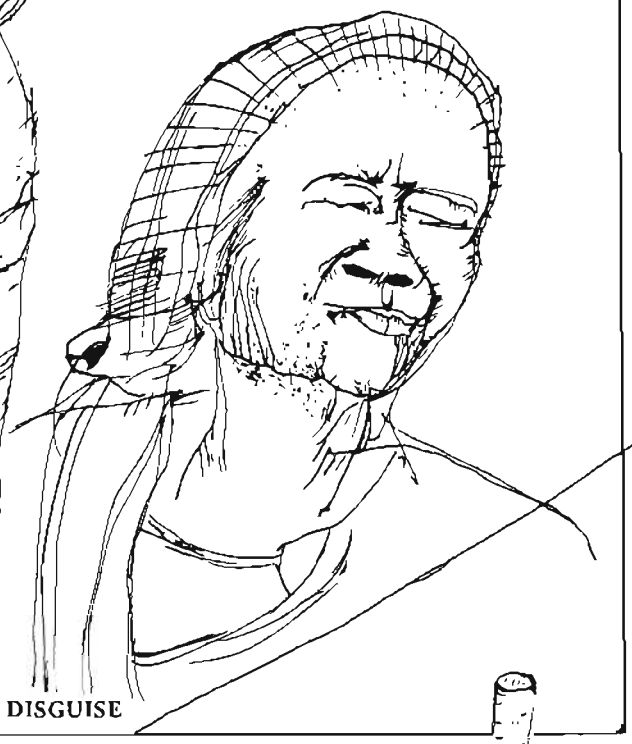
I am the twentieth century's Marat,
chained to the bath-tub
and soaking in the people's blood.
My tongue
is the black bread
multitudes at gates are screaming for.
We are sinking
into a marshfield of rotten corpses.
I climb up against a steel ladder
with an arrow
in my arse. People are nailed
to balconies
and sparrows peck out their eyes.
The locations
are gas ovens
crammed with people
screaming like trumpets.
I balance an owl's egg on my back
and become
the incarnation of history.
We are one, until
the final shriek rips
the grimace
from the faces of tyrants and demagogues.
People in rags
with hoes
and shovels
slung over their shoulders.
They will demand their ancient rights.

HOROSCOPE

I was born with the world
at war.
A rubber hand
squeezed my throat
and my birth-cry turned
into a shriek
when I saw all
those corpses
bulldozed into shallow ditches.

EXTEMPORE

Levelling the roadside with a hammer
in his hand
the little boy chants
to the rhythm of his strokes:
ba hi shani-sa, eché!
ba hi shani-sa, eché!
The foreman is sitting in a truck
and stuffing food into his mouth.
He looks at the time
and ignores the senseless chant:
ba hu-hi hlupha, eché!
ba hu-hi hlupha, eché!
Levelling the roadside for workers
to advance
from factories and shacks;
blazing hammers clutched
in their hands.



DISGUISE

Branches scratch the red scar roof
and blood drips
through the ceiling
onto the white sheets
where you are sleeping:
the mask ripped from your face.

Night explodes a hand grenade
in your brain,
tearing the stitches
from the seams of fear
until you jerk, screaming
at a face frozen in the window.

HELL THIS PLACE, HELL

Hell this place, hell.
Where toddlers are no longer toddlers
But men who shout headlines
From their newspapers:
Up in the spooky hours of morning
To search for something actually
Out of reach.

Hell this place, hell.
Where children swim and dance
In a dam from a burst refuse pipe,
Giggling and laughing like hell.
And I wonder if
For them there is nothing better.
Hell this place, hell.

Anthony More/Gartasso

ZINZI

Child of the earth
Queen of this dark hearth
Daughter of a misplaced continent
You toil, sweat on the brow, like an ant
Because our days are about to be:
To take over from those who've called
themselves
Fathers to this unlettered people
'Nurturing' the unripe apple.

Child of these weeping willows
Mother to the dark meadows
Burning the midnight oil:
Pens, ink, thought in the toil
For us, the deaf, dumb and blind.
Zinzi give us the flowers of your mind,
Show us that you can make the desert
bloom.

Dedicated to all the young women who are taking part in the struggle to uplift the black people in this dark abyss of circumstances. Especially to Zinzi Mandela.

Romeo Moeketsi More/Gartasso

Kedisaletse Mashishi

I AM THE EQUATOR

Come nearer black star
Steady man, steady
There is no hurry in Africa
Come unto me
I'll have to landmark you, yes
You are African, you know
Let me brandmark you, come on
I am the equator
Your skin is too light
For your Gauteng is not right
Come nearer my son.

Your hair is too long?
Fluffy? Stretched? Well I see
Come let me burn it
To make it shorter and denser
That's African!
Let me see the palms of your hands,
The soles of your feet.
O.K.
Yes. You are African.

Turn around, descend southwards
Return each year for check-ups.
Go in peace my son
For you know your rights now.
I am the equator
Never forget my lesson, African
For I need you young soldier.

Kedisaletse Mashishi/Gartasso

LETLHOGELA LA TLADI

Bakgatla tsogang le boneng
Nqwana o tsetswe –
lapeng la Mmeriki-a-le-ngele
Mosinane yo montsho
Ngwana Rebone yo motala le diatla
Mo ana kolobe –
Scepa se ikamogetsa

Ngwana o mmelege Rebone
Ke mang yo a ka go bakisang
Maatlametlo a o a diretseng sechaba
Thari ya Tladi e tla ata
Ka namane e ntsho
Se gatlhamela masisi
Botlhale o tswa le bona badimong
O theilwe ka pheko e kqolo
tshita dingaka
Go tlhabanela sechaba se sentsho

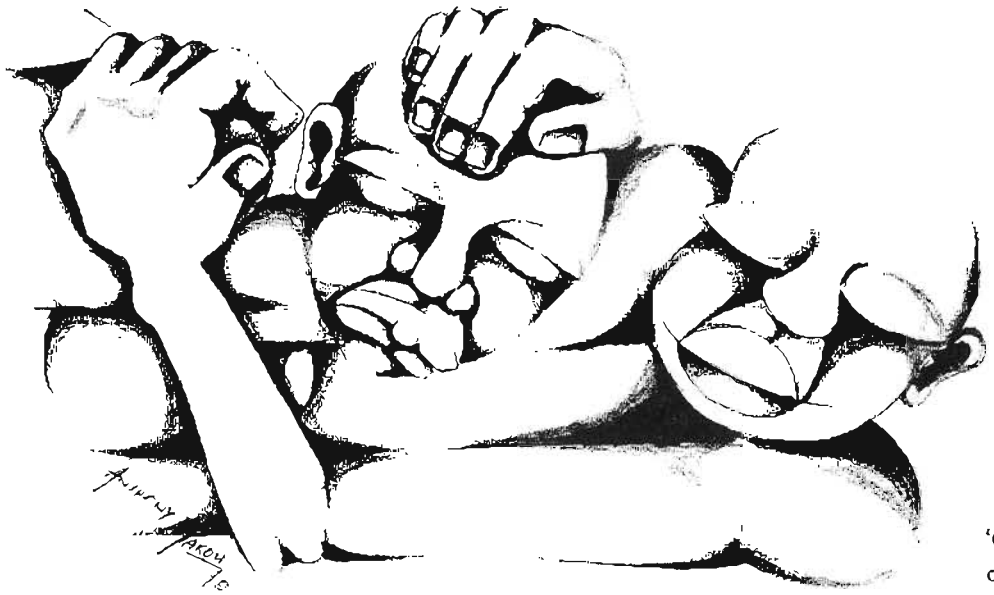
Ngwana wa thari e ntsho
Wena ngwana wa mobu
Tshwara ka thasa
Ditlogolo di tla tsoga di go gopola

Mantsetse Tladi/Gartasso

COMFORT

Yourself, in my position you put
Me, in a tragic atmosphere
My eyes, sorrow they saw
My eyes, in a dam of sorrow they
drowned
Your hand, on my shoulder is put,
My shoulder, your hand pats
Your mouth, sympathising words
it speaks
'Give your heart a rest:
Things will soon be okay'

Molongwana Anthony Makou
Gartasso



'Comfort'
drawing, Anthony Makou

WATCHING A GIRL PLAY THE PIANO AT WESKOPPIES MENTAL HOSPITAL

From wall-brackets, enclosed within herself,
She piano's her melody into this noon;
Blue Danube, and Preludes breathe
In the opened enclosure of her mind.
High these walls,
Yet not too steep to reach that height,
This girl seems to circle all her ills,
Then dive,
Keys shifting into freedom;
Piano-fortifying her skill of aloneness.

No-one else can sail within those bounds,
None talk, while her fingers brail
Her soul's cry with sound.

David Scannell

PLATITUDES

They say the darkest hour
falls just before the dawn;
they say the dying soul holds on until
the day is born.

It's said the sea lies ebbest
before the highest tide:
at flood, the channel's deepest;
at ebb, rocks cannot hide.

Nature runs in cycles.
This is what they say.
But summer turns to winter.
Night always follows day.

Mike Mellor

UNTO DUST

This grey this drab this colourless green,
red the earth that lies between;
therein absorbed
the blood of time has been.
Yet all remain
pure and still:
without stain.
Unfolding veld the eyes engage.
Tightened tendons the earth invade.
Each alone but different are;
the same to us appear to be.
Unyielding earth the soul enrages:
Each alone,
None the same;
'till dust we are
and unyielding be.

Hiram Zangwill Slomowitz

CALAI*

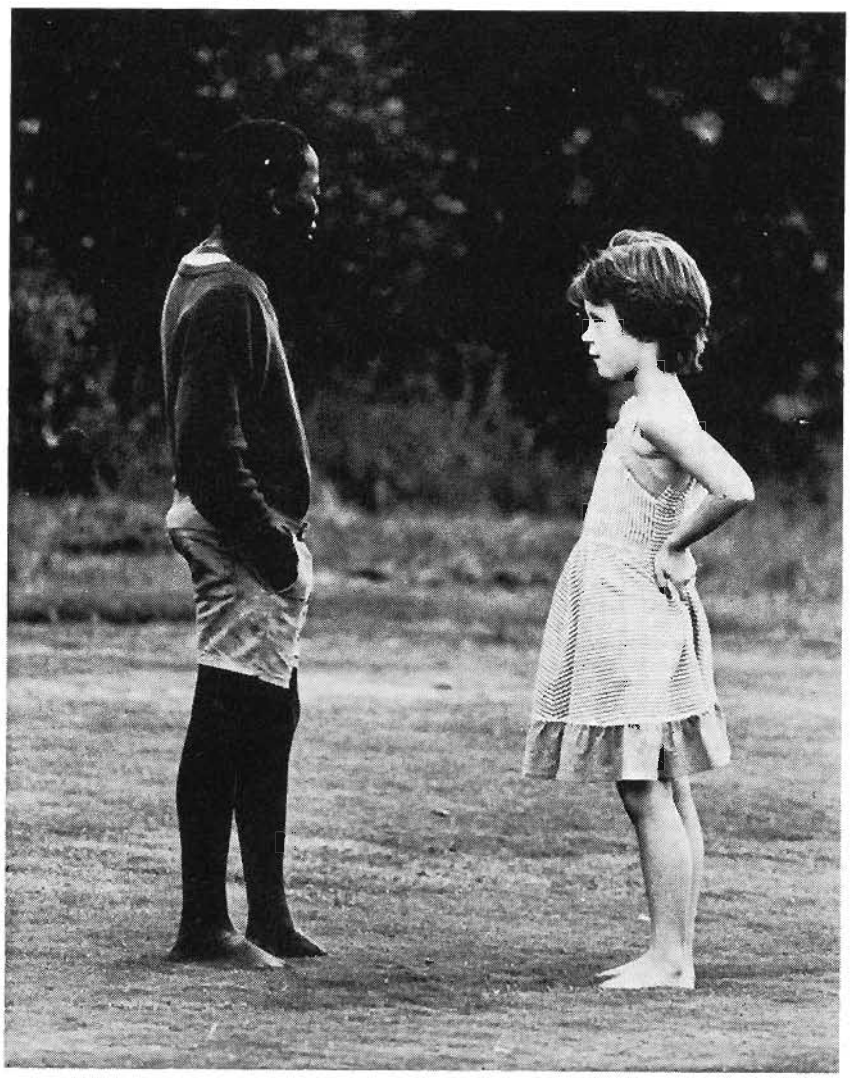
A bombed-out ghost town fast asleep
Lies spread out in the midday heat;
Crude letters daub the crumbling walls,
Protesting loudly in the silent streets.

Calai, I weep for you on summer days
And think of you more often than you know;
You lost your sons and daughters long ago
And their spirits sleep no more in you;
Dreams of running feet disturb your sleep
And you recall the sound of screams before the end.
Two worlds fought each other in your streets,
Drove away your children, left you dead,
And disappeared into the jungle night
To count their wounds and share the spoils.

While a mangy dog explores a roofless house,
His ancient master pauses in the road –
A homeless wanderer searching for a place to stay:
He shakes his head and with a sigh continues on his way.

Arthur Goldstuck

**Calai is a town on the southern border of Angola which is continually ravaged as MPLA and UNITA forces drive each other out. The town has changed hands about four times in the last two years.*



Glendower Golf Course , photo, Ralph Ndawo

GUYO BOOK CLUB/SIBASA

HOW DO YOU FEEL

you remember the rains
falling gently
softly
i crossed the vomiting rivers then
headed for the mountains
and from there
i saw my brothers
exchange their pride
for silver buttons
in the barracks
my sisters
betraying my love
in the tents
i saw mushroom overnight

shall we talk about it now
now that you have done it
how do you feel
tell me
how do you feel
or must i ask
the stars and the moon
that were witness to it all
tell me
how do you feel
when your insides neigh and roar
and there is no permanganate
of potash to dissolve and drink
when life has to end
before it begins
and the accusing fingers
keep shivering at a distance
tell me
how do you feel

Nthambeleni Phalanndwa

WHO AM I?

Who am I?
Where do I come from?
Am I a human being
Whose blackness
Symbolizes inferior status
Or am I a human being
Made in the image of God
Whose blackness
Is a constituent of his humanity?

Ranwedzi Mulaudzi

VALA – MMBENGWA

Thi nga hwetekani
Sa tshitoni nga thoni
Tshi dzwigimedzaho mafumo
A aridi ndi fho hune la yo pfula
Hone ndi tshi divha tshira.

Ndi twiswa u edza khumba,
Nda gagamisiswa basa sa khamba ya khumba,
Nda nga mufhiri shangoni le midzi khalo nda toka
Tshenetsho tsha vha tshiga tsha vhupuli ha nne
Wa vha muhala wanga
P.W. a u sikela
E nga tsha zhi 'adapt or die.'

Vhasadzi vhashu vha gagade la dzithumbu,
Mano a tshi tata vha shenga mikulungwane matungu o hagala.
Zwa bebwa zwa sedzwa vala
Zwa kongomedzwa ndi zwikongomoti zwa tsiko
Zwa teta zwi tshi dobedza pfuzo-vhulada.

Musadzi, sokou dembelela.
Gumbe la tsiko yau li do dzika
Ndi misi zwipuli zwau zwi tshi do ita tsinga-nndedede
nwedzini
Sa vhanwe vhana
Ndi misi muthannga wau a tshi do ranga vhathu phanda
Zwi nanguludzwaho nga vala a vha maluvha
Zwi si zwone a si zwone nga ú a si zwone

Nga Gundo M-Lidovho

YOUR CROSS

man, look at your cross
and see if it is right
woman, check your cross
and see if it's in position

some are cutting theirs
others losing theirs
are you holding yours black woman
are you using yours
to cross Jordan

Irene Mutsila

MADI GROUP/KATLEHONG

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?
(Excerpt from a longer poem)

See them dusty-powdered
See them cooled under
Shades of shame.
Yet they keep singing
'Mayibuye' as frustration
Dissolves in their blood.

Matthews Dlamini

SAY NO
(dedication to the people)

say no
when ordered to ride a bicycle
with no chain
thus say no
when ordered to kick a ball,
with both feet
because 1 times 2 equals two
and 1 plus 2 equals three

Maupa-Kadiaka

THE INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to meet you –
take my hand.

I am off-brown in summer,
reddish-pink in winter.

I am a semite
Whose skin has long been bleached
by the icy blasts of Siberia.
I stand now on the tip of a continent –
where day by day, like the laughing cricket,
a bitter struggle for truth rings through the air.

Hate is the name of the game
and let the best one win
so that truth remains
wrapped up
in a bucket of ice,
kept well stored in an icy fortress
upon whose door, pieces of love's
rotting flesh are embedded –
having battered his hands to bloody rags
in a defiant, violent attempt at admission.

I am tall I have muscles
I'm a human
– a real one to pass any zoo-keeper's test –
I am closer to white than black
in skin colour.
I stand on the sub-continent
A Boer, an Afrikaner, an in-between;
I stink of gaping wounds
that gush forth blood
like burst water-pipes
in the streets of the townships.

Love is the button I press
on the old jukebox
in a one-horse town on the edge
of a mountain painted in shimmering green.
Golden joy abounds the night air
cast in silver-dazzling naked eyes
that roll and groan in notes of ecstasy,
yearning in mechanical sobs for the forgotten empire.

I have returned
Look at me
I am white
I am brainwashed to hate
all that lives except my pale skin
that I burn brown in the sizzling heat.

The ice is melted, truth is out
burning through bubbling hatred,
Running through a septic sore,
blowing in rampaging blasts of glory.
Hatred's tied in knots
on the plains of human courage.

Rotating notes of joy echo
through my head:

the blood of evil has run its course.

I stand on the continent,
on the jagged edge,
a man –

Simply that
I laugh
I cry
I sing
I live . . .

Richie Levin

SHAKA

It's now that I see
Shaka's prophecy taking shape
In this fighter bomber
My fate is in that engine
Propelled
Now that I see
Shaka – Missionaries prophecy come through
To its end
I am right in the bowels of the birds he saw
In the vultures
Hovering over those locust swarms he saw
Plague my harvest season after season
I am settling the score
As King Dingane said
'Kill the witches'
I am now flying with the birds he saw
Reigning over my crop
Shaka's prophecy has come to its end
A prophecy not a curse

Bika

GENERALLY SPEAKING

We canon-saluted General De Gaulle
He packed and left
Winston Churchill saluted our parade
And bowed out
General Eisenhower did not object
General Spinola lost his generalship in the African bush
Only yesterday
We marched General Franco goodbye
The founders of your barracks
General Botha, General Smuts, General Hertzog
Left us at 'Take Cover'

Generally speaking
The last of the Generals is
A General uprising

Bika

SURVIVAL

Chains of oppression
Are tightening around our necks
It is called prison suicide
The unprincipled are wise
The uncommitted thrive
Spineless worms bend with ease
My dear brothers and sisters
In this jungle
It is the survival of the
Stupid
Finish and klaar

Bika

MAN AGAINST HIMSELF

An excerpt from a story by Joel Matlou

We must work before the sun goes down. The life of a man is very heavy in his bones and his future is a deep unknown grave.

One day when I was alone, struggling to get money, and far away from my home where no-one lives or grows, I met a man from Zululand called Dlongolo. He told me to try for work at the offices of Rustenburg Platinum Mine (R.P.M.) in Bleskop, 8 km from where I was living.

The following day I went to the offices of R.P.M. I found work. The man who hires labourers was a black man with three missing upper teeth. I was told to come on Monday. Before I left the premises I saw the sportsground, the mine hospital, a bar, a café, trucks, vans, buses and a compound with many rooms and toilets. But I left because I was sleeping at the hostel in Rustenburg and my home was in Mabopane, Odi.

On Monday morning I returned to the offices with others. At about 9.30 a.m. our passes were taken and looked into. They told me to fill in the forms they gave me in Ga-Rankuwa. So, with the little money that I had, I arrived in Ga-Rankuwa and my forms were filled in, but I was surprised when they told me to pay R1 for the forms. I paid it and left. So I was short of money for the train back to Rustenberg. I had only 85 cents in my pocket, and the journey would cost R1.10. It was 9.30 a.m. and the train left Ga-Rankuwa at 10.00 a.m. I was far from the station and I lost hope of catching the train. I thought of begging for money, but decided I was too young to beg.

My second plan was that I should sleep somewhere in Ga-Rankuwa and at about 4 a.m. I would walk to the station of Wolhuterskop where my 85 cents would be enough for the train. At about 8 p.m. I chose myself a toilet to sleep in at a certain school in Ga-Rankuwa, Zone 4. I went into the toilet at night but it was very dark inside. There were lights all over Ga-Rankuwa roads. I walked slowly to the back of the toilets where I found a big stone. I sat on it trying not to think of dangerous snakes under the stone. At midnight I heard barking dogs. All the people in Ga-Rankuwa were asleep. At about 3 a.m. I heard cars hooting all over Ga-Rankuwa. I thought I was in danger. But those cars belonged to newspapers and were calling for their employees. And there were two buses hooting. I thought they were staff buses for drivers. People started to walk on the roads then, to catch trains and buses to Pretoria and Rosslyn. At about 5.15 a.m. I felt cold. I was wearing a shirt, a jersey, trousers, and shoes without socks. The sun rose and I left Ga-Rankuwa early so that I could catch the 11.30 a.m. train at Wolhuterskop. I ran until De Wild where I started to walk and beg a lift to Brits or Rustenburg.

On the road to Brits I saw a black man sitting on the white government stone indicating bridges. I greeted him and he greeted me. As I passed he called, and stood up. He begged 20 cents from me. With shame I told him my story and showed him the forms I'd filled out in Ga-Rankuwa. He was wearing sandals, black trousers, a red 'hemp', a black jersey and a scarf. He had a camera in his hand. I continued to tell him my story. I told him to beg a lift to Brits, where he was going. A truck carrying sand arrived and we stopped it for a lift. The driver took us to Brits. We got off at the bus rank. He asked me to accompany him to the pass office for a reference book. At the pass office we saw convicts cutting grass and sweeping the pass office floors. He was given a duplicate and we departed.

I started to run through the town until I was outside Brits. The station of Wolhuterskop was very far and there were no short cuts so I used the main roads, like a car. I was tired and felt like a convict on the run. I could not imagine what was going to happen. My stomach was empty. As I was walking on the tar road I met two beautiful girls aged about 18 to 20. I am 23. They were carrying boxes with dirty dust coats inside. I greeted them and asked for the Wolhuterskop station. One of the girls, speaking Pedi, told me that it was not so far away. The second girl asked where I was from. I told her that our factory van broke down near Brits, and I was reporting back to work. She asked where I worked and I told her at the United Tobacco Company in Rustenburg, about which I knew nothing really. We parted. Not far from the station I met a traffic inspector resting under the plantation trees. He greeted me nicely and I also accepted his greetings. I thought to myself that my road was now open because I had got a greeting from a white traffic inspector. That was nearly true and nearly false because I could never have imagined what was going to happen

after my struggles. At the station there was a queue for tickets. My ticket cost 75 cents to Bleskop where Rustenburg Platinum Mine offices are, so I had 10 cents left. I bought myself a half brown bread costing 7 cents at the nearest café, and sat under the trees on the grass where I ate the bread alone. I drank some water and my stomach was full like a strong man. The train arrived, so I boarded it but my mind and future were still missing without hopes. My heart was very heavy as I got onto the train so I thought of my motto: 'If the Lord gives you a burden, he will also provide help to carry it, and in the whole world there are so many people who pray for a new life.'

When I arrived at Bleskop I wondered where I would sleep that night. I just took a stroll until 7.30 p.m., back to Bleskop station. There were a few people going home from the mines. And I started to breathe softly without fearing. There was a big waiting room in which many people were asleep and I too slept there. People from the mines were playing records with their gumba-gumba. Bleskop was very quiet but gumba-gumba men were blasting records the whole night until 2.30 in the morning, when they boarded the Pretoria train. I was left with the others who were going to the mines the next day.

After the gumba-gumba men left, Bleskop station became quiet. When the sun rose over the mountains of Pretoria, we set off for the Rustenburg Platinum Mine, some wearing blankets. The mine was where we were going to buy our lives with blasted rocks.

We arrived at the offices which were still closed, and sat on the grass. Mine people were training on the sports-ground. Some were jumping and singing in the mine hall in the mine language, 'sefanagalo'. At 7.30 a.m. the ambulance arrived at high speed, its top lamp flashing. It stopped near the door of the mine hospital. Two people and the driver got out without speaking. Their faces were in sorrow. From the back came six people in mine clothes, with their head lamps still on. They off-loaded two coffins and carried them into the mine hospital. I shivered like the branches of a tree. My motto was still in my mind but I thought that I had seen Mabopane for the last time, and my parents, relatives and friends too.

At 8 a.m. the offices opened. We were called and our passes were taken from us. At 9 a.m. we collected our passes and the black officer told us that there was work at Swartklip. They gave us tickets to Swartklip which cost R1.35, single.

When we arrived at Swartklip we were shown to empty rooms and given plates for food. Then we saw a film which ended at 10.00 p.m. Back in our rooms we slept well, with police guarding us with kieries.

On Friday morning the man known as Induna woke us at 5 a.m. He told us to report at the labour office as soon as possible. We did so. At the labour office our passes were taken. At about 9.30 a.m. a black man in white clothes told us to follow him. We were led to a big house with many rooms and beds, which looked like a hospital. We were

taken to a room where there was a chair, a desk and a scale ending in 200 kg. There we met another man, all in white, who had many files in his hands, where our names were already written. They told us to undress. We were checked from toes to head for wounds, then weighed. When the doctor produced a big needle and injected us near the heart to kill shocks when we went underground, I felt I was fighting for my dear beautiful life. Late on Friday we returned to the labour offices. We were given three days tickets for food at the compound and shown a film.

On Sunday at about 7.30 p.m., after my meal, I tried to find an empty tin and get a little chaechae, which is what mageu is called on the mines. Joel! Joel Matlou! someone called out to me. I looked at the people sleeping on the grass, and saw a man with a tape recorder. 'Come here, come here,' he said. I moved slowly towards him. He stood up and said, 'Joel, what do you want here?' When I recognised him I was so happy that I kissed him. It was Joseph Masilo of Mabopane who was now living in Moruleng, Rustenburg. We were at school together at Ratshetlho Higher Primary in Mabopane seven years ago. We started questioning one another about our reasons for being on the mine. I told him I had taken the job because I needed money fast, to pay off a big instalment.

'How do you come here?' I asked him.

'Suffering brought me,' he said. 'In two weeks' time I complete my ticket and get paid.'

'Couldn't your people or relatives and friends help you settle your accounts?' I asked.

'It is difficult to reach relatives and friends. Are you married?'

'No,' I replied. 'I will think first before I marry. Mines do not have girls. Where and how often do you get to have a girl near you here at mines?'

'This place is a jail,' said Joseph. 'No girls around here and you must have respect for yourself until your sentence is finished. Stop asking me silly questions. All the people here have troubles.'

We parted and arranged to meet the following day.

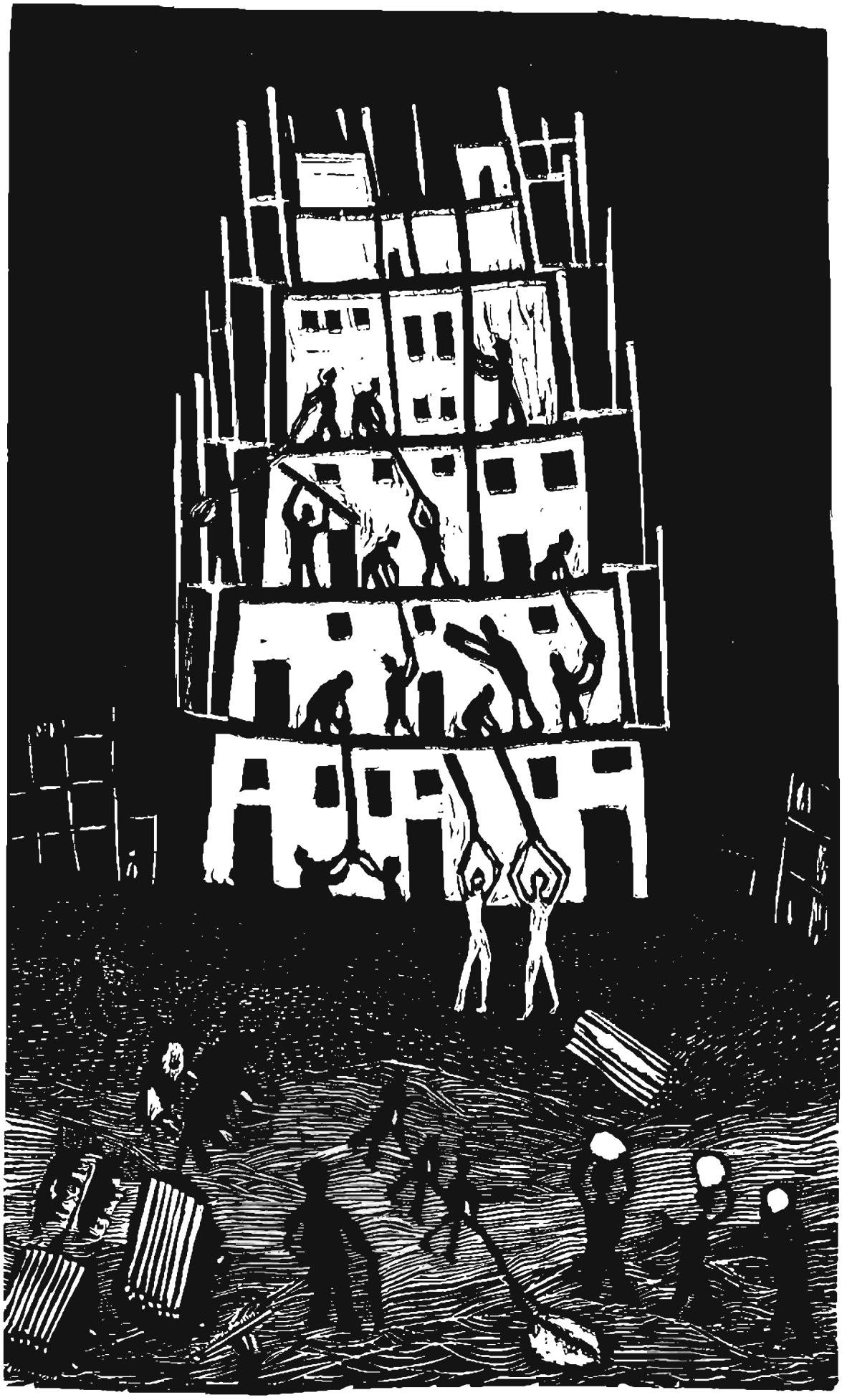
I was so very happy to meet my best friend after seven years. My heart was open and all things were going well.

On Monday morning we went to the labour offices. There were three compounds, A, B and C. A compound is called Union Section. B is called Entabeni and C is called Hlatini. They are far away from each other. The officer told us we would be transferred to C compound, Hlatini. We fetched all our belongings and the mine bus took us to Hlatini compound. There were many people in Hlatini. Some were drinking beers, playing ball, running and playing tape recorders. A big man with a bald head took us to a room called 'School Mine'. In that room we found chairs and a big white board. We were told to sit down quietly and listen.Then all the windows and doors of the room were closed. We were shown a television film of a man teaching new labourers how to build and pack wood and another film on First Aid.

Then a black man wearing a black dust coat, with a missing left eye, called us to the office. He gave us cards, then called us one by one to take boots, belts and iron (copper) hats. Then we were given numbers. A young man came running with a plastic bag containing small numbers. The numbers were on small pieces of iron 200 mm long and 100 mm wide. My number was 3281. That was on Tuesday.

There were 20 little windows, like those at which people buy tickets for buses or trains. There you got your lamp and battery for work when you produced your number. My number was 3281, and my window number was 8. We were told to report at the windows at 6 a.m. for work.

Back at the compound we enjoyed our mine meal, saw a film and went to sleep. At 5 a.m. we were woken by a loudspeaker. We got our lamp and bat-



'Babel's Tower', lino-cut, Bongiwe Dhlomo

tery and were taken to a big office where we were ordered to sit down on the floor. We were still to see and learn more.

A white man introduced himself as Mr. Alfred Whitefield from Northam, Rustenburg. He spoke English, Tswana and Sefanagalo but not Afrikaans. He said: *'Umtheto wase* mine *utbi, aikbona wena sebenzisa umlilo lapha kalo* mine. *Aikbona wena hlala phanzi banye ba sebenza. Vuka umtheto wa* boss boy. *Sebenzisa a ma* toilets *a se* mine. *Aikbona choncha. Sebenzisa umine* Bank *ku beka imali yakho.*' Those were the words which I still remember from Mr. A. Whitefield.

Before we went to work under the soil of Africa, we were given a hand belt with a number on it. It was a blue belt. My number was 2256731.

At 7.15 a.m. the boss boy took us to the lift. As it went down my ears went dead and I saw dark and light as we passed other levels. The levels go from 6 to 31. The lift stopped at 28 level. There I saw lights, small trains (*makalanyane)*, a tool room, a work shop, toilets, a power station, big pipes, drinking water, a telephone and so on.

The bossboy gave us a small book which had 24 pages. Every day he tore out one page from it. When it was empty you get your pay and a new book.

We gave our tickets to the boss boy then walked for one hour to the end of the shaft. The mine shaft was very hot. I was wearing a shirt and trousers. The sweat ran off me like water. There were three tunnels. The small trains, the *makalanyana,* had red lights on the back and front indicating danger. Before the blasting, small holes were drilled in the walls and a man referred to as a chessaboy put explosives into them. After the blasting we found broken pipes, the ventilator on the ground, bent rails, a cracked wall and other damage. The blast gave us heavy work. The *makalanyane* and its trucks were called to collect all stones. You can find a stone weighing 200 kg far from the blast.

A Zulu from King Williamstown was digging *mosele* (water concrete) when part of the ventilator fell on him and his left leg was trapped under it. The boss called us and we lifted the ventilator to take out the trapped man. His leg was broken and bloody. Four men carried him to the lift and an ambulance was called.

Water leaked from the top of the walls. Sometimes small stones fell on us. In another section of the tunnel were people called Loaders (*Malaisha*). My boots were full of water. The time for clocking out started to roll round, so we followed our boss boy to the station. We switched off our lamps while we waited in the queue because at the station there were electric lights. We were wet like fishes and ugly like hippos. Some were sitting and resting with empty stomachs. There were two lifts running up and down, taking people out of the shaft. When one was underground, the other was on the surface, offloading. After 20 minutes, the lift arrived. The guard opened the door and we flowed in. The notice on the door said the lift took only 20 people. But we were packed like fishes in a small can. At level 6 the guard opened the door and we came out, one by one, as the door is very small. We gave our officer the lamps and he gave us back our numbers.

There was no time or chance to prove yourself: who you are and what you want. I did not wash my clothes or bath because I did not have soap and other clothes to put on. All I did was eat and sleep on the grass and listen to the music from the loudspeaker at the offices of Hlatini compound (C).

I had already lost hope of going back to Pretoria where I belonged. I could not even imagine that my girlfriend was thinking about me. Life was so bad; for me life was a little piece of stone. Washing, bathing, cutting nails, dressing in clean clothes and reading newspapers was far from me. It could be about 640 000 miles far from me.

The mine injection makes you forget about your parents, relatives and friends, even your girlfriend. The injection makes you think only about work underground. After three weeks underground I was part of that world.

In the yard of Hlatini compound there was coal and wood and in the rooms was only one stove. If it was cold you could make a fire or cook your own favourite food. The Bar and shop were in the yard.

The days went on and on until my ticket said 23 days. Our month ends on day 24. Then we'd get our money. When my ticket said 24 days, I was working underground for the last time. My last day underground went so fast. On the 25th day I went to the paymaster to get my money. I was told to come back after 6 days. This was bad news. Waiting for my 6 days to end, I slept in the bush every night because I did not want to go underground. My main wish was to escape. During my last 6 days in the lonely bush I came across many dead cattle killed by Pondos and Basothos because these nations like meat. I also saw old shafts and old machines, so I used to enjoy myself going underground using ropes and chains. The shafts were very dark. During my wanderings I saw people ploughing their lands and growing crops. I also came across a slum known as Mantserre near the big mountain, far from the Hlatini compound, where there were schools, shops and churches. In the bush I met some wild animals like springboks, hares and impalas, as well as partridges. I even met people riding bicycles from the mines to Mantserre slum on the narrow paths.

I wore my mine clothes during this time as I didn't want to show people that I wasn't working. When I returned to the mine I took off my mine clothes and wore my own dirty ones. I was so happy to know that tomorrow was pay day. I met young men at Hlatini playing records and singing. I joined in though I didn't know them. My meal was so good that I ate like a pig and drank chaechae like a drunkard. What I did not know was that I was on the verge of a complete mental breakdown. My last night at Hlatini was very long and terrible. It harboured demons, but it also symbolized escape from dangerous falling rocks to the gentle air of Pretoria City.

At 3.30 a.m. a loudspeaker woke up the people as usual. I was left alone in the room, waiting for 9 a.m., for my pay. I decided to steal clothes, tape recorders and radios but God refused to allow it. Music was playing on the loud speakers. To me things seemed to be changing; even the birds were singing a chorus which I didn't understand. The hours went by and at 8.30 a.m. people started to queue for pay. I joined them. After an hour the paymaster arrived, police guarding him with revolvers. Each of us was asked for a number, and finger prints were taken. They gave me a pay slip which had two parts. At a second window they took one part and I was left with the pay slip with my thumb print on it. At the third window they took my pay slip and gave me the money which a policeman counted so that they would not rob me. The money was ninety-six rand. It was for my own work. I risked my life and reason for it.

I went out of the main gates at Hlatini to escape to Northam station. I pretended to be counting my money at the gate so that the police guards would not realise that I was running away. I did not finish counting: I just thrust it into my empty pocket and walked out of the main gate towards the bush to free myself. That time life was not endless but everlasting. The earth was once supposed to be flat. Well, so it is, from Hlatini to Northam. That fact does not prevent science from proving that the earth as a whole is spherical. We are still at the stage that life itself is flat — the distance from birth to death. Yet the probability is that life, too, is spherical and much more extensive and capacious

'I changed my clothes at the Rustenburg station toilets and put the old ones in a paperbag. I was really a gentleman. People, mostly girls, asked for the time when they saw me, just for pleasure.'

than the hemisphere we know.

The black dots in my eyes turned brown, like a dagga smoker or a dreamer. I felt like a political asylum-seeker, running to Tanzania. To get to Northam I had to cross two compounds. I ran like hell until I crossed A and B compounds. Then I ran to catch the 10.30 train from Northam to Rustenburg. Two black men, and a white man on a tractor looked at me, surprised. Far from the ploughing men I crossed a ditch in which a half-eaten impala lay. Birds were singing, animals roaring. At 8 p.m. cars passed me, one after another and I started to fear for my life. I hid under small bridges or in the long grass. At 9 p.m. I saw small yellow lights and I realized that it must be the station. My feet were aching and swollen and bloody.

At the station there was a café where I bought chips and a half brown and sat on the grass to eat it. After buying a ticket to Rustenburg, I found a small piece of paper on the grass. I took it to the toilets, wet it and washed my face with it. I even bought vaseline to smear on my dirty face. My face looked like that of a real man, but not my clothes.

The train arrived at 10.30 p.m. People looked at me. Some of them were laughing instead of crying blood. After I arrived in Rustenburg I went to the shops. People were laughing at my dirty clothes, even white people. The shopkeeper thought I was a robber, so I showed him my pay slip. I bought a three piece suit, a blue shirt, black and red socks and a Scotch tie. It cost me seventy-one Rand and I was left with only twenty-two Rand. I couldn't arrive home with dirty clothes, so I decided to buy my pride with my suffering.

I changed my clothes at the Rustenburg station toilets and put the old ones in a paperbag. I was really a gentleman. People, mostly girls, asked for the time when they saw me, just for pleasure. I had a *Rand Daily Mail* newspaper in my right hand, and walked like a president. I was smelling of new clothes.

Suffering taught me many things.

I recall a poem which is a plea for me:

I don't like being told
This is in my heart, thinking
That I shall be me
If I were you
I but not you
But you will not give me a chance
I am not you
Yet you will not let me be
You meddle, interfere in my affairs as if they were yours
And you were not me
You are unfair, unwise
That I can be you, talk act and think like you
God made me
For God's sake, let me be me
I see your eyes but you don't see your eyes
I cannot count your fingers because you see them all
Act yourself and I will act myself, not being told but doing it oneself.

Suffering takes a man from known places to unknown places. Without suffering you are not a man. You will never suffer for the second time because you have learned to suffer.

I am grateful to Mr. Dlongolo who told me about mine work and that it was a fast way of making money.

It was Friday and most of the people on the train were students and mine workers going home to Pretoria and the Transkei. Everyone was happy. Even I was happy. If suffering means happiness I am happy. The 1.35 p.m. train pulled out and I sat reading the *Rand Daily Mail*. The train stopped at all stations: Colombia, Turfground, Maroelakop, Bleskop, Marikana, Wolhuterskop, Brits West, Beestekraal, Norite, Stephanus and Tailardshoop, when it left the Republic of Bophuthatswana and crossed into South Africa. On the train people sold watches, apples, socks, liquor, shoe laces, lip ice and so on. When I saw the beautiful girls I thought of my own beautiful sweetheart, my bird of Africa, sea water, razor: green-coloured eyes like a snake, high wooden shoes like a cripple; with soft and beautiful skin, smelling of powder under her armpits like a small child, with black boots for winter like a soldier, and a beautiful figure like she does not eat, sleep, speak or become hungry. And she looks like an artificial girl or electric girl. But she was born of her parents, as I was. She is Miss Johanna Mapula Modise of Mabopane who was born during a rainy day. As I am Mr. Joel Medupe Matlou of Mabopane and I was also born during a rainy day. Mapula and Medupe is our gift from God. So, we accepted these names by living together.

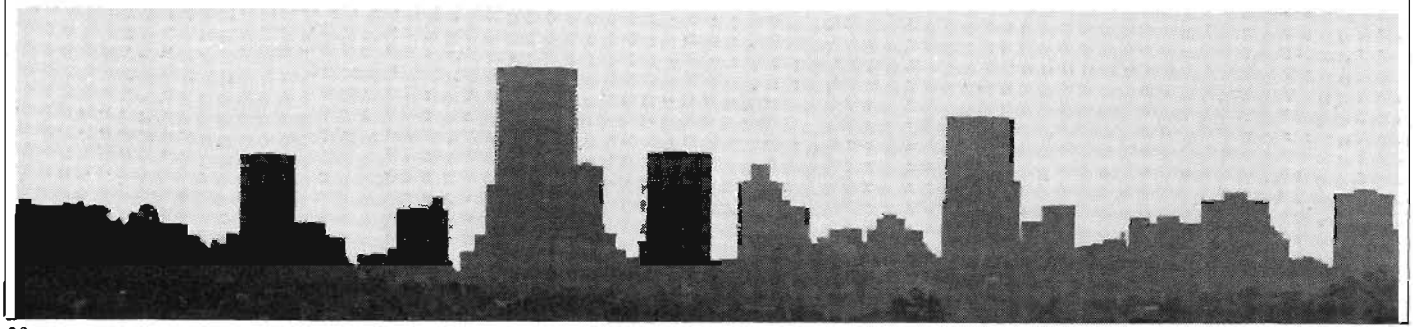
The train arrived in Ga-Rankuwa on time. I bought some groceries and took taxi to Mabopane. From there I went straight home where I met my mother and young brothers. They were happy and I was happy with them. The following morning I visited my girlfriend.

She cried when she saw me, silently looking down on the soil of Africa. I did not tell her I had worked on the mine. I said I had got a job in Johannesburg.

'Why didn't you tell me that you were going to work in Johannesburg? You didn't even write to me. You just sat there and forgot me,' she said.

'One of my friends took me to Johannesburg where he found me work. So there was no chance, I just left, I lied to her.

Back on Mabopane's dusty roads again I looked like a real gentleman. Many people were happy to visit me as they knew I was a peace lover and didn't drink or smoke. There was nothing which worried me. I had thought that getting back to Mabopane's dusty roads would lead me to suffer, but eating alone was almost more than I could bear. I learned to forget yesterdays and to think of tomorrows. Each morning in the township, I said to myself: 'Today is a new life.' I overcame my fear of loneliness and my fear of want. I am happy and fairly successful now and have a lot of enthusiasm and love for life. I know now that I shall never again be afraid of sleeping under a tree alone, regardless of what life hands me. I don't have to fear blasting. I know now that I can live one day at a time and that every day is a time for a wise man.



KHAULEZA
Creative Society

Ursula Marshall and James Matthews, both from the Cape, visited Johannesburg recently and they took part in a group discussion on writing with Khauleza Creative Society. Ursula Marshall reports:

'Two important questions were discussed:

1. The role of the poet/writer in society today.
2. What freedom will be after liberation.

'One writer raised the question about writers and poets leading the people. It was pointed out that since the 1960's writers have been expressing the poverty, human suffering and humiliation of the people. The writers wanted to know when writing would take the form of guidance for the people. James Matthews pointed out that poets and writers are not visionaries but people who reflect what is happening at present. They cannot tell readers when the time will be ripe for a revolution — as "the time is always right, it is only the people who are not right for the time."

'There was a lack of female presence at the discussion: as if women should take a back-seat in the fight for freedom. The writers promised that they would "recruit", as they put it, more women, and get them actively involved in the struggle.'

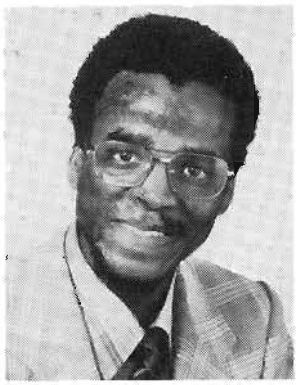
James' poem 'Nina', was another outcome of the visit.

NINA

I saw you as the child
you were
saw you sitting on an Alex
doorstep
dark, dusty and beautiful
from inside came your voice
singing a hymn to Martin Luther
King
Alex sorrowing with you
mourning the passing of a
Prince of peace
In the eyes of the little doorstep
child
was the promise of the Nina
you are
I walked away with eyes
not seeing the stench of Alex
my mind filled with a
Nina-child and the sound
of a Nina-woman voice

James Matthews

THREE POEMS by M.J. Monyebodi



M.J. Monyebodi/Thembisa

PASS BOOK

how i love
this pet
that drags
like heavy luggage
in my moth-eaten
pocket
and speaks
in two languages

this is
the encyclopedia
that knows me
better than
i know myself

what i say
about me
bears no credence
against its arrogant
language

it speaks security
under many laws
that bind me
in failure
to do it
reverence

hail that tyrant
that knows many faces
all sullen and sulky
lifting it
on its throne
thickly varnished
with laws
of colour

nhlanhla paul maake
Thokoza

KE KAE?

Ke kae, mošola
Ge o le England,
Ge o le Amerika,
Go thwe kenong,
Kenong Afrika, ke
Gona mošola,
Ge o le gona monong,
Monong Afrika Borwa,
Mošola go wena,
Ke bona Bo-Amerika
Bona Bo-Australia
Le bona — Bo-England.
Gabotsebotse, godimo ga hlogo,
Ke kae, mošola?

KE SEKHORANE

Ke a go kganyoga,
Go phela gaboleta,
Go phela gaboreledi,
Go šupa ka monwana.

Ke sekhorane,
Molatša ga a kgome,
Lešotša ga a kgome,
Nkhara ga a kgome.
Ke sekhorane.

Nna bo tlo ntlela
Neng, ka tla ka inyaopa,
Ke a kganyoga ke a lakatša,
Ke a hlobaela ke mathateng?
Kgane di a tswalelwa?

KE LE LE BJANG?

La Soweto,
Le ka gopotša motho,
Le ka o gopotša lela
Le bitšwago,
La Sodoma le Gomora —
La pelodintsho,
La mediromentsho, mekgopo.
Go lona, la Soweto,
Go phuthana go phuthane
Mehlobohlobo,
Go e rebola seina,
E tla be e le gona
Go kwa mogodu go tuka.
Ntshe go phedišanwa gampenyana,
Go phelwa ka seatlana,
Go phelwa ka seletswana,
Go phelwa ka mphakana —
Tšohle dikoba-khutšo.
Ke la mahlo-Mahubidu, segale,
Toko le Khutšo
Mogau le Phedišano,
Ga di tsebje,
Eke di a ilwa,
Eke ke manaba.
Ke le le bjang?

A BLACK MAN IN A POLICE STATE

As I went down Voortrekker Street,
I looked up and saw a policeman.
I searched my jacket inside pocket,
And my trouser back pocket for my pass.
It was not there.
He was coming up to me.
I wanted to run, but my legs would not.

I prayed God to save me from that cop,
But God did not hear my prayer.
The cop pounced on me,
Like a cat pounces on a mouse.
He beat the hell out of me
For failing to produce my pass
Being a black man, I have no weapon to hit back.
Nor a law to protect me from his brutality.

Their lawlessness is protected by law.
Where is God? Where can He be now?
Why can't He protect me from police brutality?
Or did He not hear my prayer,
Because the man who put chains around my neck,
Calls him God, and when I said 'God, Help!'
He thought it was the voice of my enslaver?
I do not deny God's existence,
But I doubt his absolute justice.

Abia Ramalebo Diutloileng/Mbakasima

Drawing, Mogorosi Motshumi

AT THE GATES OF THE CEMETERY

The march to the cemetery
The internment of the dead
Are sublime to an African Child,
For then Africa bids adieu to Africa.

Peaceful is the man who marches to the cemetery
To bury the soldier
Happy is the man who is one with the soldier
And free to walk in his footprints.

Cold is that man who fears these footprints
And shackled is he who fears the
Movement of the marches.

The bulwark against this movement
Dangled in the sky and stood
At the gates of the cemetery.

Eyes of humanity wept and watered the soil
Screams of pain and anguish were heard
At the gates of the cemetery.

The teargas was angry
Freedom sneezed off the cloud of darkness
And darkness clouded the fainting son of the soil.

Justice, peace and tranquility lost touch
With the law and order of the cemetery
For law and order took its course
And with fear it moved
But with bravado I buried my dead
And in honour he slept the last slumber.

My hands became the spade of burial
My tears a triumph over the dark
Clouds around me.
I returned in his footprints.

Thamsanqa Zondo/Sharpeville

i wish i loved

i wish i loved
this my master's language
then perhaps
hector would be alive
but then
    i do not

i wish i could speak
this my master's language
then perhaps
a mother would know no sorrow
but then
    i cannot

for where the blood was spilled
there a sapling grew
of hatred
    mistrust
        revenge
nurtured and nourished
by the tears of all the grieved
and it is under the shadow
cold
of this tree
that all africa shall be
until a mother knows peace

mogorosi motshumi
Malimo Group, Bloemfontein

GIFT

Shades of skin
Have no bearing on the deed
Be it good or bad.
A wrapper black or white,
Cannot show what's underneath.

Butler Selebalo Lieta
Witsieshoek, OFS

black crucifixion

The Tribunal

Torture and Humiliation

A selection from a series of 13 linocuts

A tragic blow to Christians

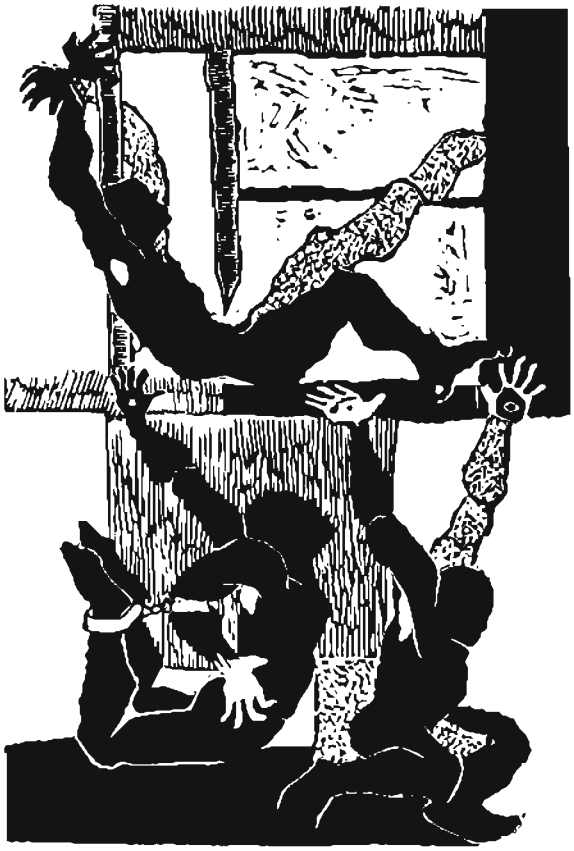
Premonition of the hour

Pain on the Cross IV

Pain on the Cross V

by CHARLES NKOSI/Marianhill, Durban

Pain on the Cross I



Pain on the Cross II

Submission to Death

Resurrection (Defeat of the Cross)

jazz & rugby,
tough games brother...

a short story by dikobe martins, illustrated by n.d. mazin

A bird-soiled clock chimes twelve o'clock. Below it on the street a robot changes colour, from green to red, and the crowd of pedestrians comes to a standstill. A young man fidgets impatiently with the straps of a black leather bag slung over his broad shoulders. It should not take more than an hour and forty-five minutes to reach his destination, he thinks.

Homecoming . . . I am the sole witness of my homecoming. His thoughts flash to and fro in time. Changes . . . so many. The mushrooming shopping complexes of tall concrete stalks, which neon-bloom at night. Jo'burg City, industrialized garden where the fragrance of the night air sighs with screams and drunken laughter chasing happiness . . . Zambia, Tanzania . . . The Patrice Lumumba University in the USSR and the bones of an African man lying in a stately grave, cold and lonely so far from the soil . . . J.B. Marks, the tombstone is inscribed.

The robot signals green and the crowd comes to life with movement. The young man steps briskly onto the road, as a shrill cry from amongst the pedestrians cuts through the cloak of noon-day heat.

'Help, he-e-e-e-l-l-l-l-p-p-p!'

He turns round in time to catch a glimpse of the screaming woman. Dazed and surprised she stands petrified in the middle of the road, her green eyes fixed on her yawning handbag.

She mutters, 'Oh no, oh no . . . ' A face that shows shock and disbelief. Pandemonium erupts as the two youths dart and leap past hooting and cursing motorists. A net of gesticulating hands grows fast behind the two, but the youths, elusive as eels, move faster . . .

On the corner of Hoek and Noord streets a policeman with a bored expression enjoys what he likes doing best.

'Hey you!' an impatient Afrikaans voice shouts.

The man with the black bag looks about him and at the policeman again.

'Yes you, man,' roars the now angry policeman. I have done no wrong, the young man thinks as he inhibits his motion, but then he also knows that a policeman does not have to wait for an African to do something wrong before he stops and questions him.

'You Plurals are making a damn mobile shebeen out of this corner,' he says as he jabs the bag with his stubby fingers and barks . . . 'and what have you got in there, stolen goods? Let's see, *jong*'.

'This bag contains my schoolbooks and clothing *b-a-a-s,*' the other answers in ungrammatical Afrikaans and points in the direction of Park Station and says, 'I am going there.'

The policeman grunts, '*Jong, ag nee* this Government is spoiling you with education, and you speak English *nê*, so if you *meneer* and I *meneer* who's going to *smeer* the *wa*, and who are you, *jong?*' 'I'm . . . ' The policeman holds out his broad spade-like hand. The young man does not have to ask what is wanted. He immediately reaches for his pass in the trouser pocket. It is not there. He panics as his lean black hand snakes in and out of his pockets.

'No pass!' the policeman exclaims and grabs him by the nape of his neck. The man's hand trembles slightly as it moves frantically into his shirt pocket. 'Pass *outa jong*!' His palm sweats with anxiety now, but his hand finally surfaces with a dog-eared, brown-covered, dirty book.

The huge hand reluctantly lets go of the neck it holds. The plump pink fingers move slowly through the pages of the dirty book until they stop at the last page with its photograph. 'Are you Poshoka?' the voice asks. Even an overfed idiot like you should be able to see the likeness, the young man thinks. 'Yes *baaas,*' he answers.

As if all white men are public transport, he thinks. The white man hands the dog-eared brown book begrudgingly to the black man. The recipient walks away briskly towards Park Station, showing his anxiety.

One o'clock news – Klip Saunders reporting.

'. . . and police are still continuing the search for terrorists at large; residents of Soweto and other black areas are again warned that the penalty for failing to report the presence of urban terrorists is . . . '

Bored with the news the man selling railway tickets tunes the small F.M. transistor radio to the soccer commentary on the battle royal between Kaiser Chiefs and Pirates.

The man called Poshoka puts the Park Station to Alice Park third class ticket in his pocket and walks to platform seven. He takes a seat on a lean 'non-whites only/*slegs nie-blankes*' bench next to a bearded minister of religion. Five women dressed in sky-blue attire stand close to the minister. These 'spiritual terrorists' always travel with many women and the male membership is almost nil. His pondering is distracted by the cracking, crashing sound of a splintering food basket disintegrating under the mass of a stout man. Chicken feet, *phuthu* and oranges spew from the now distorted basket.

'*Modimo!*' one of the women next to the priest exclaims in disgust. '*Sies,*' the others chorus, whilst they retrieve the chicken feet and oranges. The man who has reshaped the basket in his mighty fall wriggles, turns moaning, rolls and eventually manages to get up saying, '*Askies, askies, aga* excuse me *mfundisi.*'

The women replace the victuals in the disfigured basket, whilst they shake their heads disapprovingly. The *mfundisi* eyes the man who smells strongly of liquor with a look that is unbecoming for a man of his calling. The women look with disgust at the man whose huge torso is covered by a torn, besoiled, buttonless, ill-fitting jacket, his once white shirt hanging over the side of an inflated sweating stomach which in turn overlaps his pants.

Poshoka looks at the man's trousers

with interest. The trousers seem to be rolled up twice at the waist. A brown tie that looks like a strangled snake keeps his trousers from falling.

This graduate of beerology staggers a few paces towards all four cardinal points, pauses and says to no-one in particular, 'I drink my own bloody sweat for which I slave!' He looks defiantly in the direction where the priest is seated. After a few optical difficulties he manages to focus his bloodshot eyes on the food basket and spilled *putu* porridge on the platform.

'You!' he calls the priest.

'Yes, you, *moruti*, you are going to hell, why do you waste food?' Then he laughs loud, slaps his glistening stomach and pays tribute to his prophetic wisdom by sipping from a nip of Gordons Dry Gin that lives in his pocket.

'Hey, you *swart gat bliksem!*' shouts a ticket conductor from the train which moves alongside platform seven, after seeing this act of public indecency. The man shoves the bottle unceremoniously into his coat pocket and staggers more carefully as he says, '*Ek sal nie meeerrr nie baaasssie*'. The passengers, impatient, start pushing to get through the coach doors as the train comes to a jerky halt.

The man with the black bag gets into one of the third class coaches. Unlike all the other passengers who rush to get seated, he goes to the toilet. He shuts the tiny door and looks at his wristwatch. Forty minutes left . . .

In the coach all vacant seats are soon occupied.

'Careful, careful now you bloody elephant-footed goats!' The voice is unmistakeably that of the beerologist.

The passage of the coach is soon packed with humanity, the air is rank with urine, fish and other built-in smells of a third class coach. Very oppressive, the built-in smells ascend to the nostrils, choking the air with a bony-sharp, acrid odour.

The young man steps into the coach, and whilst closing the toilet door he elbows the beerologist. 'Careful, careful now you goat-footed elephant, lest you upset my stomach and spill its expensive liquor!'

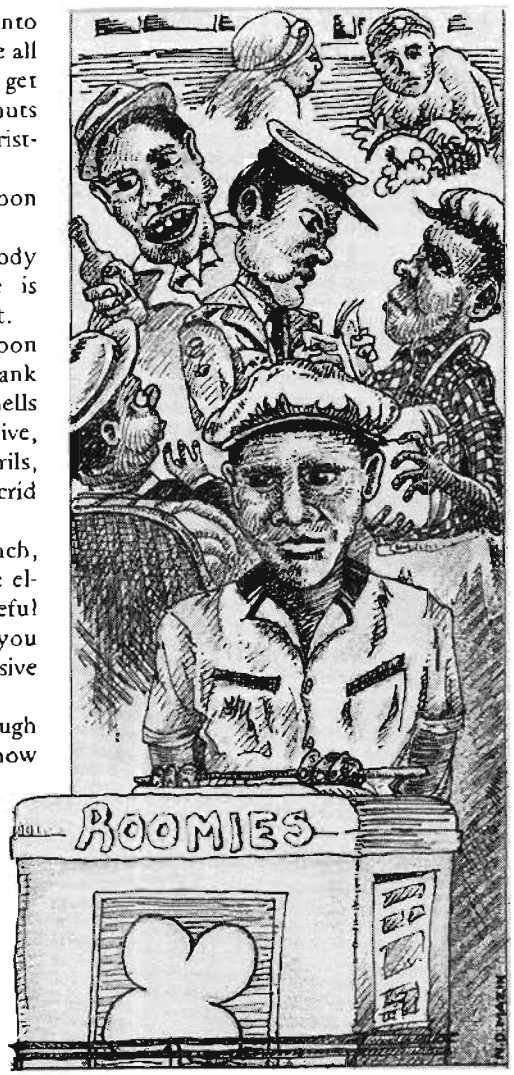
A roar of laughter ripples through the coach. The young man who is now dressed in an ice-cream vendor's uniform smiles at the nip-kissing man.

The train jerks and jolts its occupants several times before it proceeds more smoothly. The occupants move about restlessly on their seats, trying to be as comfortable as possible on the hard wooden seats. Conversations bloom and blossom among the passengers.

Poshoka looks out of a window at the skyscraper landscape which falls back as the train sails down the track. His mind probes and he remembers 'home', that one-roomed house with imagined rooms, and he feels the pain-lash of poverty. How could his mother have seemed such a happy person all those years?

He recalls when his younger brother, Mogotsi, asked his mother, 'Ma, why do we not have a wardrobe?' 'Son, but we do have a wardrobe. Even Oppenheimer hasn't got a moving wardrobe like ours,' she answered pleasantly, pointing at their clothing hanging from a nail on the inside of their door. They had all laughed, but today it is not so funny.

His mother was a good Christian, she slaved hard for them doing washing for whites, and she prayed hard to the good Lord. Unlike her sister who served ice-cold beers to her customers whilst humming a church hymn or Nkosi Sikelele under her breath. I wish I had known my mother better, he thinks. She had always left in the dark hours of the morning and she came home late in the dark of the night . . .



'Shit!' exclaims the beerologist, whilst tapping the young man on the shoulder. The young man looks at the older with an expression of confusion on his face. The older man realises that he does not comprehend. He thus points a dirty finger at the priest, who is seated two bunks away from them, and says in an aggressive-sounding tone of voice.

'When this here gentleman of the cloth says, this is the blood of Christ, referring to cheap Cape wine of course, its okay with you people. You just chorus amen, as he gurgles it down. And I, me, when I drink Richelieu's or Count Pushkin's blood you howl, "Drunkard!" Shit man, what's wrong with you people and this beloved country, anyway?'

Eyes, hundreds of them, focus on the pastor. Shocked and affronted, he shakes his head in a sanctimonious manner. Silence reigns, loaded with expectation, the train wheels rattling on monotonously, devouring mile after mile.

'Doctaaa Mkize speaking . . . ' a loud voice advertises. 'I have here by me disprins, good for all size headaches, red eyes and babalas . . they come from me to you at ten cents and twenty cents only . . ' A pause. 'Here also on me I have a love potion. How is your love life? Not married? Women, this potion will bring you boyfriends everyday, when you go to the shop, and when you come back you'll find them fighting . . .'

The rhythmic rattle-rattle of train-wheels on rails reminds Poshoka of a familiar camp sound and yet he cannot readily identify it . . . Poshoka looks closely at "Doctor Mkize". He was a mere boy who was supposed to be at school, but life had long circumcised him. Doctor Mkize continued, 'Women, you can't go wrong with, er . . . ' 'I have babalas,' the beerologist interjects. Laughter ripples through the coach once more.

Jeppe Station. The train passes without stopping at this station. 'The police are killing our children, look at this.' The speaker points to a photograph on the front page of the *Rand Daily Mail* of a young black man lying in a pool of blood. He reads aloud from the paper.

'Brigadier Johann Coetzee, Deputy Chief of security police, told the *Rand Daily Mail* that Kenneth Mkhwanazi's death occurred early last Monday morning after sixteen police vehicles and a Black Maria pulled up and police surrounded his Aunt's house in Zone Six, Diepkloof. The police found the youth sleeping in a car in the yard. The police demanded that he get out of the car. The youth floored one of the security police and ran into the house where he apparently grabbed a hand grenade from

the top of a wardrobe. Police followed him into the house and gunfire followed. He died with a hand grenade in his hand . . . Kenneth's cousin, Miss Matseko Manyama, 20, said the family went into the room where they found her cousin lying in a pool of blood with two armed white security policemen standing over him.

' "One of the security police told me to play a longplaying record of Sonny Stitt on our record player for them while my cousin stopped twitching, and they took him inside the Black Maria with a stretcher," she said. Miss Manyama burst into tears . . . '

The reader folds the newspaper, sighs, and says in a voice wet with pain, a mere wailing quiver above the babble of conversation:

'What do they want from us? They took our soil, and today our women wash and feed them, and I, like a mole, toil and bleed for the gold ring with the flawless diamond madame wears . . . Who heard me cry from the deep dark womb of the earth for loved ones who nourished the barren reserve soil with the fruits of their wombs, and dreamed of fruits of the soil, and I too . . . ' says the man, looking at his calloused hands, 'dig the hole when the master dies of over-eating . . . in this world, brother, a man can cry . . . '

The man of cloth answers with that solemn voice that all clergy seem to cultivate: 'Pray for our brother lost to the material things of the world, whose criterion of respect is accumulated material wealth. Do we forget Job covered with sores, on the heap of ash? And does our dear Lord not say that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than . . . '

The other man shakes his head slowly from side to side, very sadly.

'Poetic words of wisdom, I agree, but what of the violence of malnutrition, the hunger and poverty we reap with the other weeds in the land of our fathers? Our generation appealed to the moral conscience of the white man. We fanned out pamphlets in a hurricane: we had sit-ins and sit-outs, protest marches . . . we knocked and no one opened . . . thus this generation of manchild has decided to secure freedom by the means necessary, and today the gravedigger digs in the shadow of the gun . . . '

Poshoka has been listening attentively. But he holds his peace. 'Ellis Park Station!' The conductor in the blue uniform shouts, but Poshoka has already jumped off the train. A few minutes later he pushes an ice cream cart towards Alice Park rugby stadium.

The world at 7 p.m., Schalk van der Spie reporting: ' . . . Dr. Eschel Rhoodie, former head of South Africa's defunct Information Department, is reported to be hiding in Brazil, probably in Sao Paulo. In Johannesburg the chief of the C.I.D., Lieutenant General F. Kleinhans announced yesterday that an official investigation has been launched into alleged irregularities in the deployment of secret funds by Dr. Eschel Rhoodie and his brother, Dr. Deneys Rhoodie . . . General Hendrik van den Bergh may be recalled by the Erasmus Commision to give further evidence about his part in the Information Affair . . . Dr. Connie Mulder, former boss of the Information Department, has resigned from parliament under pressure . . .

'The Shah of Iran, entering what must be the last few days of his reign on the peacock throne, got another signal that his time was up yesterday when troops brandished portraits of his chief opponent, Ayatollah Khomeini . . .

'The State President has declared tomorrow a national day of prayer, in memory of the ninety-eight citizens killed tragically this afternoon at Alice Park rugby stadium, when an ice cream cart containing T.N.T., pushed by a terrorist disguised as an icecream vendor, exploded . . . '

On the outskirts of Johannesburg city, somewhere in Alexandra Township in a small dimly candle-lit room, a mother adrift in pain shakes under the bloodstorm of mourning. It is not the first time she has tasted the salt of these tears . . .

Jazz and rugby, tough games brother, I heard someone say.

MPUMALANGA

SO IT BE SAID

So it be said
The voice is loud and clear
The sound is Black and near

Blacks need not revile
Neither should they reconcile
People who feast on untruths
Will realize they are being uncouth

In Namibia they sing
In Zimbabwe the voice rings
People are people
No storm is without a ripple
In pools that swirl
In clouds that in the skies dwell

Let the voice sounds grow
Let the Black words show
And our fatherland burst and blow

Azania, you glow!

Mafika Pascal Gwala

Soweto Speaking

Continued from page 2

I stood still.

He said, 'Password!'

I replied, 'Escaped prisoner from Maza-Matroh!' I didn't know their password, you see.

He moved towards me.

I shouted at him, 'Halt!'

He stopped.

I was 'fighting' now. I preferred to die defending myself rather than just giving in. I asked, 'Who are you?' and he replied, 'I am an Englishman.' 'From where?' I asked.

'From England,' he said.

I stood there thinking. You see, I didn't know that Montgomery was already there, because we had been captured by the Germans when he arrived in the desert. 'What place is this?' I enquired. 'El Alamein,' he replied.

'Where — right up in the desert?'

We stood looking at each other. He became impatient and called out to me saying, 'Come on, man.'

He led the way. I followed him. He took me to their guard-commander.

When I saw the other man, I believed the guard. It was the end of my wandering through the desert. They gave me food. After nearly three weeks, I had my first meal — canned fruit.

Miriam Tlali's series of interviews with the people of Soweto continues in our next issue. If you have a story to tell, contact her through Staffrider.

AFTER THE RAINSTORM

The chain of bondage
Will be broken
Not by peace
But by war

And I shall shout triumphantly
'Let war reign supreme
If with it, it brings peace.'

Kamy Chetty
Abangani Open School, Durban

THE TEAR

gentle mellow eyes
stare into
whitish rice;
bubbling rhythmically
on earthern fireside . . .
steam envelopes — her
thoughts surge
her mind naked
open — for life
to happen.
she outbreaks into
a rare passive smile
echoing memories
of unvoiced recognition.
a tear rolls
her caste —
the caste of mankind
the oneness —
her essence evaporates
forming the tear.

Logan Naidoo/Durban

ONE TEACHING DAY

The rain falls hard and strong
As big-bellied drops
Heavy with translucent maternity
Vie for the conquest of the
Dry red dust.

Children scamper into
Bare peeling classrooms
Like shiny black beetles
Seeking shelter.

The rain beats out an
Ancient, endless rhythm
On the tin roof
Ebony limbs stir and
Murmur,
Moved by an older and wiser
Teacher
Than I.

Western education trickles down the walls,
And seeps away.
Unheeded.

Melissa King/Morija, Lesotho

SIGNIFICANCE EXCITED

Feeling smug
Because I live at the VERY
tip of Africa —
Not just anywhere —
Obscure rhythms
Doing things I don't understand
But can find.

Avril Swart/Grahamstown

THE EXECUTION

Life
You chocolate-box picture
Have hung yourself
In a gallery of masters . . .

Avril Swart/Grahamstown

PHYSICAL POEM

You placed your
Finger
Firmly
On my wrist;
Amidst the blue and white tracery of
Composite flesh
It pressed down,
Defiant in
Contrast.

You said that
My eyes
Spoke a strange tongue
of an alien sea
Or a cold blue sky
Of a far-off frosty world
While yours
Reflect mutely
The hot dark soil of
This land.

Your voice
Rolls melodious
Like mountains in
Deep shadow;
Mine, you said, is
Silvery
As northern stars
Unreachable.

Hedged in by
History,
Must we only love
In the dark, and
In silence?
Am I not of Africa too?

Melissa King

WINNIE

Thinking centuries
of miles away from her,
Barricaded by burly sea-rocks
cemented together
His mind silently escapes
Back to Township
Where the masses
(in over-passengered trains)
Slog in perilous coaches
From Park Station, Faraday
From Newclare, Croesus;
Chained to an 'Island' encircled
By mountainous, rearing waves
– splashing against the glittering marble rock.

He cannot escape
They say he cannot escape

Far away in his thoughts
For a more human Azania
Yet for LIFE he is engulfed
In the stony walls of island dungeon;
for LIFE he'll keep on thinking,
Casting the dialectic on longing Azanians
Long hardened by the situation.
For LIFE he'll rewind his thoughts
On memorable battles of boycotts & strikes
Won and lost.

Through life he now serves LIFE.

Far away from his children,
And most of all his greatest 'win'
Who is none other than Winnie
Who will be waiting,
waiting and
waiting for life.

But Winnie knows:
where there's life,
there's HOPE.

Leonard Khoza/Elsies River, Cape

BAYETE! BABA, BAYETE!

When the cannon boomed
I knew that
things would change

Things that young men
used to enjoy
no longer
exist

Everything of my culture
is termed to be wrong

Yes, I agree,
Achebe
'Things Fall Apart'
things fall apart,
Baba

The sound of the cannon
has changed our beliefs
our culture
and turned them
to poverty
Bayete! Baba, Bayete!

Ntando Marubelele/Guguletu, Cape

FOR VIOLETA PARRA*

A woman has brought patience to my house
in her pockets like an orange: invisibly.
Her footsteps on the silent rug
crunch with red mud and moss, the scarlet blood
of her betrayed Chile.

I hear her sing
through the sleep of cruel lead days
harshening stanzas of defiance,
echo the hour when that song's fingers
from the force of an army's words
broke to firewood.

Our two bodies celebrate their sundered
countries. We have such different skins,
the terrible fate of hers
and the growing wars in mine

now only the waiting, the flat sounds
of a city's tiny battles against death;
dogs scream out at children, hornbills flap
heavily as if there were
a choice of trees
when everything is withered.
Wet clothes outside the window dance
the drying wind to shreds.

A gunship crackles overhead
looking for the enemy and their soft mouths.
Our two, brittle, join below
and whisper
the first stirring of memory,
the people's mighty voice.

Kelwyn Sole/Namibia

**Violeta Parra was a Chilean woman singer. She committed suicide during the coup.*

THE INITIATE'S DREAM

I saw a group of elders
encircling fresh men
Stamping down their sticks in rhythm
as they spoke to us on manhood.

Pointing a stick at us:
'We have dipped in floods and famine
We still have cattle and land
for our customs are our sleeping mats'.

Andile G. Nguza/Ciskei

DEDICATION

you can bind my hands in chains
my feet in shackles
you can put me in detention without trial
subject me to solitary confinement
you won't enslave my heart
till the last drop of my blood
and the last pulse in my veins
i shall resist

Mzwandile Mguba/Ciskei

Ingoapele Madingoane, drawing, Nils Burwitz

THE UNFORGETTABLE MISTAKE

We headed for the mountains
Keeping our little fire to ourselves
Which for many years
Our forefathers kept burning
in their sacred huts.

Surprisingly, a stranger came
Bribed us into deserting
Our life-line,
which we did
without a thought!

Behind the mountains
We helped erect a monument
To his previous victories
which we did not know of.

Then, at the sound of the state drum
We embraced, singing for the day's fortunes
Proudly tramping at our achievements
unaware of the little fire burning out behind;
The life ball of our lives!
So happy was the stranger
Who arrested us all
For our foolishness . . . !

Motlase Mogotsi/Rustenburg

A TRIBUTE TO AFRICA MY BEGINNING*

The out-come of black and white:
Here I stand, isolated against these
Uncertain horizons
Dreaming of the pleasures that
This country cannot give me . . .
Africa
How cruel can you be.

You've called upon my ancestors
To dig for the black gold
You wanted their hands
And they gave them to you
What made you give them back,
One long and one short?

They were long here with
Their roots firmly bound;
You called up a storm to
Remove the soil . . .
Their life.

You've called upon my ancestors
To make you their choice.
With treacherous compromise
You secured your foundation,
If only they knew you'd cast
Their shoots aside . . .

This soil has space
For both you and me;
No root is too big
For the bed you provide;
No choice of donor
Do the worms have in mind;
Then why create a void
Where you can't call me
And I can't call you
Brother?

If man could look upon man
And see his own image,
If nature could open his eyes
To show him its cause,
Then surely he'd see that
Man has relieved the monotony
Of man,
That colour gives beauty
And colour gives life.

It is so simple,
For is truth not simple?

William Meyer/Newclare

'Africa My Beginning' (written by Soweto poet, Ingoapele Madingoane. Work banned in May 1979.)

THEY NO LONGER SPEAK TO US IN SONG

(in memoriam steve biko)

Mandlalenkosi Langa

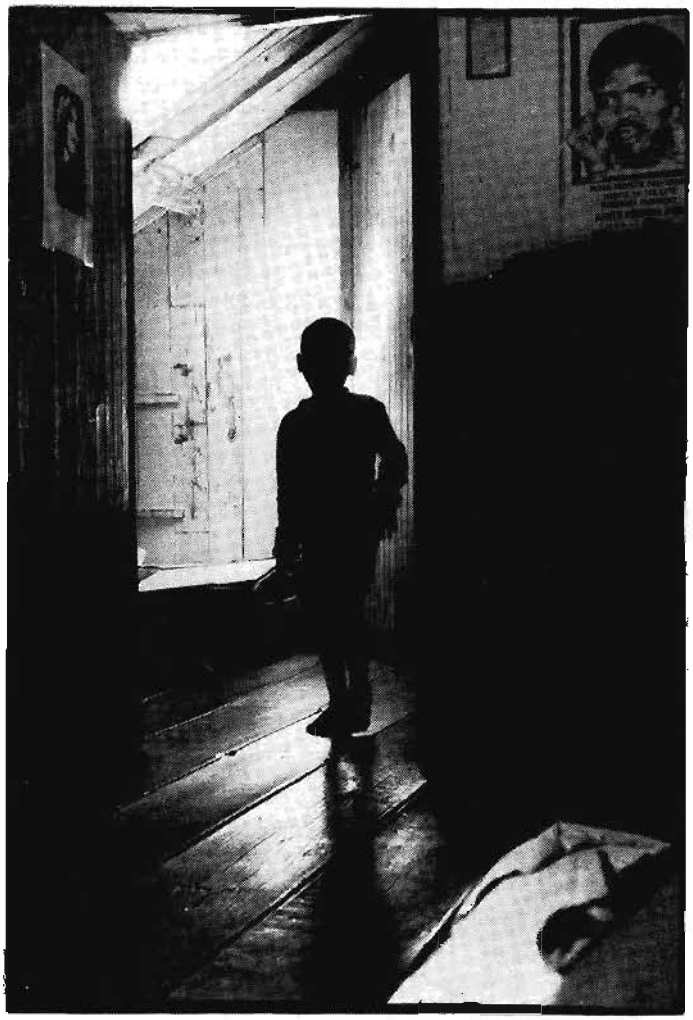
Excerpt from an unpublished work, 'Our flight in winter'.

i want to raise my voice in song
and sing a song
that won't be prey to the whims of the wind
but
a song that will remain carved and chiselled
on the lapidary spirit
that makes us what we are in this wilderness
for we all know that now is the time
now is the hour of the beasts
the green-eyed ghouls that gathered to gloat
the going away of the generous soul
of the beautiful brethren

i have heard many songs in my life
songs
that perished as soon as they knocked
from one deaf ear to the other
i have heard people sing to the glory
of a god who has one gigantic ear
that has never known how to hear
i have heard people sing about the children
who were mown down
like we mow down lawns and hedges
of the *baas* and his *missus* in the springtime
of our defeat
children who dropped down as though falling
from a great height
like all those multicoloured leaves that fall
down
at the ripe autumn that holds no promise
to the summer of our victory
we people who have never stopped preparing
for our flight in winter
in this hour of the beast
when the green-eyed ghouls gather to gloat
the going away of the generous soul
of the courageous sisteren

the children we sing about were shot down
in the midst of winter
and the leaden bullets that cut them down
were moulded and came from the cold hearts
of our cowardice

i have heard people sing about the children
who were mown down
i have heard songs that are sung in whispers
about those young maidens of africa still clad in school
uniforms who were forced at gunpoint to house the seed
of those men whose forebears are past-masters at taking
african virginity by force
those young girls our sisters our children our comrades
who died their bellies bloated with the filth
of the predators
and those who survived to tell the story
and give horrific accounts of this hideous tale
some birthing the lust of the savage in remote corners
of remote villages



Photo, Brett Hilton-Barber

some suffering untold agonies in spewing out
the continuation of the creed of men-beasts
i have heard songs that are sung in whispers
about those young captive men of africa
those young men our brothers our children our comrades
whose eyes
saw the sodomites ripping open canals of evacuation
and blood flowing trailing down the attenuated manhood
of the destroyers
yes —
they dug graves in avalon and doornkop to bury their
comparriots
slain
in the most one-sided war mankind has ever witnessed
i have heard people sing about the children
who were mown down
and now we compose songs about those
who were transported thousands of miles
cold and naked and dead
in cold and naked and dead chains and leg-irons
which the captors exhibit in court with savage glee
yes, it is time now for them to gird their loins
those green-eyed ghouls who gathered to gloat
the going away of steve
i have heard my kinfolk's voice stolen

by the thieving breeze
to reverberate against stolid hills
that have neither ear for music nor feeling for mourners
and were certainly born barren
and without the power
and without this redoubtable blessing
of giving birth and nurturing a new life
that will soon be food to the marauding wolves
for it must be said now so blessed are those in these hours
whose wombs never felt the kick of life
in these hours when everything
alive and small and black and beautiful
can be plucked like the yellow flowers they pluck every day
to decorate the offices that are in fact death cells
of the inquisitors of barberton
and leeuwkop and john vorster square

i have heard many songs in my life
men
divested of the last crutch and all qualities
that make people members of the human race
men robbed of their manhood: singing
their leathery faces raised to the broiling sun
men singing
to the accompaniment of the curse and the chain
and the gun and the whiplash
under the midday sun
singing
these men these outcasts singing in the mute cadence
of the damned
their voices trailing and spiralling upwards like smoke
and becoming one with the cloudless sky
these men singing
about how they are going to lay down their heavy loads
by and by

i have heard our women sing a lullaby
rocking
the nameless and pinkish and yelling bundle
in their arms
a bundle
that will in the course of time be transformed
into the greediest urchin
and lounge in darkened doorways with terrible and lustful
eyes
and a rumbling belly whose only friend is emptiness
and a shrivelled body that knows the entrance
of a sharp blade
and the bone-rattling kick so well aimed
from
the heavy boot of the white policeman who will always
remain
innocent and well-meaning until the end of time
yes
i have heard the voices of our women singing on grave sites
without headstones
as they witness the final passage of a young one
who has been helped
into this earth that is only silent in its groaning
by our crime of silence

i have seen the faces of my people
my people
showing the curiously-shaped scars branded as though
with a hot iron
on their faces
is it any wonder then that our faces
are never described positively
in that queer lexicon of our captors?
these well-wishing masters who have literally stamped
on the dark brow such gaping wounds
that can never heal
the same men who say they cannot understand
what it is in fact that we want
what it is in fact that weighs heavily
like a millstone
round the neck of our hearts and our minds

i have watched us: you and me: like a man watching
a movie re-run of his twin brother's drowning
i have watched us singing
songs to the attainment of our freedom
our fist raised like one black monument
to whatever glories might have remained hidden
in the cryptic meaning of our past
all of us: the singers and the raisers of the fist
wondering
at the final meaning of these gestures and these chanted
words
all of us
we children who emerged from the same fiery womb
thinking
thinking whether we understand the price we have to pay
to make concrete these sung words
all this singing is happening now at this hour
before the dawn of black liberation
when the sun is still in deep slumber
and the moon is awake and staring with one bright eye
now i want to sing a song
i want to raise my voice in song
and sing a song
that won't be prey to the whims of the wind
a song
that will still make me want to ask you
in this hour when our most beloved brothers
are lying naked on alabaster slabs
isn't it time now
to stop the green-eyed ghouls from gathering
and gloating over the going away
of brother steve?
isn't it the time now
to gather and gloat over the death
of an obscenity?

i ask you africa
i ask you all my brothers and sisters
in the diaspora
my brothers and sisters
in all these lands
my brothers and sisters of the dark race
give me an answer
a sign
for i also want to be free.

Untitled, lino-cut, Mpathi Gocini

GEMINI

A story by Ahmed Essop

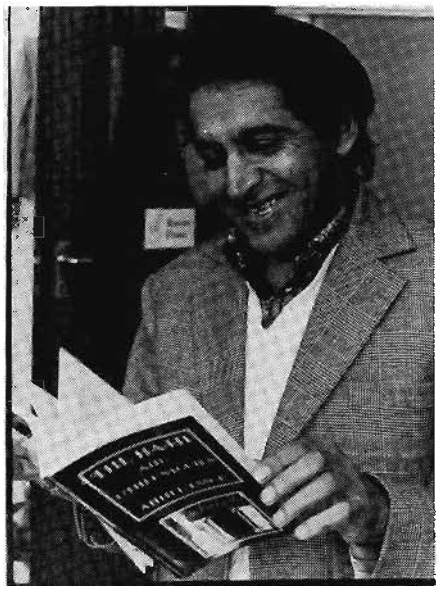
The 10 p.m. train glided into Park Station and Siva took his seat. He felt tired after the long hours of work at the Constellation Hotel. He closed his eyes, but instead of the inertia that usually overcame him until the train reached Lenasia, his imagination crowded with the faces of people he had served – wines, dinners, delicacies – at the hotel, faces lit with gaiety, of affluent businessmen, brokers, professional men and doll-like women.

His life was on the periphery of their lives, he reflected, a dark figure in a stereotype outfit – maroon jacket, white shirt, black bowtie, grey trousers and black shoes – moving from table to table, booklet and pencil in hand, noting the requirements dictated by the diners' appetites. Then there was the gathering of the food-stained crockery and cutlery and the uneaten remains that always filled him with nausea. Was he born for this – to be at the beck and call of sirs and madams and to assist in satisfying their appetites?

The train sped into the night. As the city lights receded in swift succession, he was filled with a sense of self-pitying bitterness. He could have been a doctor or a teacher (belated sterile ambitions that were always part of his thoughts), a man engaged in serving others nobly. He had frittered away his chance at school by neglecting his studies, finding pleasure in roving with the 'gang', wasting time in cinemas and cafés and smoking in corners. His teachers had at first castigated him, but later abandoned him. He failed twice in Standard Six and then left school.

The train stopped at Orlando Station and Siva looked through the open window. The brilliance of the city had vanished, and but for the glowing station lights, sprawling Soweto was in penumbra. He heard several shouts, banging of doors and the train pressed on into the night.

His only consolation was his son Krishna, a thirteen-year old boy in Standard Six at Alpha Primary School. The death of his wife (a self-willed woman quiet to the verge of obstinacy, religious to the point of fanaticism) had knotted the boy to him, for he was now involved in a maternal relationship as well, and nothing gave him greater pleasure than providing him with the delicious bits which he took surreptitiously from the hotel and were even now wrapped in paper beside him. To give his son breakfast before he set off to school, to watch him eat, then admire him dressed in his school uniform – maroon jacket, white shirt, black tie, grey trousers and black shoes – and finally say good-bye, was a daily experience that gave meaning to his existence and hope to his secretly cherished belief that the boy would, by achieving what he himself had not, mend the tear in his life, his personal failure. All that was now ignoble and humiliating in his life would be transcended when Krishna attended university and distinguished himself. The world had changed radically since the days of his own youth, and the new age presented varied opportunities and greater scope. In fact Krishna had recently written his Standard Six examination and the result was expected any day. To see his son growing to be like him in appearance and shape filled him with happiness and pride.



Ahmed Essop, photo, Biddy Crewe

Ahmed Essop's collection of stories, *The Hajji and Other Stories*, has been awarded the Olive Schreiner Prize for 1979.

As he walked along the scarred, feebly lit roads, a fresh breeze awakened in the summer night. When he reached the first row of houses he quickened his pace as he was reminded of his sleeping boy. Nearing home he was surprised to hear voices, and then distinctly the voice of his neighbour, Mrs. Rudy, the good woman who cared for his son after school.

'Siva, something happened today,' she said as he approached her and several people who stood outside the open door of his house. His mind leapt to Krishna and presaged disaster.

'There was a fire in your house today,' Mrs. Rudy said. 'But we managed to put out the flames quickly. Everyone helped.'

He looked at the group, bewildered, expecting to hear tragic news. He wanted to enquire about his son, but could not.

'Krishna is sleeping,' Mrs. Rudy said, coming to his rescue, but her words failed to assure him. A strong presentiment that his son was dead seized his mind. Mrs. Rudy was playing a diabolical sort of game by not telling him the truth.

'Only a few things slightly burnt. Go in and have a look.'

Siva entered his house and Mrs. Rudy and the others followed him. He felt as though tragedy was about to engulf him, that within the house he would see the body of his son, his hope, unrecognizably burnt, wrapped in white linen.

Within, in the light of the paraffin lamp, everything seemed to be in order, though there was a lingering smell of fire, an amalgam of water, smoke, burnt wood and cloth.

'Only your blankets and bed and chest of drawers . . . '

Siva scarcely listened to Mrs. Rudy's recital of burnt items. He went towards the bedroom door, but hesitated to enter. Mrs. Rudy took the lamp which was on a table and entered the room.

'Krishna is sleeping,' she whispered, placing the lamp on the chest of drawers. 'Don't wake him.'

Siva looked at his son, partly covered with a blanket, saw his sleep-sealed eyes and heard him breathing.

'Thank you, Mrs. Rudy,' he whispered as a pressure within, a strangling sensation, began to ease.

'I'll tell you everything tomorrow,' Mrs. Rudy said, leaving the room and joining the others. It was late. They would talk to Siva about the fire the next day. But Mrs. Rudy had already resolved that she would not tell the father that his boy had accidentally started the fire while lighting a cigarette.

Siva sat down on the bed beside his son, feeling weak and tired. He closed his eyes.

The rhythmic sound of Krishna's breathing roused him into a state of alert wakefulness. He took the lamp and examined the room. He saw his bed, the mattress and blankets partly singed. Next to his bed was the chest of drawers; one side had caught alight and

All that was now ignoble and humiliating in his life would be transcended when Krishna attended university and distinguished himself.

was black. Everything else seemed untouched by the fire.

He placed the lamp on the chest of drawers and then opened the top drawer to examine the contents. He took out some calendars and put them beside the lamp, some pencils, a comb, a bottle of perfume (left by a woman at the hotel), a gilt cigarette case (also from the hotel), a few envelopes tied with a string. He untied the string and opened the envelopes: these contained his birth certificate, marriage certificate, identity document, bank savings book and Standard Six school report, yellow and brittle. Under pressure of some inner necessity he had always kept the report as though it were some sort of astrologer's horoscope having strong links with his destiny.

He opened the report carefully, saw the name of the school he had attended and the marks he had achieved in various subjects. Then he read his teacher's final comment: 'Siva has not applied himself to his studies. He must spend another year in the same standard'. The comment filled him, as it always filled him when reading it, with sadness. He folded the report carefully and replaced it in the envelope. He gathered all the envelopes, tied them with the string and replaced them in the drawer.

There was a knock at the door and Mrs. Rudy entered.

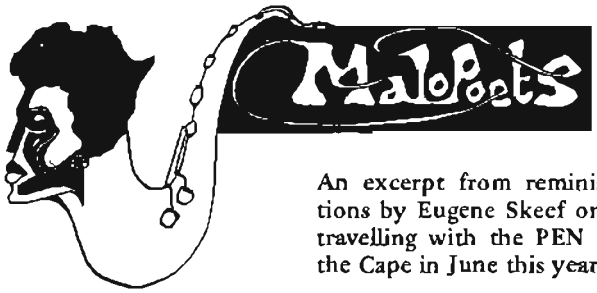
'Krishna left it with me to give it to you,' she said, handing him an envelope. 'It's his school report.'

She went out quietly.

He stood beside the lamp and looked at the envelope for a while. A tremor passed through him and his hands quivered. He opened the envelope, took out the report, unfolded it, saw the low marks attained by his son and read the final comment: 'Krishna has failed. Another year in Standard Six may prove more rewarding'.

Siva looked at the paper as if it had suddenly come into his hands, as though the turbid light from the lamp had been magically transmuted into a white sheet, its brittle whiteness imposing itself on his vision, inflicting its luminous reality. His body shook in trepidation, the paper slipped from his fingers and fluttered to the floor like some wounded bird, his limbs softened as he stepped towards his son's bed, and, sagging down stretched out his hand to touch him.

MARIANNRIDGE



An excerpt from reminiscences and reflections by Eugene Skeef on the experience of travelling with the PEN 'writers' wagon' to the Cape in June this year.

Guguletu — our pride. Unknowingly the incongruous name of a location has crept secretly yielding, like a weed on an unkempt grave that embraces the tombstone and obscures the faded history of a proud youth. No grief can seize the impulse of life in this place. This strength we shared with the people in the minor hall of the Guguletu Civic Centre. The night of a broken sabbath: the dawn of a rekindled faith in the eternal admonitions of angered ancestral spirits . . . A glow of euphoria lit up our smiling faces, easing into a tender flow of cowhide drumming that rippled the patient audience into a faint rumbling murmur. Soon this murmur rose into an elating chorus of determined voices. I remembered the conviction of young brave men. I remembered the dark flight of those Soweto fledglings whose ill-feathered wings unfurled the dust of fallacy. And now their brothers and sisters joined us in singing their song of vindication: in listening to the echo of our own souls . . . the echo of the first 'universal principle of justice' spewed forth from the cavernous beak of that great soaring eagle Ingoapele Madingoane.

behold my son,
behold
and hear man's anxious call
awakening the new reality
behold the ancestors' wish
that a day shall dawn
in the annals of creation
to be known as afrika day . . .

And I sang my song of the earth . . .

I am the earth . . .
even to the very core
where I rumble with genesis
and flame with eternity . . .
I am the earth . . .

And the earth in the people rose and shook the walls that confined their spirit. A sense of fulfilment sought to bear us off our feet. We were transformed.

But how we had failed to achieve this fulfilment at the opening of the conference on 'The State of Art in South Africa', held at the Michaelis Art School, Cape Town! Before that cold night few of us knew that the presentation of art can sometimes be a nightmare for others. 'O! What a shame . . . O what a shame . . .' that the hides of some souls are benumbed by the insidious moulting of the years. What arrogance! What blasphemy to insult the invoked gods with turned backs while ravenously feasting on the fermented blood of the martyr and the wafer of his lacerated body! O . . . what a shame. The poet's rage froze in the sterile air of stale pleasantries transmitted from cynical half-snarls. It froze into a burning flame of truth that remained suspended in the vaporous atmosphere. Two elegantly dressed automatons stood gazing from a remote corner. Suddenly they could not bear the heat under their furs, and out of desperation clung to each other, smothered in their copious tears. But no sea of tears can dowse the flicker of truth . . .

'Ma' Miriam Tlali's resonant voice rang sweetly above all the confusion. Her wisdom floated about like a lateral trail of incense smoke, gently saturating us with its freshness. I inhaled deep gusts of this inspiration. Side by side with this towering woman we easily destroyed artificial social barriers which impeded the free flow of our spirits. Oh! and that last night when her time-whetted voice intoned the blues of her children: yes, the children of Africa were her children; it was their ballad of lament which she sang when she wove her incantations through the endless forest of freedom chants. It is true that the release of spirits is freer at night.

The meeting of souls at night fulfils primary depths if the communion is creative. On our last night together we made a fire outside a military camp on the outskirts of Bloemfontein. Having girded ourselves against the conspiracy of the slow dawn, we liberated our souls into the open darkness. Spontaneously we improvised on songs of rage; songs of war; songs of love; songs of release . . .

As we chanted and danced around the fierce fire, its leaping flames seemed to forge our faces into sacred masks. The scene had become a ritual ceremony. I could not help feeling as if present with us was the resurrected spirit of the first martyr.

Endorsed out and punished as illegal aliens

An excerpt from work in progress by **Mtutuzeli Matshoba**

towards limbo

The cities offered the only hopeful alternative to limbo. People went there and found work, and never returned to limbo . . . Those who did return showed signs of having tasted of a better life. In the Xhosa dialect they were referred to as *amatshipha* – maybe because they had sold themselves cheaply to capital.

But it was not that easy, for they spoke of being stopped in the streets and asked for passes. The absence from these books of a scribble or a rubber stamp, or sometimes the presence of the same, saw them bundled like criminals into *kwela-kwelas*, sometimes as many as eighty of them into a single vehicle so that some died from suffocation, like the schoolboy that they told of in 'sixty-nine: bundled in in scores, and taken away to the gaping portals of prison. The following morning another *kwela-kwela* came to take them away from the 'comforts' of prison, to which they were already beginning to adapt – making friends, sharing a common plight, and all that. They were taken away to another jail where they met others from other jails. Formerly it was Fordsburg, and lately it has been Market Street off John Vorster Square at the cells of the 'Plural Affairs' Commissioners. There scores of them breathed each other's foul smell. They stank because they had not washed; because the coarse rags that pass for blankets were laced with lice; because everybody pissed and defecated in the same room, and there were no washing facilities.

Each one's name was barked by a policeman serving as court orderly. They answered: '*Yebo, makbosi*!' in a way which reminded one of a dog begging its master; went out of the steel door which clanged shut, sealed with the rattle of heaven's keys; went where the others never saw them again. Each one's turn came and there in the box he stood, accused.

The white man sat on a high bench behind a long polished wooden desk apparently capable of enduring the routine, perhaps a little stupefied by the monotony of his days – same questions, undeviating ritual, fixed decisions, every working day of his accursed life.

The dog that was the accused rushed into that box, wagging its tail as if it was about to receive a juicy bone – relative freedom. But it checked when it sensed the corrupt atmosphere in the damnation chamber. That made it stop the wagtail act. A corrupt relationship existed between the white man and the black man who did the vocal (impressario) bit – neatly dressed, all formal with a tie and sports jacket, his voice trained to function as a psychological cat o' nine tails. The white man yawned without looking up from the pad on which he must have been practising drawing spiders. There was no recording equipment in the chamber.

The white man yawned and then mumbled. That was the cue. The black man took over and from the way his cat o' nine tails lashed at the diminutive ego of the dog, both the dog and the white man surmised the dog's guilt. The dog stood there. Accused:

'What do you speak?'

*Isi*Zulu; *se*Sotho; *isi*Xhosa; *si*Tshangane; *se*Pedi – whichever suited the accused, the black man had his next line ready:

'*Ulala 'phi? Udla 'phi?*' (Where do you sleep and where do you eat?)

Or simply one of his blatant accusations:

'You have been found in the magisterial area of Johannesburg without permission! Guilty or not guilty?' with a rhetorical emphasis on 'guilty'.

'You were asked for a pass and failed to produce it! Guilty or not guilty?' with another resonant 'guilty', and now a bit of sarcasm worked into 'not guilty'.

'According to your pass you have been out of work for five years! What do you eat, dress and live out of?'

'You have not paid tax for ten years! Guilty or not?'

And the answers to the blatant accusations, in respective order:

'At the hostel; at Dlamini; *kwamLungu wami* (at my white man's)'. Wherever the sun set upon him; in jail – if the dog was bold enough for wisecracks.

'I came to look for my father; mother; son; daughter; brother; sister; who left home to work in Johannesburg many years ago and never wrote, nor sent money home. Now there has been a death in the family and I came to try and find them.'

'How could I have worked when I was mad for the last five years? My people say so. I have no medical proof because a *sangoma* does not issue any certificates.'

'I have been here for the last decade and a half and it took you quite some concerted effort, with all your battalions of head hunters and influx control machinery, to nab me. Just shows how good fortune breeds complacency. If you'd nabbed me earlier I would have stayed alert later. Actually, the black man has been on this continent for millions of years; since the dawn of time.'

'Guilty or not guilty?'

He was being accused and the accusing voice was so uncompromising! He wished that he had known Afrikaans and English, so that he could also stand there with a tie on and accuse. But, no, not when he had gone through all this.

Sometimes he saved his breath. An inner voice had warned him: 'Now, now, now, *mfana*, you will be jeopardising your position more if you are going to come up with lies and that kind of truth that they will never believe anyway.'

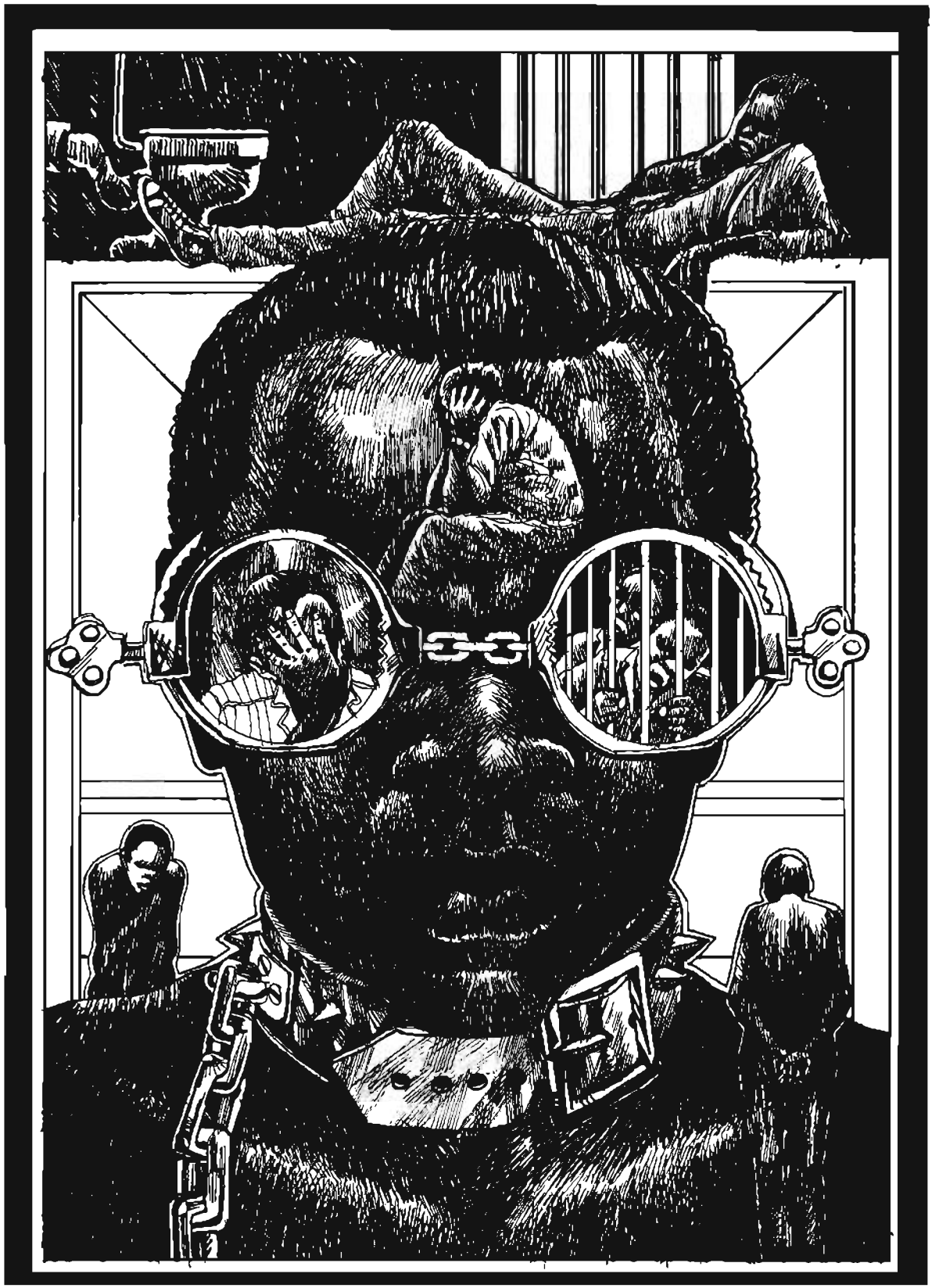
'I had forgotten my pass at home when I changed my pants, overalls, jacket. I lost it when I was robbed and I was on my way to report it when I was nabbed.'

'At home we cannot help but lead a life of interdependence. When one of us is out of work the others who work support him until he has found work. That is how I have survived for the period I have been out of work. I never once contemplated theft as a way of survival because I know it is wrong to steal, Your Honour. I would be greatly obliged if Your Honour could get me a job so that I could prove my determination to live honestly.'

'I could not afford to pay tax because I was barely dressed, and my stomach wasn't exactly full most of the time.'

The excuses that the indifferent magistrate had listened to since he joined the 'Plural Affairs' department were innumerable. Each day he found himself confronted with the fates of as many as two to three hundred illegal aliens. So much so that he had developed a capacity for spontaneous decisions regarding each of them. He must have boasted at times to his friends how he could sense the guilt of an alien or loafer, and deal with him accordingly; actually, the impressario gave the decisions – simply by reading the expression on His Honour's face:

'It is highly improbable that you are telling the truth about where you live. His Honour can tell from your very appearance that you have not been in



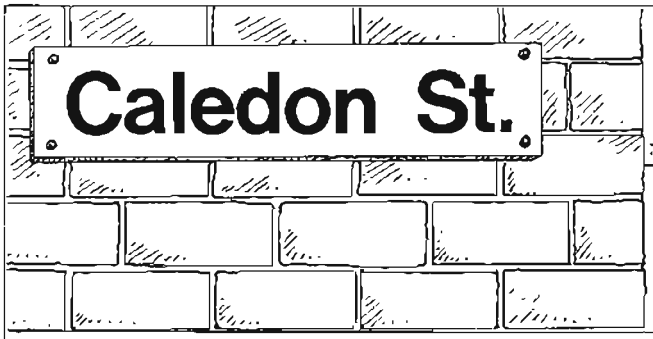
'Towards Limbo', drawing, Mzwakhe

Johannesburg for any significant length of time. You just came in from wherever you came from, and His Honour warns you to return there within the next seventy-two hours: failing which, should you be arrested again you will be sent to jail for a long, long time.'

The accused smiled inwardly and thanked his ancestors for granting him yet another chance. To be realistic he had to thank the white man and the black man for, seemingly, they represented the kind ancestors: '*Dankie, makhosi*! I will return there as soon as I am let out of jail.'

He was taken out, with a piece of paper endorsing him out of the magisterial district of Johannesburg. He never saw his fellow prisoners again. Neither did he respond to the 'seventy-two hours' threat: but after some time the constant danger of arrest drove him to a place where at least he could be as near as possible to the industrial 'white areas', and at the same time be free of the threat of arrest. He went to a limbo known as Winterveld on the 'border' of 'Bophutatswana' and 'South Africa'.

The others whose passes accused them of 'loaferskap' were sent to the Section 29 court in the same building. There they were sentenced to periods of forced labour ranging from two years upwards.



and other memories

Richard Rive

An address to the African Literature Association conference at the University of Indiana, Bloomington, Indiana: Friday, March 23, 1979.

Firstly I must thank the organizers of the African Literature Association for the singular honour of inviting me to make this keynote address. I have no doubt that this is an honour intended primarily for those Black South African writers of the early 1950s like myself, who amid repressions started pouring out their fledgling prose in Cape Town and Johannesburg, some of it derivative and attempting to resurrect Harlem in District Six and Sophiatown; some of it escapist and concerning itself with Black guys and molls, boxers and football stars; and most of it angry and resentful, trying to shake an indifferent reading public out of its complacency and smugness.

I am going to start something a bit traumatic for me. This I have been shying away from for a long time. I am going to read the first, cautious beginnings of a selected study of my earlier life. If, as I understand it, the autobiography is structurally the marriage between history and the novel, then I might ask myself what claim to literature or sociology my own personal history has. I presume that the term *novel* here refers to form and shape rather than to treatment. Is my life then so unique that it warrants an autobiography? All lives are unique and so many millions of others in South Africa and other countries have shared a similar experience to mine. But these experiences are *unique* to me and to the way I respond to them and the way I articulate them.

My life story could take different shapes, for example the form of one of the many shattered South African Dreams. But then, is there anything left for any Black man's dreams, especially after Richard Wright exploded the myth of his realisation of the American Dream? Can any black boy in South Africa ever dream of being accepted as a South African statesman, or doctor, or writer in his own country? Can any black boy in South Africa ever dream of being part of a meaningful law-making procedure in his own country? If any black boy does or did, it certainly never occurred to me and my ragged friends running wild in the mean streets of Cape Town's District Six. It never occurred to us that we were ever intended for anything other than what we saw surrounding us.

My life story could take different shapes, for example the form of one of the many shattered South African Dreams.

I was born in Caledon Street just below St. Mark's Church which stood on windy Clifton Hill. I am using the past tense because Caledon Street has been wiped out. The streets in the District sloped down perilously towards the harbour so that our street was considerably higher than Hanover Street that ran parallel to it. Around us were the squalid, dark alleys, refuse-filled streets and mean lanes of Seven Steps, Horstley Street and Rotten Row. Under the Group Areas Act District Six has been reduced to rubble. Last year I was driving through the scarred landscape of what had been the scenes of my boyhood. Bloemhof Flats still stood, and St. Mark's Church stretched solitary and defiant, and my stone-built primary school lay in ruins, and the Fish Market and Star Bioscope were gone, and Globe Furniture where a vicious gang used to meet had disappeared, and the Swimming Baths and Maisels Bottle Store were no longer there. Where were the crowded street-corners where we played around lamp posts in the evenings with the South Easter howling around us? And where were the musty Indian stores smelling of butterpits and spice? And the Fish and Chips Shop with sawdust on the floor and the plate-glass windows steamed over with the heat from the boiling oil? All these were gone because mean little men had seen fit to take our past away.

I remember when I was three or four years old that I ran away from our tenement flat and wandered down Caledon Street determined to explore but frightened stiff. I stopped outside an impressive set of French doors which jutted out onto the pavement. A red light burned in the window in spite of the bright morning sun. I had stumbled on the most exclusive brothel on Caledon Street, run by a tyrannical Madam called Mary *Worse*, or Mary Sausages. I think she received her nickname because of her pronounced lips or pronounced buttocks or both. For a long time she was the toughest, most generous and ugliest woman I had ever known. As I paused outside her establishment one of the girls spotted me and enticed me inside with a piece of candy. She was fair, I vaguely remember, with a rather worn, hard face. She smiled and called out to the other girls that there was a new customer. They all laughed and I could not understand this so began to cry and wanted to go home. She lifted me up and set me down next to her. While she painted her toe-nails I told her all about our family, how I could almost read, how my brother Douglas went to a big school in de Villiers Street, how my mother could bake tarts and yellow bread that had raisins in it. She listened attentively and then showed me butterflies tattooed on her legs and warned me that they would fly away if one told lies. I did not believe her because they still remained on her legs.

Mary Worse and the girls had a ritual every Christmas which I used to observe for the many years while we lived in the District and I was a teenager. This continued even after we had moved to Walmer Estate. Around 10 p.m. on Christmas Eve all the customers would be put out unceremoniously from the brothel, whether ill-dressed local thugs, or Chinese and Indian seamen, or well-groomed respectable pillars of our local community who came surreptitiously, or down-at-heel White pimps. The house was then closed for business, the curtains opened up and the red light switched off. Mary and the girls would wash themselves, put on fresh make-up and don their best dresses. Then, led by the redoubtable Mary (whom rumour had it was the drum-majorette in the Girls' Brigade in younger and more innocent days), they would march up Caledon Street in double file to attend midnight mass at St. Mark's on the Hill. They would file self-consciously into their seats and cry throughout the service, especially when they felt that

the references in the sermon were intended for them. By the time I was a teenager and sang in the church choir on Sundays dressed in cassock, surplice and Eton collar, the ritual was still going strong, and I would wink from our pews at any of the girls I knew, and they would reciprocate with wan, tear-stained smiles. After the midnight service they would again fall into ranks outside the church and march down the street led by Mary. It was then open house at the brothel for all who cared to come. Everything was available except sex. The Rector of St. Mark's was invited and put in a brief appearance. Wine flowed and there were plates heaped with chicken curry and yellow rice, boboties, jellies and custards, while the radiogram blared 'O Come All Ye Faithful' and 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing'. By noon on Christmas Day it was all over. All the guests shook hands and left. The mess was cleared up and Mary and the girls went to bed and slept for the rest of the day. Later that evening they roused themselves, drew the curtain and switched on the red light. It was business as usual for the rest of the year.

It is notoriously simple to romanticise slum life and write books sentimentalising it. In truth, the slum was damp, dirty and dank. As children we ran around bare-footed in patched clothes, howling at drunks and shouting obscene encouragement at bare-chested street fighters. Very rarely did the White World intrude into our area and when it did it was in the form of social workers bursting with compassion, or priests bursting with righteousness, or policemen strutting around in pairs and brazening it out with their hands always on their revolver holsters. There were also White liquor-runners and dagga-smugglers who were employed especially by shebeen-queens and brothel-owners.

I cannot find any reasonable objection to slum clearance, especially for the purpose of re-erecting decent living conditions for the former inhabitants. But when District Six was razed it was done by official decree to make room for those who already had more than enough. Today, almost two decades later, it has still not been built up. Those of us who had lived there before, people like Mrs. Barnes, and Mrs. Lewis and her daughters, and Honger, and Tana and Soelie Khan, were shifted out unceremoniously to the desolate, sandy wastes of Mannenberg and Heideveld, and a derelict area which with almost malicious sarcasm has been renamed Hanover Park. No White authority had ever bothered to ask me whether they could take my past away. They just brought in the bulldozers.

I wish to read what Dennis wrote about a similar situation five hundred miles away in Port Elizabeth after the bulldozer had flattened South End. *Stubborn Hope* p. 23.

When I went back last year I stood overlooking a wasteland on which weeds were growing, trying to reconstruct my childhood. I tried to estimate where our large tenement building, which housed twelve family units, had stood.

Richard Rive, photograph, Stephen Gray

It was a huge, ugly, forbidding double-storeyed structure with a rickety, wooden balcony running its entire length. It contained three main entrances which all faced Caledon Street. Behind it and much lower, running alongside it was a concrete enclosed area called the Big Yard into which all the inhabitants of the tenement threw their slops, refuse and dirty water. Below the street level, running under the building itself, was a warren of disused, gloomy rooms which were the remains of a Turkish Bath complex, a carry-over from the time when District Six was rich, white and Jewish.

The entrance to our section was numbered 201. The glass skylight above the door was pock-marked with holes my brother had shot into it with his pellet gun. After you negotiated the first flight of steps, which were of stone, you reached a wooden landing, where, as children, we would sit huddled in the artificial gloom, our thin jackets over our knees for warmth, and tell stories and fantasise about characters in the District. Two apartments ran off this floor in one of which lived Mrs. Louw who had a pronounced Semitic nose, purpled by too much drinking. She was nicknamed Punch. Although well into her fifties it was rumoured that she had a boyfriend who was not only decades younger, but also White. In the other apartment lived Tant' Stienie who was obese and vulgar, usually walked about bare-footed in a tight, dirty dress, and had half a dozen simian children from almost as many husbands. Up another flight of rickety steps, wooden this time, you turned into pitch darkness. At the top of these steps was a tiny landing off which ran the two remaining apartments. One belonged to Aunt Becky and her husband. She had left her Dutch Reformed Mission Church because they were far too Afrikaans for her liking. Now she was a pillar of St. Mark's. She also went to every Communist Party rally in the City Hall and dragged me with her. The other apartment belonged to our family, my mother, one sister and three brothers. Another sister and two brothers were married and had already moved to Walmer Estate. The brothers who were still at home slept in what was called the Boys' Room. This was gloomy and always smelt of sweat.

I ran away from the first three infant schools I was sent to. My objections, even at the early age of five, were aesthetic. At the first one two girls with long pig-tails sat in front of me and cried all the time. So I joined them in crying and when I realised that the teacher was in another room having tea, I ran home. At the second school we were made to stand in a queue while the teacher, who prided herself on being an amateur artist, drew whatever we requested on our slates. The girl in front of me asked for a mantelpiece and this was drawn for her. I wanted one as well, but with my limited vocabulary asked for a house instead. So she drew a house for me with smoke curling out of a chimney. I burst out crying, smashed my slate in front of her, and ran home. The third school was held in a converted garage and I objected because my brother, Douglas, attended a proper school called Trafalgar Junior. This time I refused to go after the first day. I remained at the fourth school because I fell in love with my teacher who was over-powdered, hairy and smelt heavily of perfume.

Although the White World seldom put in an appearance in District Six, we occasionally ventured out. These sorties were often hazardous and fraught with danger.

I remember how my ragamuffin friends and I, bewitched by the lights and music of a Whites-only amusement park at the bottom of Adderley Street, cautiously advanced into it only to be chased out by a red-faced policeman.

I remember the vice-squad raiding all the houses on Caledon Street for illicit liquor, and the huge, ugly detective in

But gradually, as I learnt to analyse my own position, I realised that the Scarlet Pimpernel was not on my side when he rescued rich aristocrats, that Tarzan was not on my side when he subdued Black tribesmen, that Kimball O'Hara was not on my side when he spied on Indian patriots. That because the literature I read was thematically White, I was denied an empathy with it as effectively as if it were done by official decree.

charge who poked through our wardrobes with a skewer.

I remember the man who was later considered one of Cape Town's most progressive mayors and a friend of the Blacks phoning the police to whip us off Green Point Track because we dared to practise our athletics there.

And the flaming torches carried by determined-looking Black men past Castle Bridge, protesting against segregation laws. And my eldest brother, Joey, marching off to war in the Cape Coloured Corps in order to free Ethiopia from the ranks of his segregated unit.

And the first job I ever applied for. When I was asked to come for an interview an embarrassed employment officer drew me aside and apologised because it was for Whites only.

And the unemployment queue in Barrack Street. After shuffling to the front I was told that with a Senior Certificate I was far too well qualified for any work they might offer.

And the White manager of a clothing factory who roared with laughter when I meekly indicated that I was looking for a position as a clerk.

You learn very soon that in the slums there is no real ethic other than one of accepting or rejecting. You either accept Jim Crow or you reject it. It is an ethic of survival. You soon learn how to feint, how to dodge, how to mask your resentment, how to insulate yourself against hurt by laughing too loudly or too wildly. You learn that the difference between colour discrimination and any other form, is that colour is observable. And at the same time you blend into and try and seek anonymity with the mass. You become one with the other Blacks surrounding you for the purpose of Whites. But amongst yourselves you are not invisible, you are not fused with others, because the slum also teaches you early to guard your individuality jealously. When Whites are around you lose it purely as a protective device. But amongst yourselves you stake your claim to be different because you *are* different. Beneath your black skin beats a different heart. Beneath your woolly head beats a different thought. And your anti-Jim Crow ethic starts with the first dangerous thoughts and questions about that harsh, cold, White world outside. And you approach it not as a subservient but as an equal bent on answers. And this period is the most dangerous not only because of the questions but because of the answers. You adopt the ethics of an anti-Jim Crow.

Much of what I wanted to know I later found out in the books written by people who were able to articulate their experiences better than ever I could. From my Primary School days I read avidly and indiscriminately. By the time I was in High School my reading was in order to escape from the realities of the deprivation I saw surrounding me. I read furiously anything I could find, comics, detective stories, schoolboy yarns, romances. I never questioned the fact that all the good characters were White and that all the situations were White. I recall at the age of seven reading an elementary series about twins from different lands: the Eskimo twins and the Japanese twins and the Swedish twins. And when I came to the Nigerian twins the illustrations shocked and disappointed me because I had not catered for the fact that they were black. Surely all characters in books were White. Books were not written about people like me. Books were not written by people like me. Books were about a White Deerslayer who was condescending towards a Red Indian Chingakook. They were about a White Huckleberry Fynn who was condescending towards a Nigger Jim. So enormous was my appetite that I locked myself in the Boys' Room and tried to unravel the knotted language of *Measure for Measure* and Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations* . . . I scoured secondhand book stalls on the Grand Parade and spent my miserable allowance on volumes I hoped were classics and therefore respectable literature. I bought *The Complete Works of Sir Walter Scott* which was always on sale, and Milton's *Lycidas* and part two of *War and Peace* which was also always on sale. I quoted Shakespeare and Tennyson. I joined the run-down library at the Hyman Liberman Institute in Selkirk Street and took out *The Three Musketeers* and Rider Haggard's *She*, and a book whose title escapes me now but was about a nasty villain who sold innocent, unblemished White women to sex-crazed Cape Malays in the back streets of District Six. And in my innocence I was so impressed with content that I never bothered about purpose and intention.

But gradually, as I learnt to analyse my own position, I realised that the Scarlet Pimpernel was not on my side when he rescued rich aristocrats, that Tarzan was not on my side when he subdued Black tribesmen, that Kimball O'Hara was not on my side when he spied on Indian patriots. That because the literature I read was thematically White, I was denied an empathy with it as effectively as if it were done by official decree.

Then I read Richard Wright, Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen, and discovered Bigger Thomas and Cora who was unashamed and Big Boy who left home, and Simple. I read *Uncle Tom's Children* and *The Ways of White Folks* and *Native Son* and *Cain* and *The Big Sea*. Peter Abrahams described the Johannesburg location in *Mine Boy* and described his life and mine in *Tell Freedom*. A new world with which I could identify opened up to me. I now knew that there were others who felt the way I did and, what was more, articulated it in a way I had never realised was possible. I was now able to analyse my own situation through theirs, rationalise my own feelings through theirs. I could break with my literary dependence on descriptions by White folks of the Ways of White Folks. Native Son had come of age.

By the time I wrote my Senior Certificate examination my family position had improved to the extent that we had taken our first determined steps into the ranks of the Coloured Middle Class. We moved from District Six to Walmer Estate. We spoke English at home instead of Afrikaans. However I was not satisfied and somewhat sceptical about our improved social and economic position without a concomitant awareness. I started writing my first angry prose which was published by left-wing magazines and those catering for a Black readership since they were the only outlets prepared to publish the type of creative fiction we were producing. This brought me into personal contact with many other people, especially writers.

I am going to speak about two writers with whom I started close associations about that time. James Matthews is still alive but Ingrid Jonker is dead. Both suffered as writers because they were incapable of dealing with anything other than the truth.

By the time I was in my early twenties I had become friendly with an aggressive young journalist from Johannesburg who had just been promoted to

the local editorship of a tabloid newspaper geared at a Black readership. Moodley had been jailed during the Defiance Campaign, had been banned, and was a radical of sorts with a disarming smile and a puckish sense of humour. He had asked me to do a feature article entitled *My Sister was a Playwhite by Mary X.* I was to be 'Mary X'. When I had finished I took it to his office at Castle Bridge and sat down at his desk to discuss it with him. The phone rang and while he was on the line a small, aggressive, unshaven young man of about my age, looking ostentatiously working class, shuffled in, nodded vaguely at Moodley, ignored me completely, and sat down in an opposite chair sinking his face into a magazine. For a brief moment Moodley stopped his telephone conversation, clapped his hand over the receiver, and said, 'Richard Rive – James Matthews.'

So this was James Matthews whose stories I had recently read in the *Weekend Argus*, the telephone-operator who also wrote fiction in his spare time. He came from a slum area above Waterkant Street, even more beaten-up than District Six, had the merest rudiments of a secondary education and was reputed to be a member of a powerful gang. I think he saw in me everything he both envied and despised. I not only looked Coloured Middle Class, but I spoke Coloured Middle Class and behaved Coloured Middle Class. In spite of this initial setback to our relationship we overcame mutual suspicion and our friendship gradually cemented.

Quite some time after this unfortunate first meeting, by which time we were very close friends, I taxed him with hiding his home circumstances from me. I knew vaguely where he lived and that he was married with two small sons.

'You really want to know where I live?' He arched his eyebrow threateningly. 'Alright. Come home with me on Friday evening after office.' He had by now succeeded Moodley on the newspaper.

I turned up determined not to be shocked at anything since I was sure that that was his purpose. We walked deep into the rough area above Bree Street, past mean gangs of thugs on mean corners. Near Pepper Street he paused in front of a door scarred with knife marks. We entered and stumbled up two flights of a gloomy staircase at the top of which we entered a surprisingly pleasant, sunlit room. The walls were lined with shelves filled with books. This was where James wrote. I sat down on a couch determined to be as sociable as possible. After a time I insisted on meeting his wife. He shouted to her down the staircase and a fresh-faced, attractive woman poked her head out and smiled shyly at me. He was on the point of dismissing her when I rose, introduced myself and shook hands. He smiled distantly.

James then insisted on our going to his local cinema, the West End in Bree Street. We sidled in through a back entrance and a door-keeper, who treated him with deference, allowed us in. The cinema was jammed with people who were sharing seats and sitting on the floor in the aisles. A dense pall of cigarette and dagga smoke hung low over the auditorium. In spite of the crowd one row of seats was completely empty. I realised then that no-one dared sit there as it was reserved for the gang of which James was an important member. We sat in the middle of this row with the luxury of unoccupied space around us. I was fully aware of the fact that had I not had the protection of James, I would be in an extremely unpleasant situation. In fact I would never have been allowed through the entrance. I also realised that, in spite of a growing headache, I was the only member of the audience trying to concentrate on the movie. The rest were laughing, whooping, hurling around pleasantries and insults, gambling and selling illicit liquor and dagga. James sat, a man apart, indifferent to his surroundings, speaking earnestly to me about writing. I knew that he was out to teach me a lesson. I had wanted to go slumming and he was meting out the full treatment. What I do not think he realised was how familiar all this was to me, how I had sat in just such cinemas, the Star in Hanover Street, the British in Caledon Street and the National in William Street, watching *Zorro Rides Again* with crowds milling around in the auditorium. It was all so recognisable and all so painful.

Last year James came to my flat and thrust an official envelope at me. It stated tersely that his latest book of poetry which he had written in solitary confinement while in Victor Verster prison, had been banned. He left me and went to his office to pack away all the copies of his collection with its zany title, *Pass Me a Meatball, Jones.* He left me to pack away a portion of his past. The bulldozers had moved in again.

Shortly after I had first met James in Moodley's office, I qualified as a teacher and left our Walmer Estate home to board in Grassy Park to be nearer my school. I found lodgings with an aggressively respectable family which insisted on ignoring our shabbier neighbours and insisted on speaking English of sorts. By this time I was well acquainted with most of the writers in Cape Town and often visited Jan Rabie, the novelist and his wife Margery Wallace, the painter, in Green Point. One evening Jan turned up at my place in Grassy Park with a few friends. Among them was a beautiful, withdrawn young woman with a wide-eyed, penetrating stare. She had already published a first book of poetry in Afrikaans and spoke intensely about it. This was Ingrid Jonker. We sat on the lawn of the house drinking wine and arguing, much to the horror of my landlord who was an elder in the local Dutch Reformed Mission Church. I was fascinated by Ingrid's intensity. I referred to her inadvertently as a poetess and she took me severely to task. She was a poet, no more, no less.

Our friendship progressed and became a very close one. We would sometimes ride around Cape Town on my scooter and pretend to be brother and sister because Margery Wallace said we looked alike and she felt motherly towards us. One evening we sat on the floor of Jan's house discussing South African politics. She drank in hungrily everything I had to say, then, after a long pause, turned her large, brown eyes on me and stated naively, 'I am so afraid that they will cut my throat.'

Suddenly the whole South African situation, all its discrimination, contradictions and injustices were focussed in her one fear. I never asked her what she meant, who would cut her throat. Would it be the Blacks thirsting for revenge, or the Whites furious at her unconventional standpoint? Metaphorically every innocent throat in South Africa is cut by bigotry and cant, and poets as well as non-poets are the victims.

We saw quite a bit of each other. Sometimes I would visit her; sometimes she would visit me; often we would meet at the same parties. She was always strange, sometimes withdrawn, sometimes impulsive, always unpredictable. At times she seemed like a spoilt

Continued on page 61.

Suddenly the whole South African situation, all its discrimination, contradictions and injustices were focussed in her one fear. I never asked her what she meant, who would cut her throat. Would it be the Blacks thirsting for revenge, or the Whites furious at her unconventional standpoint? Metaphorically every innocent throat in South Africa is cut by bigotry and cant, and poets as well as non-poets are the victims.

Staffrider Drama Section

THE AXE-MAN

A play by mmanabile

CHARACTERS:

SHIBI
THABO
MTHIWAKHE CHILOANE
MRS. CHILOANE
THE AXE-MAN
THE WITCHDOCTOR
NEIGHBOURS.

SHIBI: Thabo, my dear cousin, we are very glad to have you back in the family fold. Since you were imprisoned six months ago, the family has suffered brutal and ghastly terrorism. Only your parents and myself are left alive, and we are now living in extreme terror, not knowing who'll be next.

THABO: I must thank you very much, Shibi, for having decided to stay with us, and for everything you have done for my family.

SHIBI: Save me that.

THABO: I sadly regret my arrest and imprisonment for a trifling pass offence. If I had been here, perhaps God might have given me power to prevent the blood of my dear family from being shed so ruthlessly.

SHIBI: I wish you had been here.

THABO: But, my dear cousin, you'll tell me everything that has happened since I have been away and perhaps we'll find a solution to our affliction. *(Thabo coughs as he speaks, not a rough cough.)*

SHIBI: Let's move to the sitting-room, Thabo, this kitchen is crammed. *(There is a sound of shifting chairs, doors opening and closing and in the sitting room soft music is playing on the radio.)*

SHIBI: Though your internment was short, to us it was an eternity, Thabo. In five months we lost five members of the family, and the police still can't find the killer.

THABO: *(Coughs.)* I cough badly, but it's worse at night. Tell me exactly how it began, Shibi.

SHIBI: You see how burnt uncle's face is? He was dark in complexion, as you know, but within one night his face altered.

THABO: What happened?

SHIBI: Acid; he was the first victim. One night, quite unsuspectingly, he opened the kitchen door to go out, and the liquid was splashed into his face. Uncle screamed, and the attacker fled. While uncle was in hospital, something worse happened. I had been working night shift, and Jabu had gone to the bioscope. Though the family was afraid to be left alone, nobody suspected that such brutality would be perpetuated. But, as luck would have it, a window in the children's bedroom was not closed, and the axe-man jumped in. What followed was the work of the devil. *(Pause.)* Thandi tried to tackle the killer but was felled with one blow. Your mother fled and locked herself in the main bedroom, hoping that the killer would not touch the children and our grandmother, who were virtually cornered by the killer. The killer axed them all, grandmother and children. You might have heard screams and wails. The axe-man fled.

THABO: But why? Have you found out why my family has been chosen for slaughter?

SHIBI: We don't know; but I haven't finished. Jabu was shot at the gate when he came home. He was one person who would not stop coming home late. And, of course, at that time we didn't suspect that our family had been selected for slaughter. As you know the location is so rough, as it is, that one can't cross the spruit from the old location to the new. These young tsotsis are terrorizing the people.

THABO: We have to watch out, we have to do something. . . . Here comes father. *(Door opens and closes.)*

THABO: Hello dad.

MR. CH. : Hello boys, I hope everything is well at home.

SHIBI: It is, uncle, it is still early in the day. I was telling Thabo everything which befell our home.

MR. CH. : Good. The church people will hold a service here in another hour. We have to pray to God to protect us from our enemies. There's no one we can turn to. The police have failed us badly. So what must we do? Carry axes under our armpits, or revolvers in our pockets? God forbid.

THABO: Did you go to church, dad?

MR. CH. : I have come from there, with your mother. I wish you had also been there. Our minister wants to see you, just to pray for you.

THABO: Where is mother?

MR. CH. : She's outside, I think. I want you boys to give me your word that you will not stir — not only at night, but also at week-ends. Do you give me your word?

SHIBI: We do, uncle.

MR. CH. : Very well. You've got a duty, you know, to protect your mother. She can't be left alone. I have a feeling that the axe-man will strike again. It's very sad, you know. Jabu, your brother was shot at the gate. Thandi, your sister was axed with the rest. Let's get ready for the service.

(The organ plays a hymn. Fade out.)
(Fade in.)

MR. CH. : This short service has given me strength. It's

about two hours now since our brethren left, and night has settled in.

MRS. CH. : Did you check all the windows, Shibi?

SHIBI: I did, but I'll make a double check.

MR. CH. : You see, Thabo, we've got burglar proofing and thick curtains on the windows.

THABO: That was very wise, dad.

MR. CH. : There's nothing which God can't put right. God is strength. Our enemy will be squeezed by the hands of God. We shall again pray to God when we go to sleep.

SHIBI: Every window is closed, aunt.

MRS. CH. : Very good. *(Fade.)*

MR. CH. : Let everyone come nearer for prayers. *(Prays.)* God, Almighty, defender of the defenceless, hear today our solemn prayers . . .

(A terrific gun-shot, window panes breaking; running feet.)

SHIBI: *(Shouts)* The killer!

THABO: Let's go after him.

(The door bangs as they rush out to chase the assassin.)

SHIBI: There he goes! Help! Stop that man!

THABO: After him. Help, ho! It's the assassin!

MR. CH. : Don't let him escape; help, ho!

(Neighbours are all out. There is confusion, noise.)

MR. CH. : Oh, my dear neighbours, the killer fired a shot into my house.

NEIGH-BOUR: What happened?

MR. CH. : He shot through the window just after we had finished prayers.

NEIGH-BOUR: Don't say that. That can't happen.

MR. CH. : God forbid, but that's what happened. Let's run home, my wife is alone.

NEIGH-BOUR: Was the window open?

MR. CH. : It was closed, and the curtains were drawn.

NEIGH-BOUR: Was anyone hit?

MR. CH. : No.

NEIGH-BOUR: Thank God.

MR. CH. : We are at home. *(Knocks.)*

MRS. CH. : It is myself, Mrs. Chiloane.

(Door opens. Sound of sobbing.)

Mr. CH. How do you feel?

MRS. CH. Just shaken.

(Fade.)

SHIBI: We are back uncle. We couldn't catch the

devil.

THABO: He just vanished.

MR. CH.: Never mind boys; never mind. *(Fade.)*

SHIBI: *(Fade in.)* Thabo, uncle says we are to hold a family council. Things have gone too far.

THABO: That's alright, Shibi. Has he reported this latest attack to the police?

SHIBI: I did. He sent me. The police refuse to believe that we have been selected for slaughter. They think it's just another of the criminal acts of the location.

THABO: That's too bad. We'll have to fight this ourselves.

MR. CH.: The witchdoctor is here. These are difficult times. I've asked the witchdoctor to smell out the killer. He'll certainly do it. He is the best witchdoctor in the country.

THABO: Is he here already?

MR. CH.: Yes. He's outside consulting his ancestors. Let's go into the main room. The witchdoctor will come also. *(Fade out.)*

WITCH-DOCTOR: I'm witchdoctor Mbethe, the greatest witchdoctor in the country. Take off your shoes and sit flat on the mat, my friends. *(He shuffles on the mat.)*

WITCH-DOCTOR: Put your fifty cent piece on the bones, Mr. Chiloane, and I'll throw them on the mat and read to you the secret behind your persecution . . . Ah, that's right . . . I implore you, my great ancestors, who see the unseen, and know the unknowable, instruct me with your wisdom so that I might reveal to this bereaved household the reason for their persecution and who's behind it. *(Throws bones on the mat.)* Say yea, say aye, the witches are behind all this.

FAMILY: *(In a chorus)* It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: Say yea, the witches have entered the house.

FAMILY: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: They are ruthless. They are a danger, for they do not use conventional witchcraft. Say yea.

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: They use a killer, the axe-man who is protected by a tokoloshe.

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: You may not know what a tokoloshe is. You may not believe in it. Say yea.

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: A tokoloshe is the dwarf; the little man who has been turned into an evil spirit. Say yea.

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: A tokoloshe appears and disappears at will. Say yea.

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: Protected by the tokoloshe, the killer cannot be arrested by the police. Say yea!

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: Agree with me. The witches will finish this house, every soul in it.

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: The aim of your enemies is to wipe you out completely. Say yea!

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: Blood has been shed in this family, and now we ask: who is next? It can be anyone in the house of Chiloane. Say yea!

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: Who is the killer? Who is this slaughterer? He does not stay far from here. Say yea!

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: The killer greets us every day in the street. Say yea!

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: The killer wears a friendly smile. The killer grins at us everyday. Say yea!

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: The killer is short and wears a moustache. Say yea!

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: Our enemy is a well-to-do man. He has money. Say yea!

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: For here is the bone we call the star-pointer which points the home of the enemy. Say yea!

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: For here is shortie bone standing upright and shortie here has whiskers. Say yea!

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: Here is the golden-bone soliciting our attention — our enemy is a wealthy man. Say yea!

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: Why should I call him by his name? What more do you want to know? He is short, with a moustache, and with money. Say aye!

CHORUS: It is so.

WITCH-DOCTOR: You may sit up, my dear kinsmen. The work of the bones is done. If you decide upon revenge, don't mention my name.

MR. CH.: Can't you tell us precisely: who is the killer?

WITCH-DOCTOR: I can't. I'm not permitted. But I'll give you the charms; I'll work upon you all to destroy the power of the tokoloshe.

MR. CH.: We shall be very glad.

WITCH-DOCTOR: And that will cost you R50.

MR. CH.: We are prepared to pay it.

WITCH-DOCTOR: Good. I'll begin with you, Mr. Chiloane and make cuts on your body with a razor blade. Afterwards I'll hammer sharp sticks into the four corners of the yard to arrest the spell of the tokoloshe.

MR. CH.: We shall be very glad indeed.

WITCH-DOCTOR: Let's begin. Let one young man play the drum while I work.

(Thabo beats on the drum. Fade out.)

(Fade in.)

THABO: Father is really pleased with the witchdoctor.

SHIBI: Oh yes. It's about an hour since the witchdoctor left, but uncle still floats in that spirit. Who do you think is the person identified by the witchdoctor as the killer?

SHIBI: I don't know. The witchdoctor was as vague as can be.

THABO: I think he is that short monkey who stays at 14 JD.

SHIBI: You mean Ntshontsha? You might be right. Ntshontsha is quite rich.

THABO: Not only rich — he's short and has whiskers.

SHIBI: But Ntshontsha couldn't kill a fly, I'm sure of that. He is yellow in the liver.

THABO: But that's the reason why he sneaks and snipes. And for that reason, we can't be terrorised by a man like Ntshontsha.

SHIBI: I feel very bad, because we are virtually house-arrested.

THABO: That's what I can't stand. There's no thug

who is going to house-arrest me. Tomorrow I'm going to accost that man.

SHIBI: Which man?

THABO: Ntshontsha of course.

SHIBI: No, let's make a plan. We can't risk arrest. I have a plan.

THABO: We must lynch him, before he destroys us all.

SHIBI: Look, I want to sleep now. I want to think how we can lynch that man.

THABO: Yes, sleep on it. *(Fade out.)*

(Sound of breaking window panes.)

THABO: What's that?

SHIBI: An attack!

THABO: What's the time?

SHIBI: About midnight. Come. *(Sounds of crashing and breaking.)*

MR. CH.: Don't dare go out, boys.

SHIBI: But now we are vulnerable inside. The attacker has broken the window-panes.

THABO: Watch out. You may be hit.

SHIBI: But the witchdoctor has protected this house tonight. How come this is happening?

THABO: He must have been a false witchdoctor.

MR. CH.: Don't talk like that, boys. Have faith. The attacker has retreated.

SHIBI: I can't sleep anymore.

THABO: How can you? I'm going to kill that Ntshontsha, first thing in the morning.

MR. CH.: But how can you be sure it's Ntshontsha? I was thinking of Zungu.

SHIBI: This is all confusion. I'm going to trap our persecutor . . . tomorrow.

MR. CH.: Pick up the stones from the floor, boys. *(Fade out.)*

SHIBI: *(Fade in.)* Hello. How were you during the day?

THABO: Very well, Shibi. How was work?

SHIBI: I was pre-occupied with thoughts of the killer. Did you lynch him, Thabo?

THABO: No. You said I must wait. It's now evening, and look at our windows. And father was saying we should put in new panes. How can we, when that man will come and break them again.

SHIBI: Look, Thabo. I'm going to lynch him tonight. Come away; let's go and talk under those trees. *(Fade.)*

THABO: Hey, a revolver. Where did you get that revolver, Shibi?

SHIBI: From my boss. I explained the situation to him, and he has agreed to take all the risks.

THABO: Good, Shibi; give it to me.

SHIBI: No. You might miss, because you were not there when my boss explained it to me.

THABO: Don't worry. I know how to handle guns — any gun.

SHIBI: No, I'm going to shoot the killer.

THABO: Where will you hide?

SHIBI: In the fowl run.

THABO: I'll be with you.

SHIBI: Sure, if you want.

THABO: Let's go and prepare the place; we'll sleep there the whole night. *(Fade out.)*

(Fade in. Sound of fowls cackling.)

SHIBI: Shsh! Don't disturb the hens.

THABO: The damn things are just irritable. What time is it?

SHIBI: I can't see well. It's past eleven.

THABO: The devil will come any time now.

(A terrific scream is heard from inside the house.)

THABO: What's that?

SHIBI: The devil is in the house. Oh, we are cursed.

THABO: Cursed ill-luck. Let's spring.

(The door opens and then bangs. Running feet. The screams are a sad moan.)

SHIBI: The axe-man's coming out! He was in the house, the devil!

THABO: Get him!

(A gun shot.)

SHIBI: I got him. No, I missed him.

THABO: Get him before he disappears around the corner.

SHIBI: *(Fires again.)* I missed — he beat me to the corner.

THABO: After him! I'll go and see my mother. Oh, my mother — she must have been slaughtered.

SHIBI: I'll go after him; he won't get away. *(Running.)* Hey! Ho! Stop that man! Where has he gone? I can't see him anymore. Ah, there he goes. He is jumping fence after fence. I must jump too. Hey! Ho! Stop that man! I'll only burn out my voice. Nobody sticks his nose into anyone else's business around here. I could shoot, but this thing hasn't got any more bullets. There he goes behind that garage. I've nearly caught up with him. *(Something strikes him fiercely.)* Aagcheee! *(Scream.)*

AXE-MAN: I've got you, ha! ha! I was behind the corner, brother; you didn't see me. You just came running head first round the corner, like a fool. Ha! Ha! Ha! Already fainting before I've dealt with you. I have hit you only with the flat of the axe. That'll teach you; I'm the axe-man. But quick, I'll drag you into the garage before the others come. *(Pause.)* Ha! Ha! You didn't know? This is my garage, and this is my car and this is my house, which you once attacked with lightning from your witches. No, I won't finish you here. I'll put you in my car; but first I'll tie you up. *(Pause.)* There you are, all bundled up. Into the car now. You are bloody heavy, you dog. *(Mimes all the following actions: closes door.)* Still bleeding, eh? Not very much though. Here we go. *(Gets in car and drives away.)* Ha! Ha! Here we pass the foolish people in the street, still looking for me. The whole neighbourhood has come in a posse to look for me. But here I pass them and they don't know me, yet I stay next door to some of them. They'll never see you again. We are going into the forest and I'll drop you into a sinkhole. Yapeee, here we go! *(Mimes driving, in silence for a while.)* Hey, are you stirring — coming round? Regaining consciousness? But here we are. Nobody will see you. *(Car stops. Doors open.)* Come, sweetie-pie. I'll carry you to the sinkhole.

SHIBI: *(Scared.)* Hey, what are you going to do?

AXE-MAN: I'll dump you into a sinkhole.

SHIBI: You can't mean that, you bloody scoundrel. You won't get away with this. You'll hang, I tell you, hang by the neck until you die. You are Molapo. I know you now.

AXE-MAN: Don't worry yourself about me. I will look after myself.

SHIBI: You'll regret this, I tell you.

AXE-MAN: You won't be alive to see my regret. Do you know how deep this sinkhole is?

SHIBI: Don't be a fool, I tell you.

AXE-MAN: It's about fifteen storeys deep. A caved-in pit. They've even fenced it, because it's dangerous, you see? Now go down.

SHIBI: Hey, are you mad?

AXE-MAN: I'll lower you slowly. I could drop you and allow you to be crushed to pieces. I want you to die slowly at the bottom of the pit.

SHIBI: Please, please Mr. Molapo, spare me. Please! Please!

AXE-MAN: No, no. You are now three feet inside. Do you see how dark it is? Look down at the bottom. Can you see the bottom? Of course, you can't.

SHIBI: *(From the pit.)* Please, good sir, give me a chance. I'll go away from here. I'll vanish. Please give me a chance.

AXE-MAN: Before you die, I'll tell you why I'm killing off the house of Chiloane. I'm Molapo, you know me, of course. I stay seven houses from your home. You know what Mr. Chiloane and his wife did? They sent lightning to my house by witchcraft. The lightning killed my wife and my three children on the spot. Did you know that?

SHIBI: How can you prove that? You are a superstitious rat. Nobody killed your children by lightning. It was nature.

AXE-MAN: It was not nature, you son of a witch. A witchdoctor told me everything. He said it was Chiloane who sent the lightning to kill my family.

SHIBI: Damn your witchdoctor. You know witchdoctors are filthy liars.

AXE-MAN: Do they lie today? What was that witchdoctor doing at your home last night?

SHIBI: That's not my business. I don't believe in witchdoctors.

AXE-MAN: I do. I will avenge my family. I'm the only one who survived that lightning. Alright, now that I've told you, I will lower you to the bottom.

SHIBI: No, don't do that! I was not responsible for the killing of your family. I'm innocent.

AXE-MAN: You are one of them.

SHIBI: No, Chiloane is only my uncle, please understand, please.

AXE-MAN: Down you go.

SHIBI: Hey, pull up the rope, please Mr. Molapo. Help! *(Screams.)*

AXE-MAN: Nobody will hear you, you can scream your throat out. We are in the forest; and it's one hour after midnight.

SHIBI: *(Continues to scream.)*

AXE-MAN: Down you go. I have a long rope. I have three long pieces; I'll join them together.

SHIBI: Can't you listen please, Mr. Molapo, I swear to you, I'll be your slave, I'll be your dog.

AXE-MAN: I don't want a dog like you, down you go.

SHIBI: Then kill me in a better way. Chop me up with the axe.

AXE-MAN: I want you to be eaten by snakes in the pit. There's mud or water at the bottom.

SHIBI: *(Screams once more.)* Oh, my God, this is the end. Receive me in Heaven. Oh, the cold. This place is a fridge. I'll die. I go down fast now. If only my hands were not tied, I would grip onto something.

(The faint sound of the car zooming away. Fade out.)

SHIBI: *(Fade in.)* I'm in the mud, Oh God, Oh God. How long have I been at the bottom of the pit? I must have fainted. God, God, why have you forsaken me? I can hardly see the mouth of the sinkhole. What's that? There's a light! The light is coming down, down, oh, come down light and expel the darkness from this dungeon. It's a search light; I'm all lit up. But who are those up there? *(He screams.)* My rescuers, come down ho! Help, I'm still alive. Hey, what's that at the corner of the pit? A snake! *(Screams again.)*

THABO: Mr. Policeman, there he is! He has fainted. We've a job to do here, Mr. Policeman. I wonder whether our rope is strong enough to take us all. Hey, Shibi, wake up! It's me, Thabo. Thabo is here. Let's carry him up, Mr. Policeman.

POLICE-MAN: What a terrible place to throw a human being into. That snake's been there all along.

THABO: We shall soon be out. *(Fade out.)*

SHIBI: *(Fade in.)* Where am I?

THABO: In the hospital, Shibi.

SHIBI: Thabo, is that you? Oh, yes, I see you. Tell me what happened?

THABO: The police brought you straight to hospital.

SHIBI: The police? Tell me everything. How did you know I was in the pit?

THABO: We know now that the killer is Molapo. Someone heard him in the garage when he was taking you away. By the time he reported it to us, the killer was far away, but we guessed the road he took. I hired a taxi to follow him, and we lost him in the forest. But then we saw him driving away. We let him go and searched for you.

SHIBI: You mean you nearly caught him here?

THABO: Nearly. We guessed that he had dropped you in the sinkhole. We thought you were dead. Then we heard you scream.

SHIBI: Did you hear my screams?

THABO: Yes, and we screamed back.

SHIBI: I didn't hear you.

THABO: You could not. The sinkhole echoes upward only. We had to go back to fetch the police.

SHIBI: And where's Molapo, where's the axe-man?

THABO: He's been arrested.

SHIBI: You're not lying?

THABO: It's true. He went straight home, thinking that nobody knew anything. The police picked him up there.

SHIBI: Hurrah! But what about mother, is she dead?

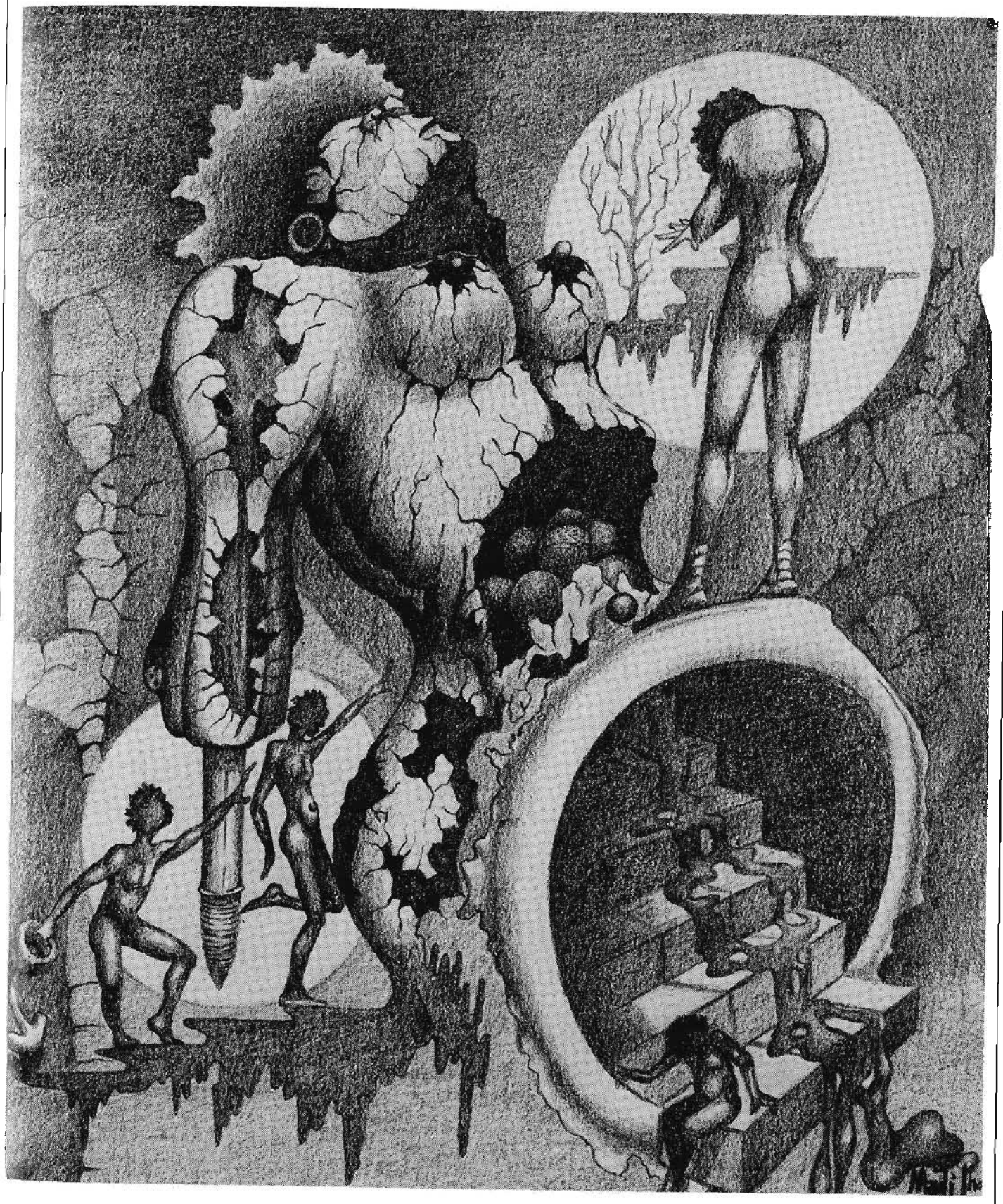
THABO: No. Her epileptic fits saved her. Apparently, the axe-man stole in during the day and hid under the bed in the children's room. That room is empty, you know. During the night when my mother went to the toilet, she met the axe-man in the passage. She had a fit from fright and the murderer fled. You know the rest.

SHIBI: Look, Thabo, as soon as I come out, we are going to slaughter a goat as thanksgiving to our ancestors.

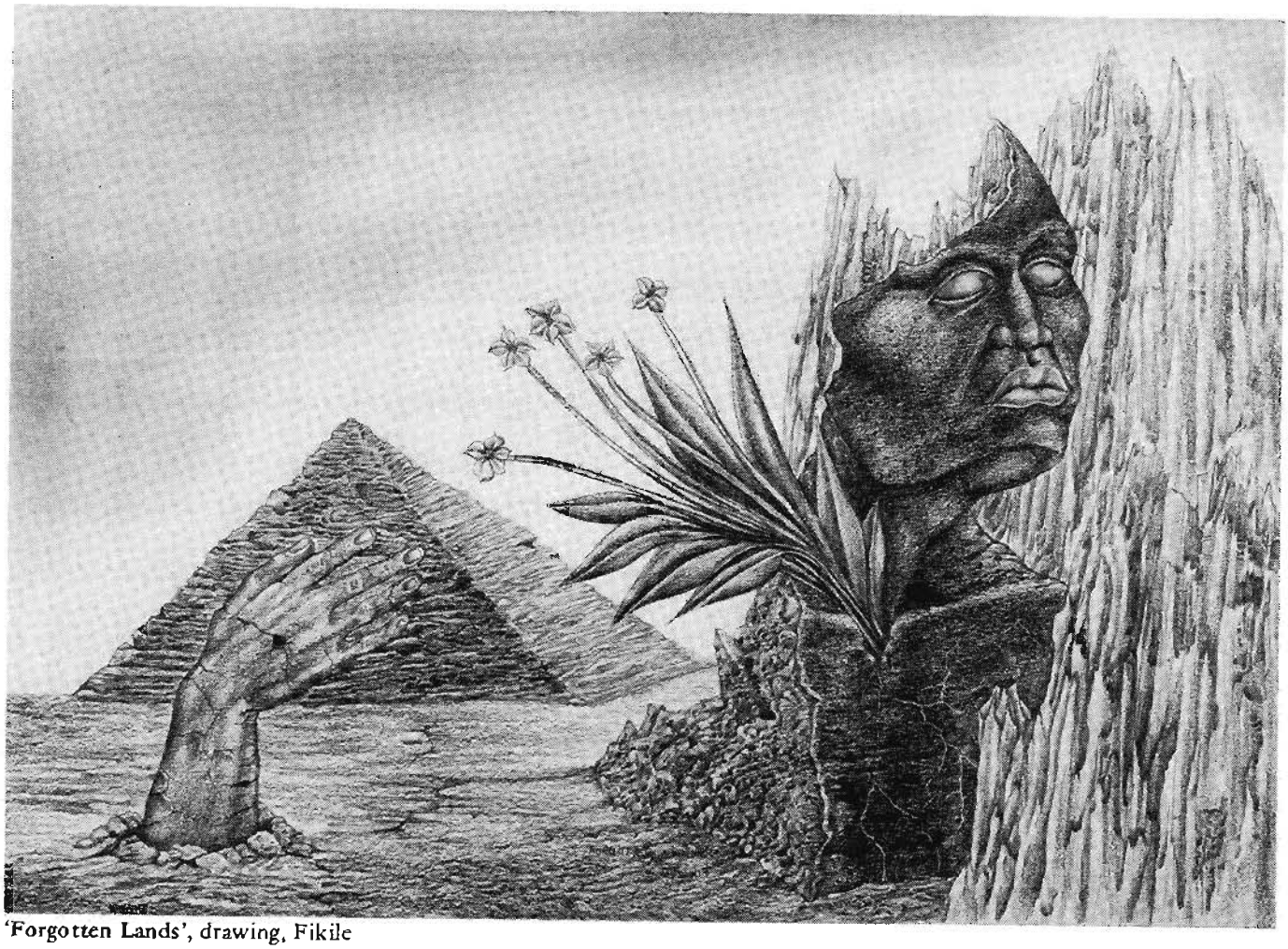
THABO: I was about to tell you: father has the goat at home already, tied to a pole, waiting for you.

SHIBI: Good, I'm very glad. Afterwards we can go out and celebrate.

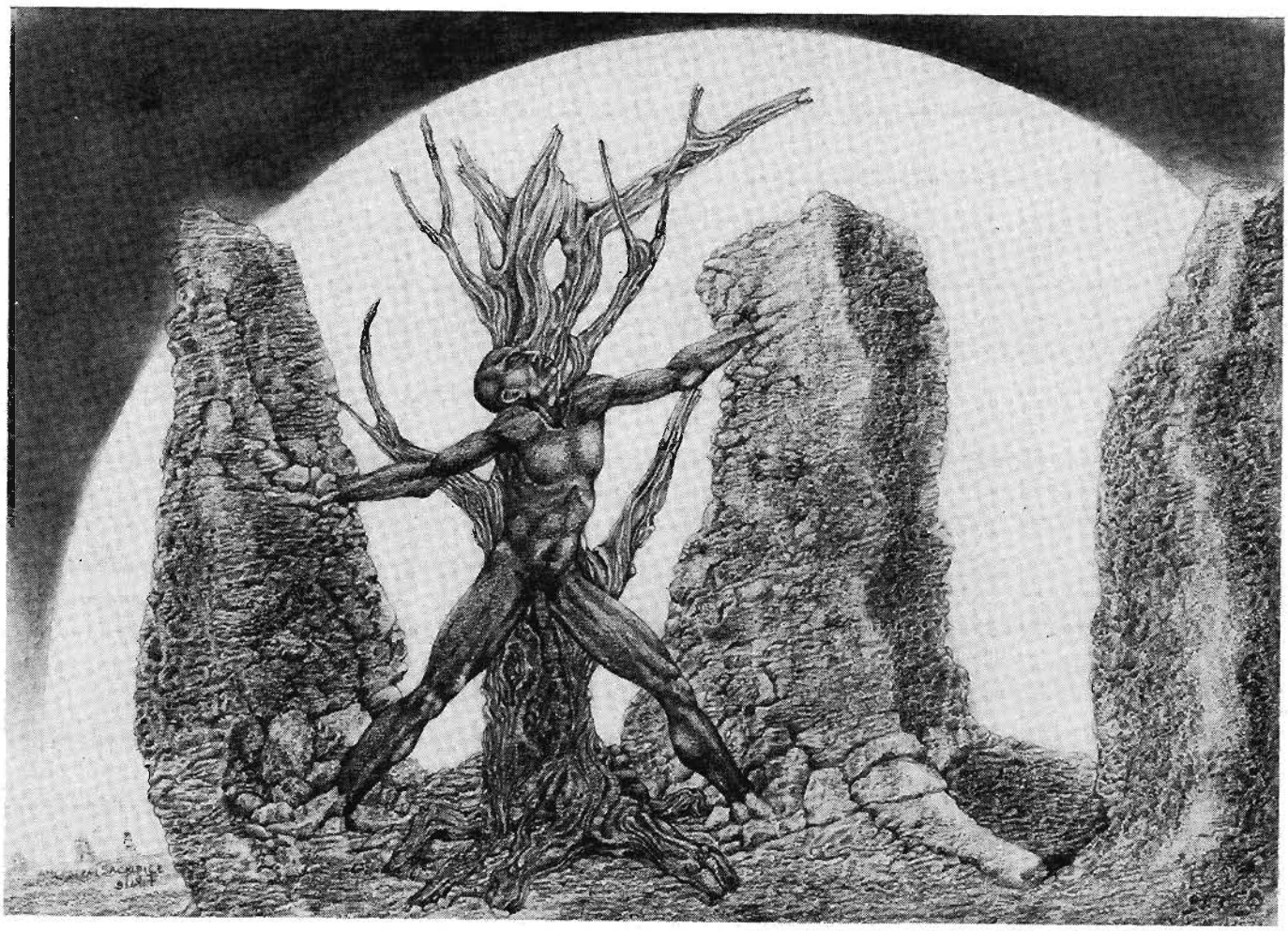
Staffrider Gallery



Untitled, drawing, Madi Phala, Bayajula Group



'Forgotten Lands', drawing, Fikile



'Ancestral Sacrifice', drawing, Fikile

The Wisdom of Africa

Notes on the oral tradition: Es'kia Mphahlele

What is referred to as a people's *folklore* embraces its traditional beliefs, superstitions, manners, customs, music, literature. Even before man could write, he recited and sang his literature – tales and poetry. Sometimes individuals composed, and the tales and the poems were adopted by the community. Modifications were made. Later there emerged professional poets or story-tellers who could do the job better than others. The poets composed or recited what they had inherited from previous generations. Some of them were elected to be the King's poets and/or poets for festivals, wars, etc. This has been a universal phenomenon through the ages, and not something confined to Africa.

Some folklorists i.e. students of folklore, believed that the culture of so-called primitive societies indicated first steps in the evolution of human institutions and civilization. So folk tales, beliefs, customs were like fossils or relics, and where they survived, they were an index to backwardness. The fact that so many tales are common to various races was explained by the theory that all races had passed through the same stages of development; that people react the same way to similar circumstances and environment. This theory overlooked differences in human responses to situations.

Other folklorists, whose theories are more popular today, held that culture contacts were mostly responsible for peasant beliefs and customs, which explained similarities between communities. Contacts could be through war, invasion; travel, migration and so on.

Stories told by people in early times and passed down from generation to generation or carried by migrating tribes, merchants, sailors and other travellers from one country to another fall into three main categories: (a) those of myth, (b) those of legend, and (c) popular tales meant mainly for amusement. *Myths* are sacred narratives which deal with the creation of heaven and earth or the coming of death into the world, or with such ever-lasting mysteries as the struggle between good and evil or life after death. For instance, the Kikuyu of Kenya believe that they are descendants of Gikuyu and Mumbi who had been placed on Mount Kenya by God. The Malagasy believe that they are descendants of a man and woman who discovered each other on the island. 'By recounting what is believed to have happened in the primeval ages they provide supernatural sanction and precedent for existing rituals, traditional behaviour and custom and the accepted pattern of tribal society . . . the true function of a myth, for so long as it remains a living force, is not to provide explanations but to stabilize and unify the community or tribe . . . ' (*Encyclopaedia Britannica,* vol 9, pp. 519 – 520).

Legends perpetuate traditions of heroic characters and of real or supposed historical happenings. There may be historical fact, but it is embellished and given a romantic tone. Heroes are featured as giants, fairies and supernatural beings. The legends about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table and about Ulysses are examples.

Ordinary folk who cannot write make up stories that have nothing to do with myth or history but simply entertain or amuse the audience. These tales illustrate the third class mentioned above. They treat mostly of triumphs, failures, in which supernatural forces come into play or do not. The good or cunning person or animal or poor person comes up on top and the wicked person or animal comes to a bad end.

Contrary to the anthropologist's view, folklore survivals are not undatable remains or fossils from remote antiquity, preserved in the minds and memories of simple people, incapable of changing except when they decay. Rather, not all survivals are of equal age. They exist because they still have life and so are able to grow and change.

'For the modern student of the subject, folklore is a living and inextinguishable force, ebbing and flowing with the rhythm of social life and, while carrying into the present the traditions of the past, constantly adapting itself to the changing conditions of the times. Old customs disappear and superstitions vanish with new techniques and knowledge, but ancient forms of thoughts are continually reappearing in a new guise.' (*Encyclopaedia Britannica,* vol. 9).

The 'new guise' can be seen in the way Chinua Achebe transposes Ibo thought into the diction of his novels. Amos Tutuola also adapts myth to contemporary life, as in *The Palmwine Drinkard.* Owing to more economical ways of circumcising, ritual has been dispensed with in several communities. The 'school' has thus given way to new techniques and knowledge.

Evidently a considerable amount of traditional poetry is composed for specific social occasions and then becomes an organic part of the people's folklore whenever similar occasions arise. And yet Montaigne, the famous French Renaissance essayist and thinker, was right when he wrote in 1578 that we should not think that ancient people recited their poetry 'out of mere servile compliance with their usages and under the compulsion of their ancient code, without reflection or judgment, their souls being so stupefied that they cannot do otherwise.' The essayist renders an ancient love song, to show that it is poetry and that 'there is nothing barbaric in such a product of the imagination.'

In the reciting or singing of traditional poetry, accompanied or unaccompanied by drums and other instruments, gestures, eyes, voice play a very important part. This poetry is more a part of life than poetry is among Western societies. There are songs (or poems) on abortion and the death of infants whose birth has outraged the people's custom; songs in praise of cattle; laments; songs of caution etc. 'But be their subjects and their occasions what they may, poems nowhere arise of their own motion.' (*The Unwritten Song,* by Willard R. Trask). These poems are by professional poets and by anyone and everyone.

It is significant what a traditional Eskimo poet says to an investigator:

Songs are thoughts, sung out with the breath when people are moved by great forces and ordinary speech no longer suffices. Man is moved just like the ice floe sailing here and there out in the current. His thoughts are driven by a flowing force when he feels joy, when he feels fear, when he feels sorrow. Thoughts can wash over him like a flood, making his breath come in gasps and his heart throb. Something, like an abatement in the weather, will keep him thawed up. And then it will happen that we, who always think we are small, will feel still smaller. And we will fear to use words. But it will happen that the words we need will come of themselves. When the words we want to use shoot up of themselves – we get a new song.' (Knud Rasmussen: *The Netsilik Eskimo: Social Life and Spiritual Culture).*

W.G. Archer says in *Man in India*, an article in 'Comment' (1943): 'Only through its songs do the attitudes of a tribe or caste become clear and it is not until the poetry has been understood that a tribe is understood.'

Some scholars are also in the process of reconstructing the history of one tribe and another through its oral literature: its wars and battles, its heroes, its thought, etc.

Traditional African tales and poetry are being translated these days and we are beginning to see a few volumes in print. It is hoped that much more of this will yet be done, particularly with more and more African participation. It is quite obvious that when you translate African oral poetry into a European language the result is often disastrous. You seem to freeze the original music and rhythm. Certainly the gestures, tone of voice, facial expression have been left out of it. The printed product may look like a fossil. And yet if the translator has an ear for poetry even in his own language, the thought expressed in the original thought and feeling can come through without causing offence to the reader's sensibilities.

The Oxford Library of African Literature has published now a few volumes of oral literature. Then there are Ulli Beier's collection, *African Poetry: An Anthology of African Traditional Poems*, Lyndon Harries's *Swahili Poetry*, Willard M. Trask's *The Unwritten Song*, which covers several other parts of the world. Some years ago (1938) H.P. Junod, a Swiss missionary who worked in the northern Transvaal (South Africa) published *Bantu Heritage*. He specialized in Shangana-Tsonga (or Thonga) and translated some of its oral literature, including proverbs and riddles. French-speaking writers are translating much of this kind of literature from indigenous languages in some West African countries. It is to be hoped that Zambians can begin to do the same for their languages. Then they do not have to wait for that far-off day when they will have mastered English enough to use it for creative writing. They can work as a team in which the main language groups are represented. Each person can be set a task in his own native language to translate literally the poetry, tales, proverbs of his people into English. Someone who has an ear for the English language and has used it for his own creative writing can rework the translations and render them into readable and enjoyable English. But the original manuscripts should stand as literature in their own right, whatever indigenous language they may be in.

The Oxford Library of African Literature and *Swahili Poetry* render parallel texts of the original and translation, a commendable presentation.

There is oral poetry about God, death, loneliness, love. There are praises to kings and lamentations. You will notice that oral poetry shows even more clearly than the written, how close poetry is to the composer's or singer's state of mind. In fact, poetry *is* a state of mind, an attitude. Our metaphorical speech, which we use mostly on formal occasions demonstrates this fact too. Oral poetry goes straight to the heart and stirs us more at the emotional level than at the intellectual. Here is a traditional Somali poem, *Fortitude* (presented in *Somali Poetry* by B.W. Andrzejewski and I.M. Lewis for the Oxford Library of African Literature).

Like a she-camel with a large bell
Come from the plateau and upper Hand,
My heat is great

Birds perched together on the same tree
Call each their own cries,
Every country has its own ways,
Indeed people do not understand each other's talk.

One of my she-camels falls on the road
And I protect its meat,
At night I cannot sleep,
And in the daytime I can find no shade.

I have broken my nose on a stick,
I have broken my right hip,
I have something in my eye,
And yet I go on.

This poem clearly reflects the life of a nomad. (There are still Somali nomads today). The last four lines clinch the idea of fortitude.

Praise poetry is probably the most difficult to translate into English. Consequently the translation is seldom readable. Often single words are found in an African language which require whole phrases or sentences to render them in English. Here is an extract from a praise poem culled from the Bahima, a pastoralist people in Uganda. It is a personal kind of praise composed by an individual about himself (taken from *The Heroic Recitations of the Bahima of Ankole* (ed. by Henry F. Morris for the Oxford Library of African Literature).

I Who Am Praised thus held out in battle
among foreigners along with The Overthrower;
I Who Ravish Spear In Each Hand stood out
resplendent in my cotton cloth;

I Who Am Quick Was drawn from afar by lust
for the fight and with me was The Repulser of Warriors;

I Who Encircle The Foe, with Bitembe,
brought back the beasts from Bihanga;

Note that the capital letters are meant to indicate for a phrase or clause there will often be found a single word in the original language. Cloth is worn over the shoulders and replaced the skin in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Bantu-speaking peoples of the East African coast came into contact with the Arab traders in the same area in the Middle Ages. The Swahilis, as these coastal blacks are called, first began to write their language in Arabic script. Swahili has the oldest tradition of written verse among all the Bantu languages, and it has several Arabic words. The Swahilis became Muslims, and indeed their traditional heroic poems were about Arab heroes and often the Prophet Mohamed was depicted as one of the characters of the epic. Here is a song, *In Praise of Marriage:*

Give me the minstrel's seat that I may sit
and ask you a word, my friends.
Let me ask for what reason or rhyme
women refuse to marry?
Woman cannot exist except by man.
What is there in that to vex some of them so?
A woman is she who has a husband
and she cannot but prosper.
Cleave unto your man
and his kinsmen will become jealous.
His kinsmen have planted coco-palms
but the fruit they reap is dum-palm nuts!
We think you plant the borassus palm
the teak, the mnga and the salanum tree.
When man goes on his road he goes with a friend
for he who walks alone has no good fortune.
As man goes through life
soon he is pierced by the thorn (misfortune).
Or the sand-mote enters his eye
and he needs a friend to remove it.
Likewise I give you advice, the rich man
and the poor man join hands across the shroud.
Better a loin-cloth without disgrace
than the fine-flowered shawl of shame.

Another Poet Gone

Agostinho Neto 1922-1979

Mothobi Mutloatse

Africa has lost another leader through the death of Angola's President Agostinho Neto in Moscow, in Russia. At least he died after Angola had (thank Thixo!) achieved its freedom from nearly 400 years of Portuguese rule.

In fact, at one stage Angola was named Portuguese West Africa by the colonialists, just like Mozambique was known as Portuguese East Africa! Today these two countries gained their liberation following costly, deadly and seemingly endless battles with the European settlers.

This article is no eulogy about Dr. Neto, who qualified as a medical doctor in Lisbon. Far from it. We'll let history be the judge . . . On the other hand, I wish to introduce the unknown side of Dr. Neto – the poet. Like Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Dr. Neto was an active poet before becoming an activist.

Long before he joined and spearheaded the liberation of the Angolan masses against their Portuguese rulers, through the MPLA – the Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola.

In *Farewell at the Moment of Parting,* Dr. Neto wrote:

My mother
(oh black mothers whose children have departed)
you taught me to wait and to hope
as you have done through the disastrous hours

but in me
life has killed that mysterious hope

I wait no more
it is I who am awaited

Hope is ourselves
your children
travelling towards a faith that feeds life

We the naked children of the bush sanzalas
unschooled urchins who play with balls of rags
on the noonday plains
ourselves
hired to burn out our lives in coffee fields
ignorant black men
who must respect the whites
and fear the rich
we are your children of the native quarters
which the electricity never reaches
men dying drunk
abandoned to the rhythm of death's tom-toms
your children
who hunger
who thirst
who are ashamed to call you mother
who are afraid to cross the streets
who are afraid of men

It is ourselves
the hope of life recovered.

Brenda Leibowitz

Agostinho Neto's poetry is part of a powerful new tradition of revolutionary poetry from the third world, and as such it is also a record of a people's struggle from which lessons are to be learnt: that the counterpart of destruction is construction; that oppressed people not only have the motivation to fight and free themselves, but are also especially well-equipped to build a new and better world than the one that had to be destroyed; that these constructive aspects need to be preserved and cultivated as part of the struggle.

Do not turn too much to yourself
Do not shut yourself in the castle
of infinite meditation
On memories and dreams you might have lived.
Come with me, Africa in fancy trousers,
let us go down into the street
and dance the tiring dance of men,
the simple 'batique' of the washerwoman;
let us hear the anguished tom-toms
while crows watch the living
in the hope they become corpses . . .
Do not cry, Africa, for those who have left
let us look clearly at the bowed shoulders
of people going down the alleyway
black black of misery black of frustration
black of anxiety
and let us give them our hearts
give ourselves
through hunger prostitution tattered
huts
and worn sword blows of the sepoys
through the walls of prison through the
Great Injustice

No one shall silence us
No one can impede us
The smile on our lips is not
gratitude for the death
with which they kill us

Let us go with all of humanity
to conquer our world and our Peace.

Women writers speak

There is a need for an explanation from active women writers. This need is to create a picture of what a woman is to her society. What does a woman writer say when she sees her children slaughtered, or her daughters disappearing into the ditches of immorality, or maybe her community losing direction – does she stand on the hill and point a finger at them? Or does she digest the problems that may be misleading them, and try to bring out a solution?

Here I have talked to Manoko Nchwe about women's literature. Manoko began writing three years back. It is fortunate that the two of us shared a desk at school, where our writing began. She has been writing since then, though she has not published.

She feels that if women sit with their arms folded, waiting for men to dictate terms to them, much harm will have been done to the balance of nature.

Firstly we discussed what she takes an African woman writer to be:

An African woman writer has some priority in building herself to develop in her community: irrespective of the form of her art. Such a woman has a duty to trace the remains of her distorted culture, put them together and nourish them to be part of her.

She believes that our religion, belief in our ancestors, is dying. This religion can only be treasured by gathering the remaining dust particles to be the sound base of our culture.

She adds: *A writer can never write outside her society. She cannot write about people or their lives unless she shares that life with them. A woman writer must take a valiant self-reliant stand which in no way shall be taken to overthrow men. If she does not bear respect, morals and principles that she may want to write about, then she is like an unprinted film.*

Manoko has a theme in her writing which she thinks may give a direction to a listener/reader of her words. She says that she is a crying woman and she writes about the cries of other women which she shares spontaneously.

I become part of the life of a woman who is dying gradually, leaving her children to the outside world. I step into her shoes to share her grief over the loss of her husband, children or property. I hate myself if I am easily defeated by external forces.

As Mtutuzeli says, 'For what is suffered by another man in view of my eyes is suffered also by me. The grief he knows is a grief I know. Out of the same bitter cup do we drink.'

This is a feeling shared universally. It does not only refer to men alone but it is also shared by women.

What makes women's literature?

Women can produce good and enduring literature if they can be genuine, powerful and comforting; by sensing the needs of their readers.

A woman is very fortunate if she can write about daily life in her surroundings, (as Miriam Tlali does, for example.) A myth can always be found in her writings or if it is not there she must bring it in.

I believe that a woman as a mother in her society, as the first teacher of her children and also as an ordinary member of society is in a very good position to communicate with the people she writes for. The usage of simple domestic language can be very effective as it will be easily understood, but I must stress that a woman is not confined to write about domestic life. I only gave that as an example.

Would you say that women are hiding or ignorant of the spinning wheel of arts, for instance in presenting their works for performance or publication?

Women are not that. Firstly, they must be given the opportunity to express or present their works without feeling that there are few women writers around.

I suggest that women writers should keep in contact and share the common themes which have begun to emerge from us. I believe that a woman writer in Soweto can understand what another woman writer in Guguletu says by merely keeping in contact.

As a woman writer, I must emphasize the importance of self-discovery. By that I mean making other women aware of their value to the society, and of how much they have to offer in all areas.

How do women who are writing at present, discover others?

Women should bear in mind that there is always independence of the mind, although they should learn to share ideas which are of value to the situation in which they find themselves. Besides being involved in arts, there are other community services they can render. There is still enlightment required to clarify the position of a

COURAGE, AFRICAN WOMAN.

In the twilight
In the sprawling hideout
Where I hold my crying
Hungry baby
Singing lullaby songs
During deserted nights
Cry I must not
For the future of
My children who lack paternity
Depends on me
I, African woman, responsible for her family
Used to bitterness in life
I, woman alone
Nkgoleleng banake – Nkgoleleng baAfrica
Courage I must not lose
Hopeful I am
That these children of mine
Will grow to be
Brave heroes
To lead their oppressed nation
Nkgoleleng banake – Nkgoleleng baAfrica

Winnie Morolo

MY TEARS

My life is at stake
My nipples are aching
My heart is pounding
My breast is swelling

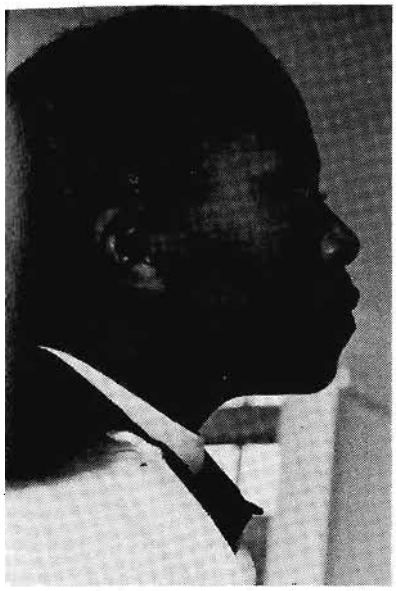
I was happy for a moment
When pains of labour arrived
I thought I was delivering a baby
But it was a victim of oppression.

Manoko

Here I stand
With no child in sight
Did I conceive to throw away?

My children have gone to the towns
To seek bread
They never returned
They went to the mines
To dig gold
They died in Shaft 14
They went to the mills
They died in the grinding stones
They went to ISCOR
Their hands were guillotined
My children
Children of blood, blood of my children

Boitumelo



Boitumelo, photo, Biddy Crewe

woman in her society — and the only person who can do this is woman herself.

At present we must encourage self-discovery and free expression in our women. The myth of female inferiority should be completely discouraged. The ideology of women's liberation is not yet clearly understood by a great number of our women, and how this ideology combines with our distorted culture I do not know. I do not expect a woman in South Africa to have the same demands as an American woman, as here the movement is still young.

When last did I have a good laugh?
A hearty laugh
A real laugh

Maybe
In my mother's womb

The wrinkles on my face
The rings under my eyes
The twisted drooping mouth
The sadness in my eyes
Are born in the bitterness of
Black life.

I'm black
I'm me
I've blood —
Red blood — not ink
Let me be me
Let me be me

These are no poems crooning
Sweet nothings
These are my feelings
  my fears
  my pride
  my life
  my very own
These are about my environment
  my people
  my experiences
  myself
I'm me
I'm Afrika

Ntombiyakhe kaBiyela kaXhoka

A day, a moment, a second came my way. I was in trouble. It was labour-pains. I didn't know what to do. I cried, screamed and kept quiet, but all in vain. I felt as if my womb was leaving my body. It was terrible. My sheet was crimson with blood. An hour later my son, Nkululeko, was born. It was a relief and I thought that peace would last forever . . .

— Sizakele

Women's liberation is beyond the relationship between man and woman. It is beyond being freed from man's oppression, but it is the first phase of our struggle to reaffirm our role in the struggle for total liberation.

To my fellow readers I wish to express my sacred belief that women's literature can live for centuries. Hard work and sincerity build the validity of the kinds of literature we are writing. I do not see how it can die if life goes on and on. The changing times cannot change the suffering of yesterday to be better than that hose of tomorrow. But we should take care today to understand the sufferings of yesterday, and act in order to face the sufferings of tomorrow.

A woman writer will always accept herself as a writer originating from her society and shall not write outside of it.

— Boitumelo

Caledon Street

Continued from page 49.

child, at other times she seemed obsessed, especially when discussing her poetry. Often she would laugh broadly when she tried to imitate an educated English accent.

After winning a major literary award she went overseas on her first trip outside South Africa. I was one of the very few people to see her off on the Union Castle liner in Table Bay. She looked pleasant and trim in a costume. Then began her strange journey into the outside world. David Lytton, author of *The Goddam White Man* described some of this in an article called 'Ingrid Jonker Comes to Stratford'. I understood and appreciated his description of the almost psychic web which she was able to spin around herself. Ingrid Jonker was like that.

And then on a brilliant morning in July, 1965, I was writing at my desk in Claremont near Cape Town, and the sunlight filtered through the open window, and a small transistor radio played softly in the background. The music stopped and an announcer said that the Afrikaans poet, Ingrid Jonker had been found drowned at Green Point. She had taken her own life. And suddenly the morning turned grey for me. I rang Margery Wallace. She has tremendous self-control but this time she burst out crying and could hardly speak. But Ingrid had already died, well before the water of Green Point had lapped over her. As Nat Nakasa had already died well before he threw himself down a New York skyscraper during that same week. In a poem she called 'I Want to Receive No More Visitors', Ingrid had spoken out strongly against her fellow White South Africans:

. . . the people living at the sea as
though in the Sahara
the traitors of life with the face of
death and of God.

We were a small, sullen group of writers at her funeral. Jan was there trying to organise. Jack Cope was beside himself and sobbing all the time. We stood desperately watching the ritual. James Matthews was next to me staring at the ground. And I remembered how, when she gave me a copy of her first book, *Ontvlugting*, she had written in it, *'Vir Richard — sonder die liefde is die lewe nutteloos.'* Without love life is worthless.

And that same week Nat Nakasa died, and a few years later Arthur Nortje was also found dead in an Oxford room.

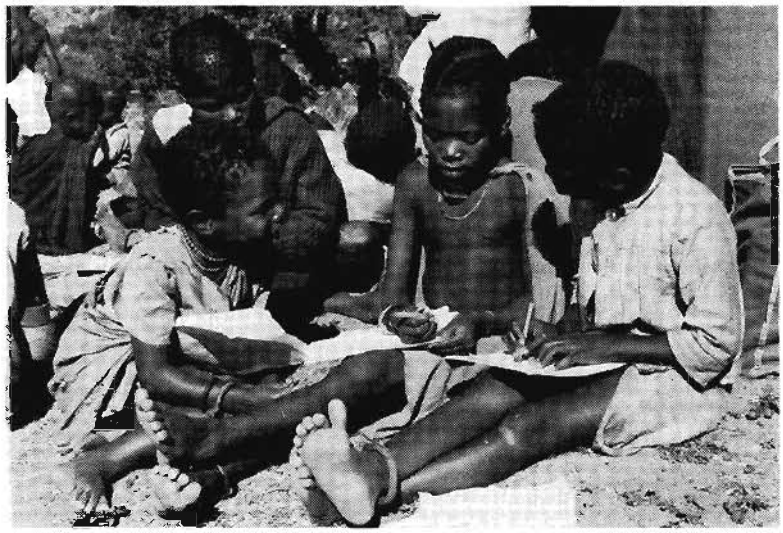
What better way to close this address than to bring together all we feel about South Africa, about Africa, but especially about all the peoples who make up that sad land at the Southern edge of Africa. What better way to feel its temporary loss than to read the last verse of Arthur Nortje's poem, 'Waiting' in which he shows all his nostalgia and yearning for the land he was never to see again.

You yourself have vacated the violent
arena
for a northern life of semi-snow
under the Distant Early Warning
System:
I suffer the radiation burns of silence.
It is not cosmic immensity or
catastrophe
that terrifies me:
it is solitude that mutilates,
the night bulb that reveals ash on my
sleeve.

Msinga Stories

In a corner of Msinga we are developing Barefoot Learning Centres to educate the poorest children for self-reliance. While the main emphasis is on food production we do other things as well. Emdukatshani Farm is the headquarters of Barefoot education; and the herdboys there contributed the following to *Staffrider*.

Kathy Bond



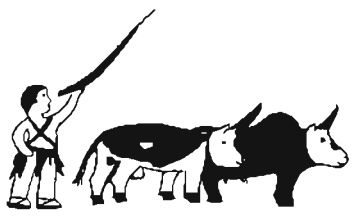
Two years ago I was very shy. I couldn't read and write. I felt bad. I thought I was stupid because I was old but couldn't read or write or speak English. I felt many things inside me which I couldn't say and couldn't explain.

Now I like reading and writing. I write in English. I want to tell people how I felt before I learnt to write. There are many children who are poor and shy. They have to work and can't go to school. I was like them; I am still a bit like them. So I want to tell you about us.

When we learn to read, there are not many books for us. Most of the books are about rich white people. So we need to write our own stories. We ask children and young people to try and write stories, so we can have many good things to read. We also want you to write letters to us, and tell us how you live. — *Nkunzi Dladla*

NKUNZI'S STORY

When I was a little boy I lived at home at Nkoseni, and ate so much food. I liked to eat and play. I did not know about where the food was from. When my mother said 'there is no food' I cried and cried and cried. And then my mother said 'if you cry I can't give you any sweets.' And then she said 'be quiet my boy! Another thing is if you cry the baboon will come and eat you up.' So I couldn't say anything. She said 'just remember about baboons!' I was very afraid of baboons.

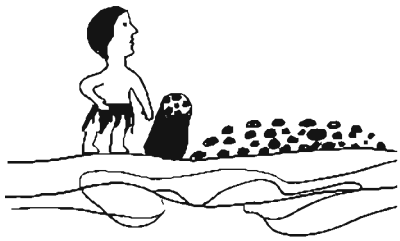


When I was about 8 years old, I began to herd my father's cows and goats. If I lost them my father hit me with a whip. Later my father went to Port Elizabeth. He worked with an orange machine. We saw him at Christmas. My mother looked after our home. My grandmother also stayed with us. She was very kind. She told us stories. But I was rude, and imitated her. She got angry and hit me with a long stick, but not very hard because she liked children.

When I was about 10, I went to work on a white farm because I wanted money for clothes. Before I used to wear a beshu. I herded the cattle. I worked from 8 to 5, 7 days of the week. In 6 months I didn't get one day off. I took my own food. I earned R1,00 a month. The farmer was a bad farmer — he still is bad. He paid the men R6,00 a month (now they get R10,00), the women did piece-work. Many children worked there, there are still many children there.

Some people complained to the farmer about the money but he was very angry and sent them away. So people stole cabbages and oranges because they didn't earn enough money. I also stole vegetables and sold them to get money to buy jam and biscuits. One day the farmer hit me because there were many bulls and I couldn't look after them all. I threw stones at him and he ran away. He didn't say anything. After 6 months I changed to piece-work. We planted cabbages and potatoes. The induna always watched us and hit us if we were lazy. After 3 months I left. It was a bad farm. I thought all whites were bad. I herded at home for a few months. I wanted to go to school but I had to work.

Then I went to work on another farm. I went every day on a big cattle lorry, the lorry was always very full of people. My work was to pick potatoes. I earned a bag of potatoes a month. The work was difficult but it was better than the other farm. I left after a few months because there was no more work.



(Nkunzi will complete the story of his life in the next children's section in Staffrider.*)*

THE GHOST

Last week we were looking for horses on the mountain. We finished work late, and left for home after dark. We walked quickly, not talking to each other. As we got nearer to the dip we started walking faster, keeping our eyes on the road, not daring to look ahead. Suddenly, in front of us, we saw a terrible thing — white and smoky, appearing and disappearing, as huge as Mashunka mountain one moment, as tiny as an ant the next.

We wanted to close our eyes but we couldn't stop looking at it: its deep red fiery hole eyes, its red hooked nose on its white white face, its shaking donkey ears, and strange bushes of hair around a bald patch. It moved creakingly on long white legs — joined with screws at the knees, sliding along and stamping its white baboon feet. Fire poured out of its mouth as it moved faster and faster — leaping and dancing, clapping its hands and clinking its nails together.

We tried to run but we couldn't, our legs wouldn't listen to us. We fell over each other and couldn't see anything as if we were drunk — rolling and stumbling until we came to the gate.

— *Mboma, Mdidiyeli, Linda*

Pen Conference 1979

The idea of a conference was in the air almost from the moment PEN (Johannesburg) was reconstituted and it came to fruition on 8 and 9 September at Wits University. With youth predominating, about 200 attended, including delegations from Natal, Northern Transvaal, Umtata, Grahamstown, Cape Town and Botswana. The theme was 'The Writer Faces the Future'.

Prof. Es'kia Mphahlele chaired the proceedings with an experienced ease which allowed him generously to share his own thoughts as part of the lively flow of discussion.

Nadine Gordimer's paper concerned the arts, and particularly literature, in a segregated society. She emphasised the inevitable socio-political implications of the creative pursuit, and drew a distinction between 'commitment' (determined from within by the writer's own attitudes) and 'relevance' (determined from without by groups with defined aims). As discussant, Sipho Sepamla further illuminated her question whether there is a South African literature.

Prof. Chabani Manganyi's paper was titled 'The Censored Imagination', and among other ideas discussed censorship, authoritarianism, creativity and heroism in South Africa and other countries.

After each paper discussion from the floor was wide-ranging, intense yet good-humoured and never in danger of running dry. Most striking was the variety of viewpoints and levels, the impression of a rare openness and, but for pressure of time, freedom of expression.

The Sunday proceedings, after a late start and with time for free talk further restricted by the need to hold an A.G.M., were less satisfying. But there was a rewarding symposium on the conference theme with statements from André Brink, Ahmed Essop, Mafika Gwala, Mike Kirkwood and Es'kia Mphahlele. In the subsequent open discussion the mood was detectably more disgruntled, more impatiently challenging than Saturday's.

While no over-all pattern of thinking emerged, Conference left the sense of a vital, unique occasion made rich for thought or feeling by a number of the individual contributions: a young delegate's protest against the teaching of Shakespeare instead of the African oral tradition; Mafika Gwala's demand for a more socially purposeful direction in our view of literature and in PEN's functioning; André Brink proclaiming some mutual need of 'book and gun', or outlining a censor-proof method of publishing; Ingoapele Madingoane's call for ways to protect writers from the kind of harassment he described from experience; Ahmed Essop's reminder of the breadth of experience that literature needs to be cognisant of; Neil Williams's plea against the application of racial categories to literary work; and many others — but none perhaps more memorable and moving than Fanny Klennerman's impassioned personal declarations of concern and the enthusiastic reception she was given; and Miriam Tlali's testimony on the special situation of the black woman in relation to her potential creativity.

Those were some of the voices, though as one mentions names one realises that no list of individual contributions could be representative or complete.

WORKSHOPS: WHAT DO THE WRITERS WANT?

Pen wants to know what kind of workshops the writers want: conflicting views have been expressed on whether the emphasis should be on technique or content, and on what sort of person should lead the workshops. We invite correspondence on the subject.

The People's Space

THE MAIN AIMS OF THE PEOPLE'S SPACE PROJECT

- Stress on honesty, dedication and relevance.
- A theatre that is ambitious and not fearful.
- A theatre whose art emerges from our greater society and is made for it.
- The nurturing of local talents in writing, directing, acting, design, music, dance, lighting and technical matters.
- Providing a decent return for artists working at the theatre. To this end:
- Basic capital must be raised to ensure proper publicity for all shows.
- All productions must be budgeted to pay the workers/artists decently and promptly.
- Rather 200 people at R1,00 than 50 at R2,50.
- Subsidization of theatre management staff so that the building is and remains properly run and attractive.
- Shows must not be made for short runs only but must have back-up to tour and explore all audience possibilities.
- The public in all communities must understand the project and its aims and so know what they are supporting. They must also know that they can influence what happens at the People's Space.
- Varied programme. A high standard of production in light and serious pieces.
- Providing a forum for criticism and new ideas, centering on the meetings of the Artistic Council, but also involving the public.

ARTISTIC POLICY

The importance of the Space has always been centred on its preparedness to present plays which challenge the social and political conditions in South Africa – and indeed elsewhere. This policy must obviously be continued and is what makes the whole project worthwhile. The freeing of minds from thinking in a rut, the exposure of unjust practices and attitudes, the provision of a platform for those artists whose work is not catered for elsewhere, the bringing together of varied sensibilities in a stimulating atmosphere – these functions are what the project is about. It is also about fun, entertainment, music and thrills.

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THE MANTIS AND THE MOON

What Mbongi the spotted-necked otter
told Chelesi the honey-badger,
what Fudo the tortoise remembered,
and what Chakide the mongoose overheard . . .

Written by Marguerite Poland
Illustrated by Leigh Voight

Inspired by San (Bushman) mythology and other sources, Marguerite Poland's stories are beautifully told, exciting, lyrical and zoologically sound – creating for young readers the animal world of Africa South.

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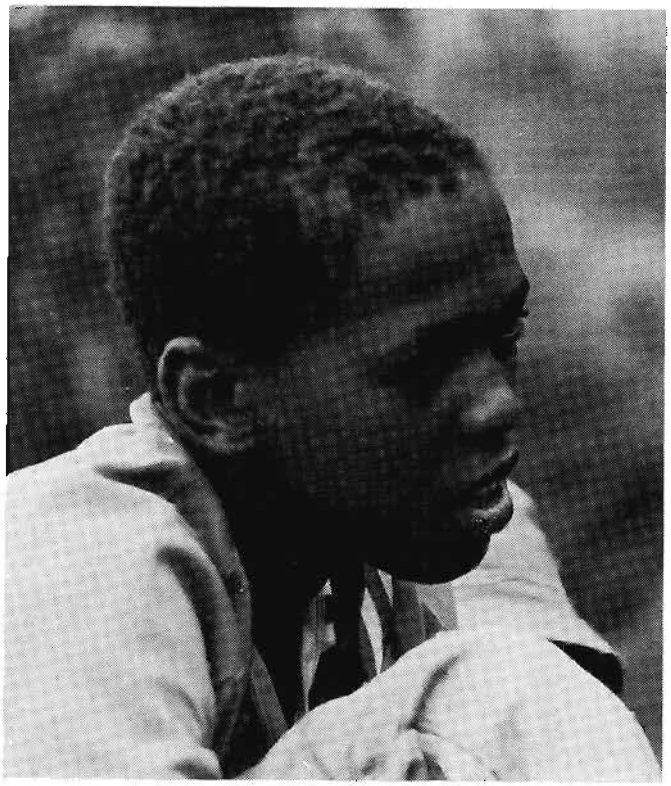


The story of Mboma

MSINGA SERIES 1

The Msinga Series is drawn from the autobiographies of children at Emdukatshani, and illustrated by the children themselves. The books are 'supplementary readers' with a difference: literacy is seen as a part of the struggle against one's environment, for a better life. Mboma and his friends tell their stories as no one else could, and invite the children of South Africa to write other stories like these.

The Story of Mboma is the first book in the Msinga Series.

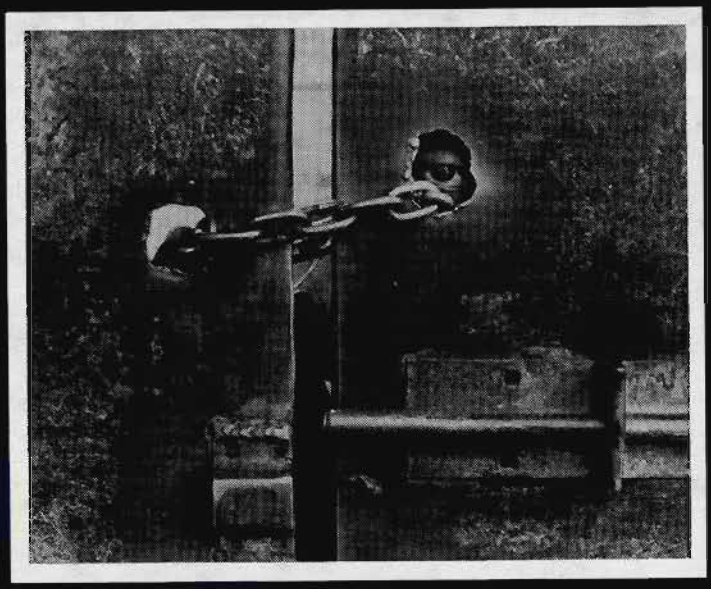
R1.25 plus GST

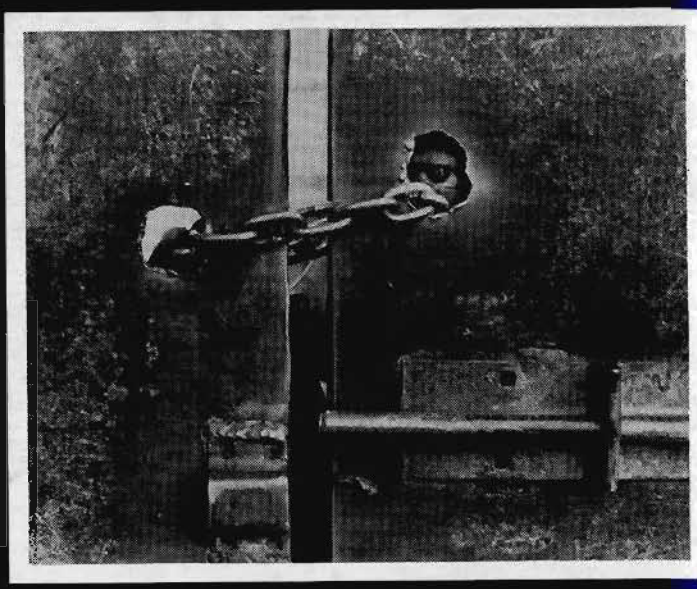
...coming soon from Ravan Press...

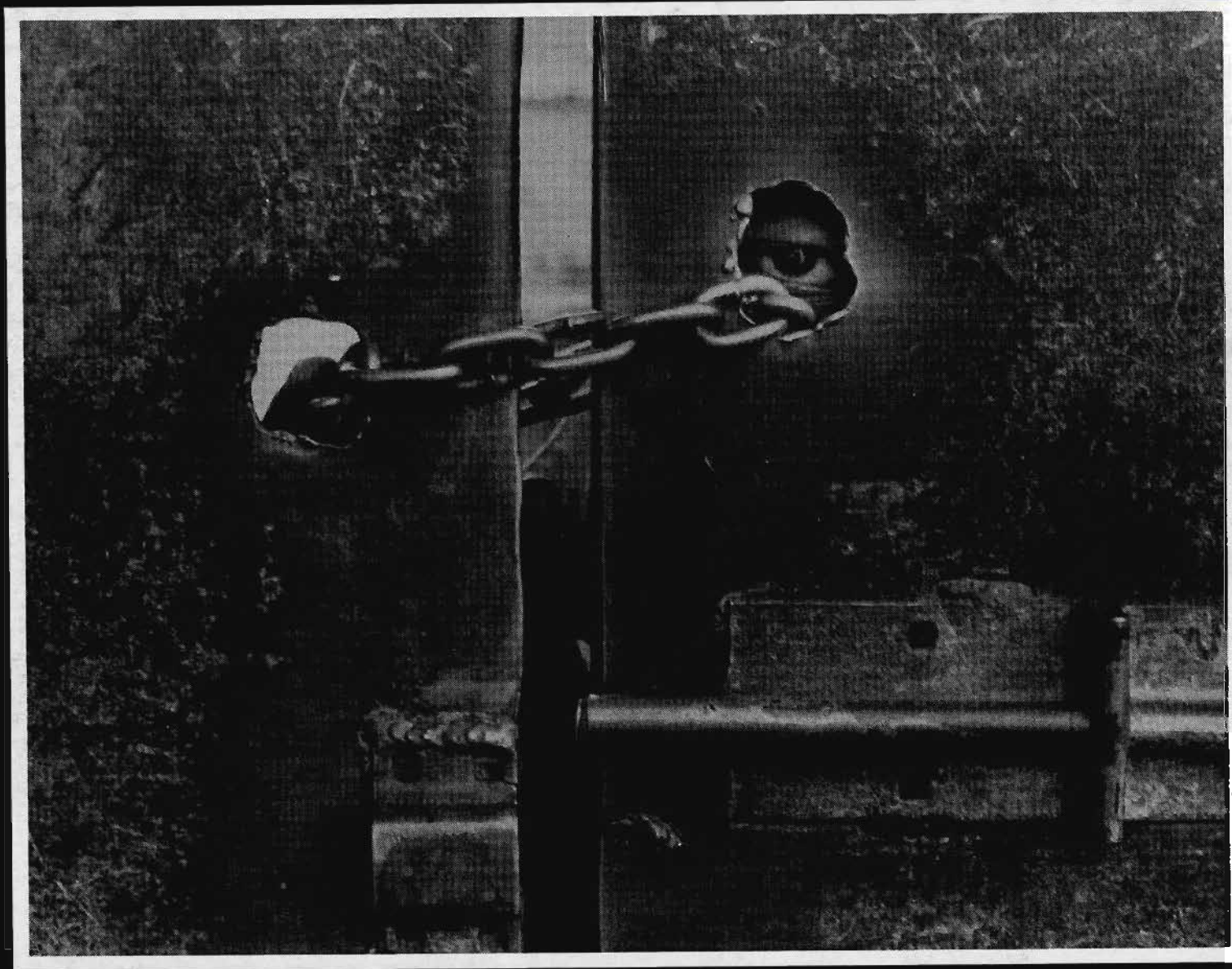
Casey & Co.

Casey's lively journalistic style in *Drum*, *The World*, and *Classic* over the three decades until his death in September 1977 made him one of the best-known and best loved black writers in South Africa. This selection of his writings is to be republished by Ravan Press early in 1980. Don't miss it!

Price: R3.85 (soft cover)







Riding Staff in this issue:

- SILUMA, BECKETT, DIKOBE, RIVE, ESSOP, MATLOU, MATSHOBA — stories
- SEROTE, MADINGOANE, LEVIN, LANGA — epics
- MOYAGA, FIKILE, NKOSI, GOCINI, PHALA gallery
- MPHAHLELE, TLALI, MSINGA CHILDREN, WOMEN WRITERS, WRITINGS FROM GROUPS
- AND OTHER COLUMNS