

Staffrider

Volume 6. No3, 1986 R1.50 (excl. GST)

Days with Poona Poon

memories of a poor white childhood

Temba Makunga

remembers Bonnevilles Sof'town and Saville
Row suits in

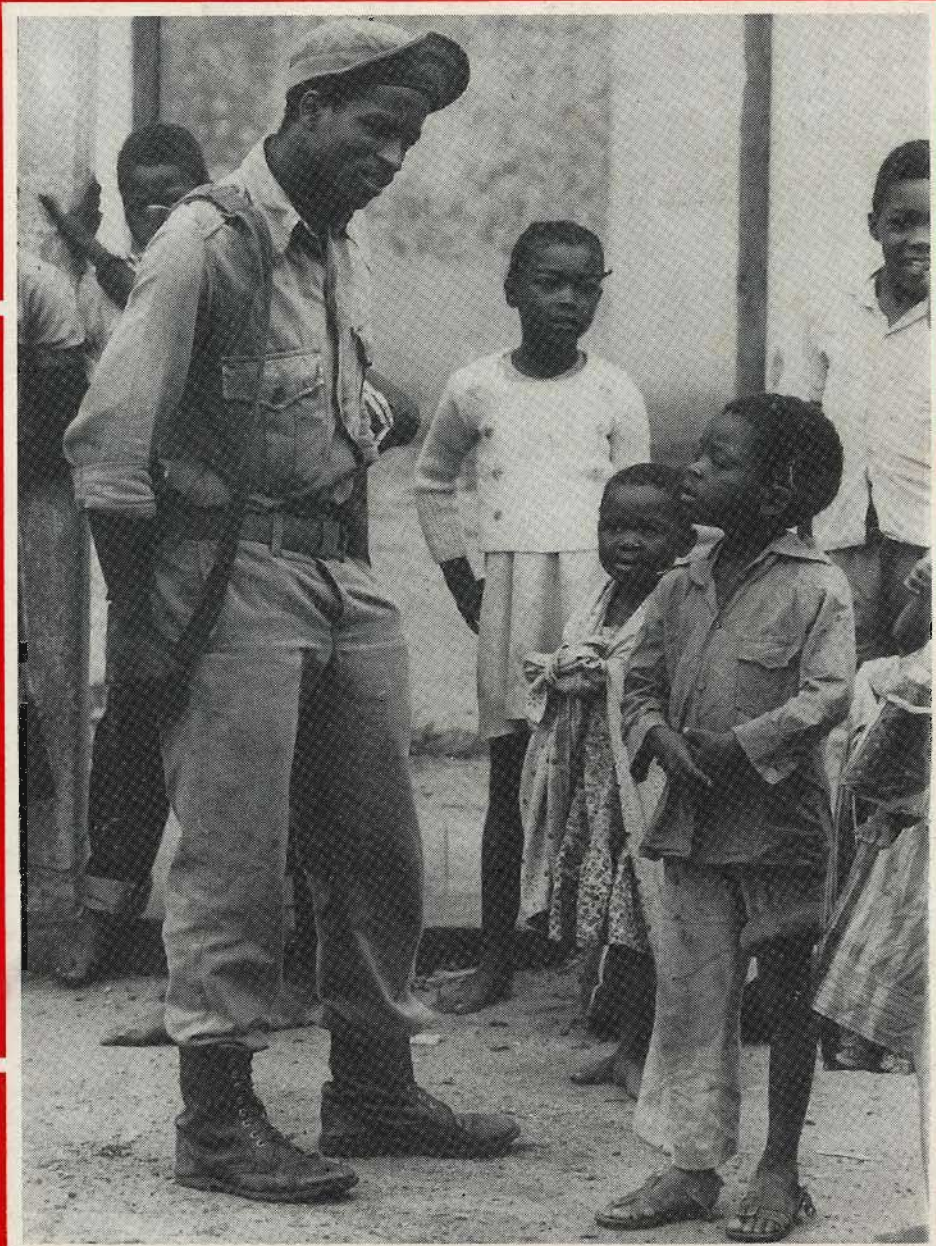
The Masquerade Ball

language,
literature
and the **Struggle**
for Liberation

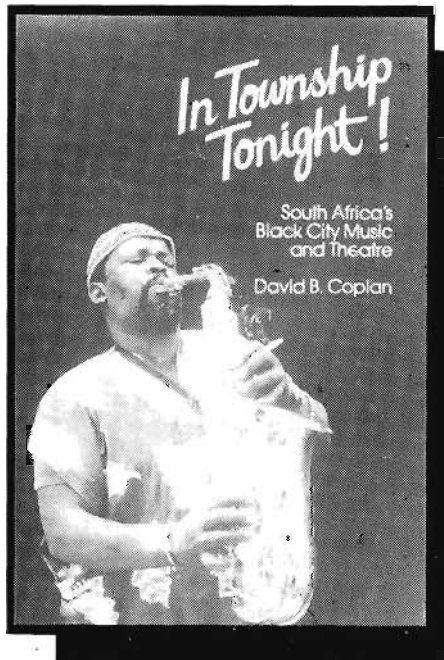
South Africa

by
Daniel Kunene

Exciting new
poetry



NEW BOOKS FROM RAVAN



In Township Tonight!

South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre
David B. Coplan

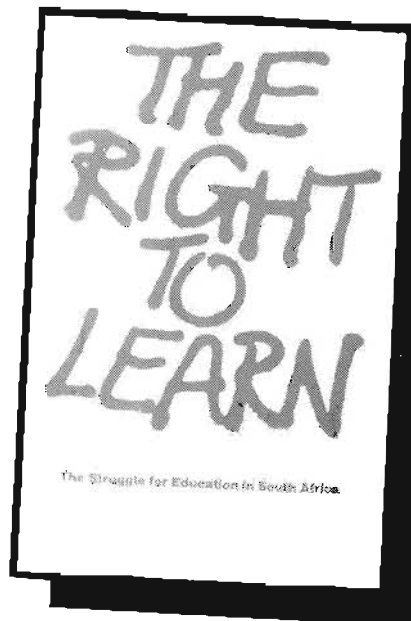
A unique social history of over three centuries of black South Africa's city music, dance and theatre.

Against the harsh background of the apartheid system black popular culture is a dynamic force which continues to give life and hope to the people of the townships such as Soweto and Sharpeville. It has produced artists of international reputation — Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand), Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela — but they represent just a small fraction of this rich, vibrant and diverse urban culture. Every night musicians and other performers draw enthusiastic audiences to dance halls, jazz clubs and shebeens throughout the townships. It is a culture which has a long and complex history.

In Township Tonight! is a tribute to the resilience and achievements of black South African artists who, in the author's words, have 'humanised a wasteland of oppression and neglect'. It is a book which will be of great interest to social historians, musicologists, jazz enthusiasts and all those concerned about contemporary South Africa and its development.

278 pages

R25.00



The Right to Learn

The Struggle for Education in South Africa
Prepared for SACHED by Pam Christie

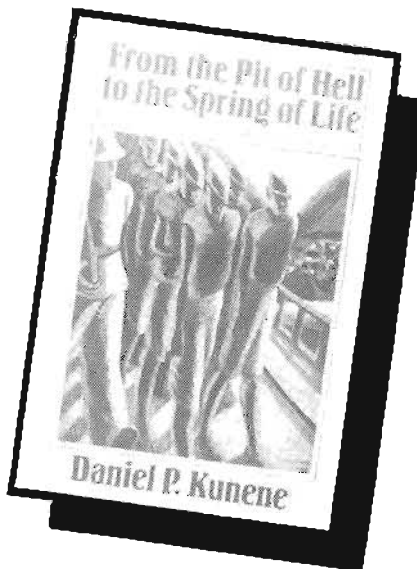
Events have shown that education in South Africa is a political issue. But is this always so?

Education is never neutral. There can be many different purposes behind an education system. That is why education can help to bring about social change — but it can also be used to prevent change.

How does apartheid education work? And how have students, teachers and parents resisted it? What is the relationship between education and jobs in South Africa? And what are the alternatives? *The Right to Learn* draws out broad issues from the ongoing education crisis in South Africa in order to look towards a changing future.

272 pages

R8.99



From the Pit of Hell to the Spring of Life

Staffrider Series No. 26

Daniel P. Kunene

The themes of bondage and freedom are central to Kunene's writing. His characters are often people facing significant choices: a man who must choose whether or not to join a strike, a young boy who must cross a swollen stream to reach his home, a man who sees the armed struggle as the only option left open to him.

Through careful observation of character and a subtle understanding of the relationship between the individual and his community, Kunene explores the complexity of the choice, its implications, its potential to enslave or liberate.

168 pages

R6.95

H.I.E. Dhlomo: Collected Works

eds. Tim Couzens and Nick Visser

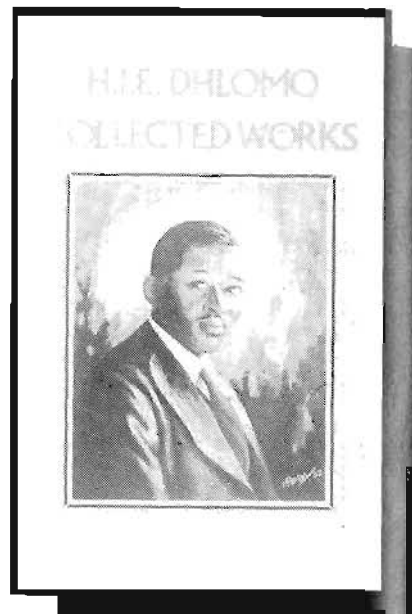
H.I.E. Dhlomo (1903-1956) was the first major black dramatist in South Africa outside of traditional forms. He wrote heroic plays about the past (on Shaka, Moshoeshe, Dingane, Ceshwayo) and biting plays about the contemporary political and social scene. He was the pioneer in the development of black theatre in South Africa, the 'father of black drama'.

Herbert Dhlomo is best known for his long autobiographical-political poem *Valley of a Thousand Hills*, but numerous other poems, often scathingly critical of the system, also survive. He experimented, too, with the short story form.

Discovered in manuscript form in a cupboard, reconstructed from personal documents or culled from newspaper archives, all the complete literary works of Herbert Dhlomo in English are present here for the first time. The work collected here throws light on the seeds of black South African literature and reaffirms Dhlomo's crucial position in South African literary history.

500 pages

R26.95



The New African

A study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo
Tim Couzens

H.I.E. Dhlomo (1903-1956) was the first major black playwright in South Africa. His plays on Shaka, Moshoeshe, Dingane and Ceshwayo, written in the 1930s, were pioneering works in South African drama. Dhlomo was also a prolific poet, and is probably best known for his epic poem *Valley of a Thousand Hills*, published in 1941. He was a major influence on black journalism and played an important behind-the-scenes role in the founding of the A.N.C. Youth League and other organisations.

This extensively illustrated biography takes both a sympathetic and critical look at Dhlomo's life and work, his role in the development of the theory and practice of literature in South Africa, his social and political ideas and his effect on the history of the black press.

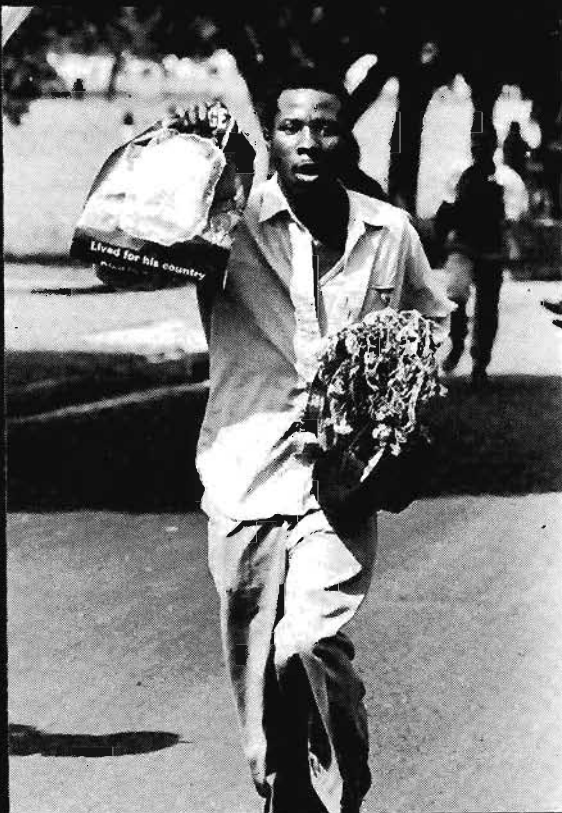
But the book is more than the biography of one man. It is a portrait of two decades in South Africa, of the politics, music, painting and social life between the two World Wars, and the gathering crisis after the Second World War. It depicts the struggle of a whole class of people to win independence in all spheres of their lives.

382 pages

R21.95

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Volume 6. No3, 1986 R1.50 (excl. GST)



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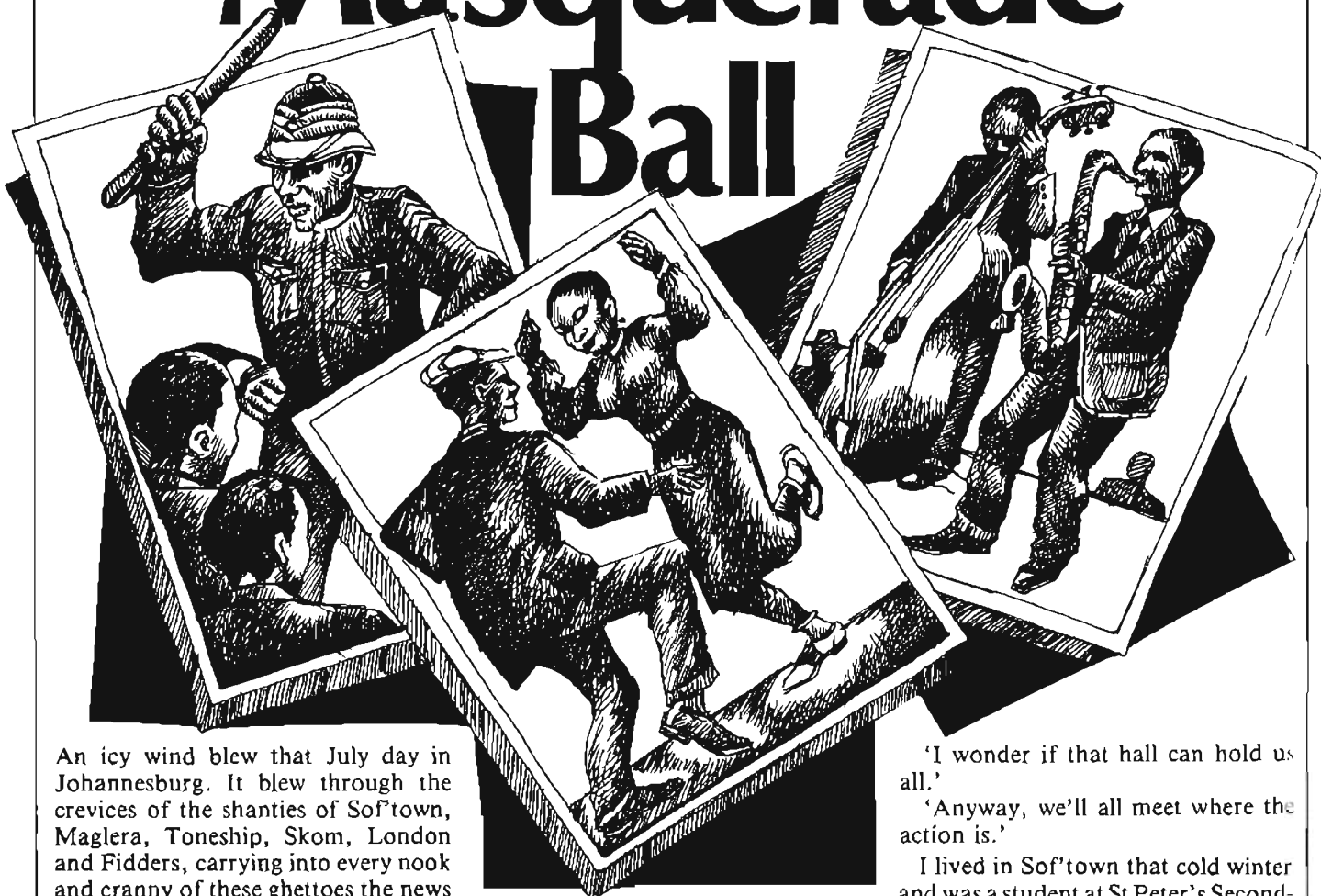
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Ivan Giesen

The Masquerade Ball

by Temba Makunga



An icy wind blew that July day in Johannesburg. It blew through the crevices of the shanties of Sof'town, Maglera, Toneship, Skom, London and Fidders, carrying into every nook and cranny of these ghettos the news of the annual TASA social function to be held that Friday night. The wind breezed and buzzed the entire Reef, from Randfontein to Springs, an untiring harbinger puffing and wheezing with gusto.

Students from everywhere — the Transvaal, Natal, the Orange Free State, the Cape Province — many of them members of the Transvaal African Students Association, had returned home for the vacation. Their talk was full of who they were expecting to meet, who they were going to date, what new swing steps they had learnt at their 'mixes', what the new jazz hits were, what they were going to wear. They stood at every street corner in their tsotsi dungarees, leather lumber-jackets, Samson overalls, mine boots, keds, jaunty nine-pieces, three-quarter length pants, culottes, skippers and foot-sacks, braving the chilly wind.

At the corner of Good Street and Victoria Road, in Sof'town, a group of tsebanyanas — wise-guys — lounged, talking as if one person was in Springs, the other in Randfontein.

'I wish the Harlem Swingsters instead of the Jazz Maniacs were sessioning tonight,' Masilo said. He was a student at Killarney in Pirara.

'The tickets are all sold out,' added Gavi from Madibane High, Maglera.

'You can always buy some at the door at black-market prices,' supplied Fana, a day-student at Salpierre, Rosettenville.

'It's a dirty shame "clevers" have to resort to this sort of thing,' remarked Nzo, a drop-out from Sansapi, Sof'town.

'Where do you come from?' S'banibani retorted. 'This wouldn't be Jozi, the City of Gold, if everybody didn't want to get rich quick.'

'I wonder if that hall can hold us all.'

'Anyway, we'll all meet where the action is.'

I lived in Sof'town that cold winter and was a student at St Peter's Secondary School. Thabo, Mangi, Skip, some other friends and I engaged two pirate taxis to take us to the hall on Polly Street where the student function was to take place. Everybody wore flashy American or European clothes bought back-door from department stores like Bonds of Bree, Levisons of Eloff or Debonair's. Others wore 'can't-gets', clothing purchased from American sailors whose boats had docked, some time or another, at Durban, Port Elizabeth, East London or Cape Town. There were groups like the 'MacGregor Boys', so called because of their adherence to this brand of shirt. We all tried to outdo one another to impress our friends and girl-friends. Those who could not afford expensive imported clothes cut off labels such as 'Bachelors of Boston' or 'Hector Powe of London' and stitched them onto locally

manufactured, equally loud suits. When asked where they had obtained their clothes, they would answer vaguely that the clothes came from their 'sgodis'. It was the label that counted.

I did not have a girl-friend but I was confident that I would meet one at the dance. We piled into the chrome-plated Bonneville's; each car was overloaded and so we had to take the back streets into the city: past Westdene into Fidders, then into Fordsburg, along Commissioner Street, quickly past Eloff, down Von Wielligh and finally into Polly. Some of us got out of the cars a block away from the hall and swaggered the rest of the way. The wind yowled at us and we turned up our 'background' — trench coat collars, hunched up our shoulders braggaciously like Styles (Richard Widmark) in *Street With No Name*. Some of us even chewed apples loudly to complete the picture.

The entrance to the hall was jammed with students trying to get in and the police were having the time of their lives swinging their clubs. It appeared there were almost as many policemen as there were students. Police in plain clothes were easily spotted because they looked so out of place with their forced gaiety.

We wormed our way into the hall like maggots boring into rotten meat. The girls had to adjust their dresses, hair-do's and make-up as well as they could in the hall because the ladies' rooms were so full even a scrawny flea would have had a hard time trying to get in. The boys took out spotless white handkerchiefs and flicked imaginary specks of dust from their Saville Row suits and shiny Executive Florsheim shoes.

'Hey! You look boss,' Fana said, slapping Mangi on his padded herring-bone tweed jacket.

'As usual,' Mangi replied. 'Sonofagun! Where did you get that ermine-collared coat from?'

'Goggle that tsotsi with his pig-skin suit. He looks so slick and chic his mother wouldn't recognize him.'

Not far from them stood someone with very dark polarized sunglasses trying to look meaner than James Cagney.

The action was on.

Everybody was swinging to the hot beat of the jazz from the Maniacs. Fingers flicking, hands clapping, hips swaying, Thabo was imitating Mabaso the saxophonist. He stood, leaning back at breaking point blowing an imaginary horn, his

checks bloated, fingers rippling over arpeggios. Suddenly he grabbed a girl and swung into an aerobic dance. His modulated movements were sinuously sensuous, insinuatingly erotic, interpretive.

The hall was packed with gaudily dressed students who had not seen each other for a whole semester. The air was stifling hot. Perspiration oozed through masks of Butone and Pond's facial creams. Metamorphosa cream had transformed the faces of some girls but had left their dark necks unblemished; Arrid Extra Dry had lost its commercial value; Playtex girdles were tormenting their victims; Crockett and Jones shoes were squeezing corns whose existence hitherto had been unknown. The show nevertheless went on.

I was admiring a staggeringly beautiful, slim, chocolate brown girl with a short skirt that made my mouth gape and my heart do a double somersault when a voice rasped:

'Moerskont! Wat kyk jy!'

'Who's your moerskont? — I can look at whomsoever and whatsoever I please!' My hand was on its way to my back pocket. There was a scuffle, some students shouting: 'Moer 'om! Moer 'om!'

Others were shouting: 'Neek 'om! Neek 'om!'

But the more cool-headed amongst us intervened: 'Cool it gents, cool it; if you have to fight, fight the 'Law. Enjoy the music. Make love, not war.' There was very little room for bloodshed and, in any case, too many cops around for anything serious to happen.

The boys took out spotless white handkerchiefs and flicked imaginary specks of dust from their Saville Row suits and shiny Executive Florsheim shoes.

But something serious did happen. A policeman had his buttoned-down, holstered 38 Special stolen from right under his nose. There was hell to play. Boys were roughly frisked by police hands, bras were ripped open, lace slips raised, nylon panties and purses searched. The Maniacs blared on as if nothing extraordinary was happening; boys and girls, unperturbed by this not unusual occurrence, formed small circles in which a boy took a girl and they demonstrated their dexterity and virtuosity in swinging to the rhythm of the deafening jazz in a dance macabre. A wiry 'priest', complete with white collar,

tails and top hat, white spats over glossy, black custom-made shoes, with a battered bible and a black bag choking with nips of Limosin brandy and Gilbey's gin, was doing a flourishing business-as-usual, selling the nips at exorbitant prices to teenagers who could not have cared less if all the gold mines of the Reef were caving in beneath them. Every so often the 'priest' would tap his foot to the beat of the music and do an amazingly agile twist. One boy was heard remarking:

'Ku guga othandayo!' — He grows old who so desires.

I had made the acquaintance of a chic little thing who said she lived in nearby Gock. She attended school at Inanda Seminary for Girls, in Natal, she told me. She was so cute I wanted to smother her with kisses and caresses. Her breasts tried frantically to break out of her high-collared silk blouse, her body was lissom and lithe in her black silk skirt. She danced beautiful, her figure twisting and turning to my touch. After some very close, languorous dances, I had visions of lying in bed with her, making her weep with joy. Later in the evening, she shyly advised me to wear a jockstrap next time I went dancing. I laughed and asked her what her name was. Tandeka.

Hell broke loose. I looked around for my friends hoping that even in that maelstrom, I would spot Skip who was sporting a lurid crimson tuxedo. Instead I saw Mangi. 'Where's everybody?' I asked.

'Skep die mova — hit the breeze — can't you see, auyile amathole — the shit's hit the fan.'

I told Tandeka that it was time to leave, as matters were getting out of hand. She agreed. We inched our way towards the exit like twins emerging from a mother's womb. Dishevelled as she was when we reached the door, Tandeka was still a picture of delectable sweetness. She straightened her sheer Berkshire stockings, and dauntily sleeked down her upcrept skirt.

If I had thought that matters were bad in the hall, outside they were gross. Furious cops with furious Alsatians straining at their leashes were using their guns to panel-beat students reluctant to be searched.

'Take your dirty paws off my pinstripe, you dirty dogs!'

'Who's a dog! You sonofabitch!' Pow! Pow! Pow! with a pistol butt on someone's Borsalino. It was skopskiet-en-donder, kak-en-betaal.

We managed, somehow, to survive the onslaught of the crazed police and

the snarling dogs. That Friday night pirate taxis were as scarce as peace on earth in South Africa. The thought of walking alone with a girl to Doorie to catch a train to Sof'town was as mind-boggling as trying to walk a tightrope a thousand feet above the ground. At 2.30 a.m. anything could happen to us: we could be murdered, poor Tandeka could be raped while I watched helplessly. Worse still we could be shanghaied to end up on some boer farm with none of our relatives or friends knowing what had happened to us. We were in a restricted area where no natives without special passes were allowed after 11 p.m. In our haste to leave the hall, we had failed to obtain night passes. Getting them would entail a repeat performance of the ordeal we'd just been through.

I was so afraid for Tandeka, I was sweating into my new Esquire socks and Bally shoes. But I had to put on a bold front for her benefit.

'Scared?' I asked, in an unintentionally hoarse voice. I immediately coughed to clear my throat.

'No,' she answered, unperturbed.

It hardly encouraged me though. I felt ill.

She must have guessed what I was going through, for she said, 'Don't worry, my mother works as a nanny about a block from here. She has a room at the back of her boss's house. Today is her day off, we can spend the night there.'

My sigh of relief could be heard above the thunder of the Maniacs' music and the howling wind. It has always intrigued me how some women can put up such a courageous front in the face of imminent danger. I gave her a quick hug.

After a fast walk down the block we turned right into Von Wielligh Street, then left into Mooi, and soon came to an ornate old building. We entered the yard through a side gate, soundlessly, the last thing we wanted was to be mistaken for burglars and shot on sight. Tandeka fished out a key from in between her prim little breasts in their Maidenform bra. She opened a door into one of the rooms, set aside at the back of the building, for servants. The door flew in from a gust of wind and Tandeka stumbled, almost falling. Inside I quickly pulled off my pointed, pinching shoes and flopped onto the single bed in the depressingly small room.

'Tired?' Tandeka asked sweetly, eyeing me as I loosened my Botany tie.

'Bushed,' I replied, but I didn't tell

her how much more relieved than tired I was. I should have kissed her then but I must have been suffering from delayed shock.

'I'll make some tea,' she offered.

A hotplate stood on a tiny table that had apparently been made especially for the room. The walls were decorated with pictures cut out from *Golden City Post* and *Zonk* magazines. In one corner of the room was a makeshift wardrobe made of a curtain hung from a rod stretched between one wall and the other. There was a rickety chair which I thought Tandeka's mother must have retrieved from the garbage collector. The concrete floor was bare and as frigid as a gaol cell. I looked at the bed wondering if it could hold us both.



As Tandeka made the tea I stood up and immediately felt the cement

floor. I put on some slippers that were under the bed. I thought they must be her mother's; they were fairly large. I watched Tandeka still engrossed in her tea making. I strode over to her and mashed my lips hard against hers, my right arm around her shoulders, her tiny breasts digging into my chest, my left arm pressing her little behind close to me. She went limp as a piece of string. My tension snapped like an overstrung bow.

I got undressed and was about to climb into bed when I heard footsteps approaching the door. I looked at Tandeka. Her big eyes in her small face were white, wide as hoops and scared.

'Quick!' she hissed. 'Behind the curtain.'

With my heart thumping like a drum, I waited with bated breath behind the drape, listening. There was a loud rap on the door.

'Who's there?' Tandeka asked timidly.

'Me,' a gruff voice responded.

I heard a key turning in the lock, then the clump, clump of boots entering the room.

'Darling, I thought you wouldn't be home till eight,' I heard Tandeka say.

'I quit. It was too bloody cold,' the gruff voice replied.

'Oh. I just got back from the dance . . . it was hot as hell in there . . . Darling, could you please fetch me some water from the tap outside; I'm so thirsty, I feel I've come from the Sahara.'

'Hell, no! Get it yourself.'

'Please,' pleaded Tandeka.

'Okay?' the voice assented after a while.

I heard springs squeaking as if they were about to snap. Thump! . . . thump! He must be pulling off his boots sitting on the bed, I surmised.

'Where are my slippers? . . . Ah there they are,' he said. I dared not move. With fists clenched, my nails cutting into my palms, and sweating like a pig, I waited until I thought he was bending down to take the peeping slippers from under the curtain. I kicked out hard, missed and almost fell on top of him. I rushed out of that room like a bat out of hell.

I still do not know if it was Tandeka's wild screams or the shrieking wind that blew me into the Polly Street Hall, scared shitless, jacketless, tieless, shirtless, shoeless, as if the Maniacs had gone to my head and I was out of my mind for coming to the masquerade ball, dressed as I was in my birthday suit.

Images of Youth

from the 1985 Staffrider Exhibition

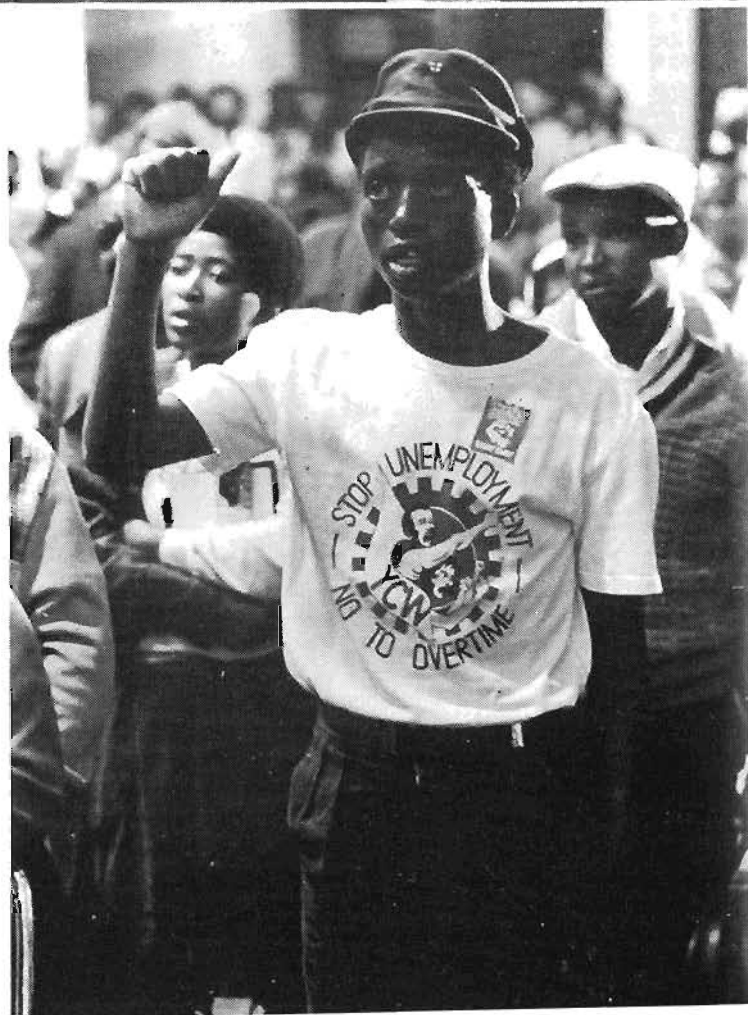
South African photographers focus on our young people, their struggles, celebrations and their lives, in 1985, The Year of the Youth.

Cradock — Julian Cobbing





On the March — Cecil Sols





SADF Festival — Gideon Mendel

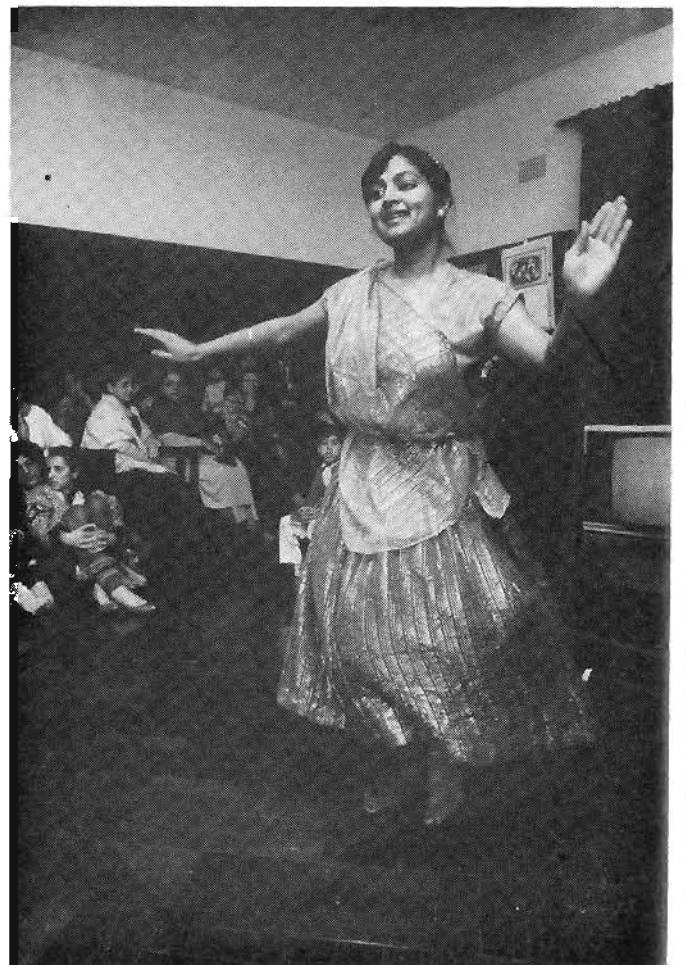


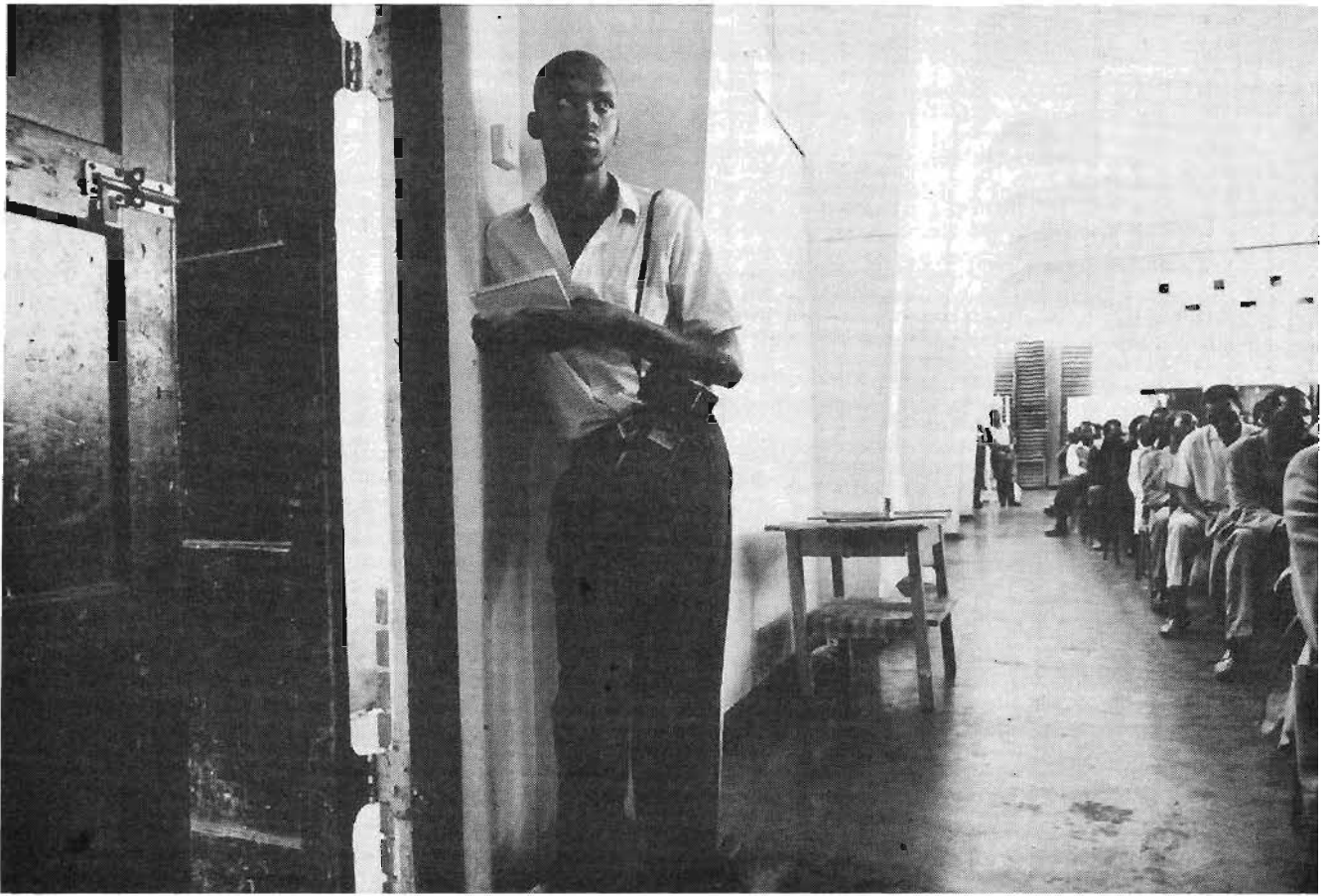
Hillbrow — Wendy Schwegmann



Street Performer — Paul Weinberg

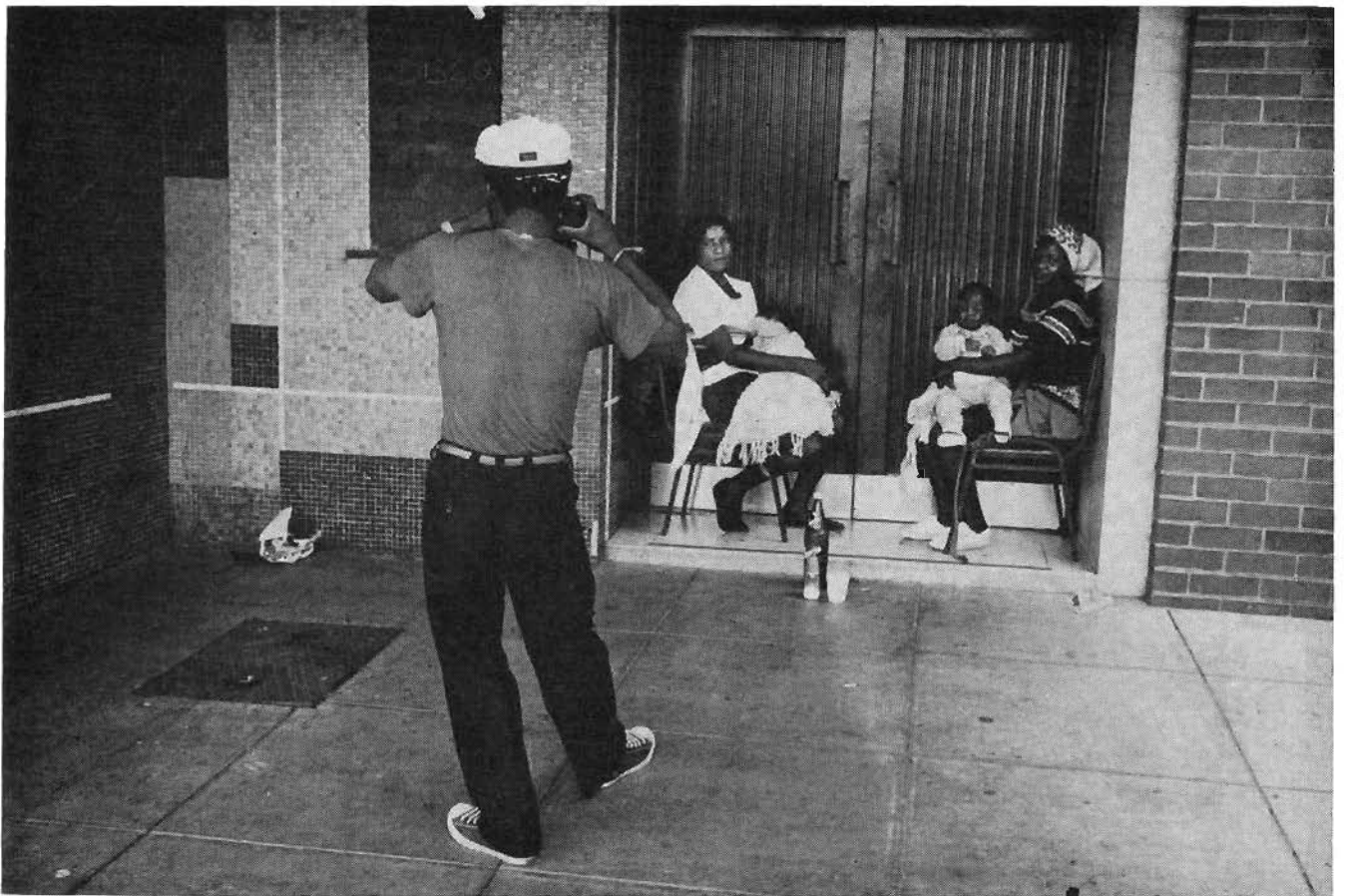
Women's Cultural Day — Paul Weinberg





Journalist at YMCA, Beatrice Street, Durban — Omar Badsha

Family Portrait, Beatrice Street, Durban — Omar Badsha



Een Maandag Aand

Ek loop toe nou die aand vir ou Swanie in Nuweland raak waar Tafelberg oor ons waak.

'Fok my! Wat het van jou geword!'

God. Wat hét van ons geword?

Ons is toe daar in by die New Sportsman, ou Swanie soos 'n óú bekende die deur in. Hy lag en gooi 'n vet arm om my skouer.

'Fok my! Jy lyk nie 'n dag ouer!'

Ek sê ons moet loop, sy vrou wag.

'Fok haar!' sê hy, en gee 'n bitter lag.

Maar dit was toe al waaroor hy wou praat, oor hierdie lewensmaat.

Hy het later begin kak soek, sommer op almal gevloek, en toe gooi die barman ons daar uit.

'Fok jou!' skreeu hy, en breek 'n ruit.

Hy moer toe 'n poliesman neer, plat op die teer. Toe loop staan hy in die middel van die straat en pis, reg voor a Tramways bus. Ek slinger daar weg, ek onthou nie waar, ek voel sleg en ek voel naar.

Ek het later loop lê in my kar en huil soos 'n kind, en daar het iemand my die volgende dag gevind.

Die son was al hoog, die dag aan die gang. Ek het wild om my gekyk, skuldig en bang. En daar waar ou Swanie dood is, het mense geklim in 'n Tramways bus.

Die Gek en Ek

Ek skeer die Gek,

maar hy beweeg.

Ek sny sy nek,

hy bloei hom leeg.

Four Poems by Mario Maccani

Die goeie jare is weg, vir altyd. Verby!

Ek onthou nog vir Maitland
met sy stink peanuts wind,
en vir ou Ben Malherbe.
Ou Bennie Ongeêrwe.

Hands that hold and hands that heal,
hands work hard to earn a meal.
Dit was Bennie se opinie
van sy Mammie en sy Pappie.

Maar eendag kry Bennie balhare,
en hy ontdek 'n haat van jare,
en hy word 'n Maitland soldaat,
'n engeltjie van haat.

He shouts and he screams,
he wets his dreams.
He kicks and he bites,
he lives for the nights.

'Die goeie jare is weg, vir altyd. Verby!'
Dit sê ou Bennie een aand vir my.
'The hand of friendship has become the fist of vengeance!'
En ou Bennie se stem het geklink soos 'n duisend fire engines.

Die Robben Eiland Two-Step

Vader, u gee vir my lewe.
Steek dit in jou gat.
Op koue sement lê ek en bewe,
Ek is nou siek en sat.

N.G. Kerk en melktert,
dis alles snert.
Dis fokkol werd.

Ons vir jou Suid Afrika . . .
blah, blah, blah.
Ha, ha, ha.

WEAK OF FAITH

by J.V. Pillay

'Longtail, hey Longtail! Come over here. We've had a new man in today.' Monohorn's face cracked in a wide grin of pleasure.

Longtail bounded across, sending upwards a trail of lively sparks as he cracked the coals with his whip. 'So what the hell,' he replied, 'we get them in every day. Why the excitement?'

Monohorn rubbed the stub of his missing horn; something he did every time his feelings were hurt. 'What can I do if I love my job? Do you know that —'

'That you don't assign case numbers to your charges and you know each one by name?' Longtail completed the sentence for him. 'Yes

Longtail plunged his fork into the ash and settled his bottom upon its handle. 'Fire away,' he said, 'I'm all ears.'

Mono. I know that. I've heard it hundreds of times before. But just you wait till they catch up with you....' Here he slapped the arrow at the end of his tail onto his hairy palm.

Monohorn blew the ash off a large boulder and sat down. 'But this fellow's story, Longtail, you must hear it. His name's Rhaven. Rhaven Rambally.'

Longtail plunged his fork into the ash and settled his bottom upon its handle. 'Fire away,' he said, 'I'm all ears.'

Rhaven was the fifth son born to his parents. His father worked in a shoe factory; his mother — well, she was always at home. After him two daughters were born.

With four brothers before him Rhaven was fortunate. He was able to complete high school and was even encouraged to further his education. But the lad knew his limitations.

Mr Rambally spoke to his boss, who in turn spoke to his supervisor, who spoke to his manager who decided that Rhaven would be just the man to assist in the dispatch department. And thus, at nineteen, like so many others, Rhaven took up employment alongside his father.

Four years later, the notice above Rhaven's door announced to anyone who passed: 'Dispatch Manager'.

'You see,' his mother told him, 'that's what comes of finishing school.' Rhaven smiled up at her; the smile she returned spoke of love, trust and pride.

Years passed. Then a new gravestone appeared in the city's northern cemetery: 'Bisnath Rambally. Born 7.12.1926. Died 2.4.1974. May his soul rest in peace.'

Rhaven assumed a new set of responsibilities. He had his diabetic mother and two sisters — one in school and one at college — to provide for. His four brothers, all married, only sometimes remembered their mother. But the Rambally household survived, and Mrs Rambally knew that with Rhaven, her security was assured.

Despite the load he carried, Rhaven was a satisfied man. At the dawn of the New Year, he eagerly awaited two events.

At the end of that year his sister would emerge from her three-year cocoon of books as a qualified teacher. The second event was more personal: 'You are invited to a reception in honour of the marriage of Rhaven Rambally to' This was to take place in January.

Bheena loved her new home. Only a month after the marriage Mrs Rambally wondered how she had ever managed without her newest daughter-in-law.

'Amah,' Bheena said one day, and



then remained silent.

'What is it?' the elder lady asked.

Bheena's left eyelid twitched; an action that did not go unnoticed. 'Oh, Amah, I don't know how to say this.'

'Say what, child?' She took the arms of her daughter-in-law and held her closely. Bheena's body began to shake.

'Bheena? What's wrong?' And then Mrs Rambally heard the giggles. 'I'm just being childish,' said the younger woman, inserting her hand between them and rubbing her tummy. Both women began laughing.

'I'm so glad, Bheena. And Rhaven must be thrilled!'

'Oh yes, he is, Amah. he can't wait for the month to end. Russells is going to have a sale and cots are going to be sold at half price.'

Bheena was gently led to the closest chair; soon both were seated and deep in small talk.

Bheena reached down and meshed her fingers with those of her husband. Snuggling up to his ear she said, 'Could you stop at the chemist's for me tomorrow?'

'And what's wrong with you?' Rhaven asked.

'Two problems,' she teased. 'Both are swelling problems. One, I'm swollen with child. Two, I'm swollen with pride.'

'It's a bit late for the chemist to help with the first problem,' Rhaven replied. 'And for the second problem I recommend immediate treatment. Or the result may be fatal.'

Later she resumed the conversation sleepily.

'Now seriously, love, I'm out of nail varnish, and you know the place where you can get it. Please!'

'Of course I'll do it. But remind me in the ' His voice trailed off as sleep enveloped him.

Bheena smiled as she touched her husband's lips with hers.

A heavy boot swung out of a gloomy doorway; Rhaven fell headlong.

The East Street Pharmacy stood about two hundred metres down the street from the factory where Rhaven worked. Getting the Johannesburg order processed meant almost three hours overtime for Rhaven. As he rushed out towards the gate, he glanced at his watch. Fortunately, the pharmacy closed at eight o'clock; the ten minutes he had should be sufficient.

'Hamba kahle!' uniformed Moses

called to him from his tiny cubicle at the gate.

'Have a good weekend,' Rhaven called as he dashed out.

Pietermaritzburg was quiet. Insects orbited the cones of light that poured down onto almost deserted streets. The few people who were to be seen were all in a hurry — presumably to get home. Most of them were over-timers like himself. A winter breeze stirred the abandoned newspapers and empty packets, scolding them for the carelessness of those who left them there.

At one minute to eight, Rhaven was out of the shop and sprinting towards the bus-stop.

A heavy boot swung out of a gloomy doorway; Rhaven fell headlong. The crash that came from his inner breast pocket was unmistakable. Angry, he tried to turn, only to be yanked up by two burly hands holding his collar.

'You've broken the bottle!' He spoke through painful jaws, at the same time reaching out and grabbing his assailant's hair.

'Your money, you bastard!' the voice commanded. Rhaven appeared not to hear; his fingers curled more tightly.

'You've broken the bottle! How am I — ' One of the hands let go of his collar; an eye-blink later, a long narrow blade flashed.

Longtail straightened and stretched his cramped joints. He pulled out the fork that he had been sitting on and hung it on one of the hooks that lined the wall nearby.

'Interesting story,' he responded, 'but of course the tale is not unique. In any case, what the devil can we do?' He examined the wall, adorned with dozens of strange implements.

Monohorn's hand strayed to the scar on his head. 'That's true,' he opined, 'there'd be no fun for us otherwise.'

Longtail chose a cat-o'-nine-tails; it had been a long time since he had used that. 'You going back to Rhaven?' he asked.

'Of course.'

'Here, take this, It works like a charm.' He threw him a chain, at the end of which was a sooty spiked ball.

'Thanks,' Monohorn replied. He rose and walked off, still rubbing the spot on his head.

Morris Moodley lacked nothing. By any standard, life in his home was normal. One afternoon, in his fifteenth year, his mother answered a tap on her door.

'Are you Mrs Moodley?'

'Yes,' she managed to say.

'Is Ganas Moodley your son?' She sucked in a deep breath.

'Yes, he is.'

'Don't worry, Mrs Moodley, your son's okay. But he's been in a bit of trouble and I'd like you to come to the station with me. He's there.'

'Come in and wait,' she told the policeman, 'I'll be with you just now.'

It turned out that Ganas and three of his friends had left school during their lunch break and broken into a Morris Minor parked nearby.

They headed westwards, reached the Midmar Dam; then crossed the island between the two-lane freeway and aimed the car towards Pietermaritzburg.

Ganas, who drove this time, freewheeled the car down the decline between Hilton and the city. He lost control on a left hand curve; the Morris screamed onto the central strip. The car stopped after it had flattened several metres of hedge that had always been carefully tended by the Roads Department.

Ganas had thus come to the attention of that segment of the human population referred to as the Law. In the furore that followed, Ganas swapped first names with the stolen car.

Morris Moodley was born.

If one year later Mrs Moodley was asked where her son was she would have been unable to answer. At that time Morris had already been leading, for a month, the group of malcontents who called themselves the 'Studs'. They caused no little fear in the Cape Town suburb which was their territory. It had not taken Morris long to become top Stud.

Mr and Mrs Moodley were greatly surprised when they were told that their son was not a unique case; he was simply one of hundreds of youngsters who opted out of society.

The police could do nothing — unless perhaps Morris was apprehended after committing another felony.

The Studs continued their campaign of hold-ups, muggings, car thefts, and other activities for about three years. Then Morris decided to move to Johannesburg and the group broke up. The Johannesburg stay lasted several years; Morris yearned for the coast again — but not Durban.

An examination of Port Elizabeth police files from that time shows a sudden leap in all kinds of petty crimes. For about two years, no amount of police effort could restore the situation to normal. And then,

for no reason apparent to the law, the crimes abated.

Morris had ripped out lots of telephones before; this one would be easy.

Natal's capital could not bar one of her sons from returning. Morris Moodley was back home.

He had no difficulty in discovering that his mother, now a widow, lived with his eldest brother. He dared not visit her at her home. Further enquiries revealed that she worked at Moosa's Family Store.

Morris had ripped out lots of telephones before; this one would be easy. Only when he saw the coins he had placed on the shelf did he realise that he'd come to actually use the phone.

'May I speak to Mrs Moodley?'

'Which Mrs Moodley, please?'

'Mrs R Moodley. Rangini Moodley.'

'One moment please.'

The street was getting busier. In half an hour the five o'clock Friday stampede would begin.

Morris scanned the art and literature etched painstakingly on the walls of the telephone booth.

'Hello, are you there?' The voice came over the phone.

'Yes. Mrs Moodley?'

'One moment, sir.' The receptionist said.

'Hello.' His mother's voice. He was quiet.

'Hello, Rangini Moodley here. Who's speaking, please?'

'Amah?'

'Seelan! Why are you calling?'

'No, Amah. Ganas. Remember?'

The floor of the booth was a precise square, well worn by many feet. Bubblegum, Simba Chips, ice-cream — other telephone users had left their mementoes.

'Could I see you, Amah?' Now she recognised the voice.

'Ganas! What a surprise! You know where I'm staying? Can you come home?'

'No, Amah, I can't. What time do you finish work?'

'Five o'clock.'

'Meet you at the bus stop next to Asmall's?'

'Okay, Ganas. We'll do that.'

'See you later, then. Bye.'

'Ganas!'

'Yes?'

'I love you, son.'

'It's all right, Ma. See you at five.'

Morris stared at the strangely distorted image of the checkered tablecloth through his third beer. The

bar-room of Hotel Thistle had been a lot more full when Morris first came in. Now, only a few men remained.

The reunion had gone no better (or no worse) than Morris had expected. They had stood under the awning of Asmall's Building for almost an hour; five buses that Mrs Moodley could have taken came and went — but they continued talking.

Mr Moodley had died in a motor accident three years previously. A notice was placed in a Cape Town newspaper — this, at the time when Morris was in Johannesburg. Seelan, well-off, upright, eldest brother Seelan, offered to take his mother in. She had no alternative.

One final swallow, and Morris's glass was empty. He glanced at the grimy bar clock.

Morris was rarely mentioned.

At the end of the hour Mrs Moodley had pressed a ten rand note into her son's hand. Morris had refused it.

'Will I see you again?' she had asked.

'Maybe. Maybe not.'

'You'll be here long?'

'I don't know.'

'Where are you staying?'

'With friends.'

Her eyes were brimming with tears as she stepped onto the bus.

One final swallow, and Morris's glass was empty. He glanced at the grimy bar clock — seven thirty — pushed his hands as far as they would go into his pockets, and, with hunched shoulders, stepped out onto the street. Pietermaritzburg had changed considerably; where he remembered that there had been stop streets, there were now robots. He breathed deeply, taking in the evening odours of the city that had spawned him.

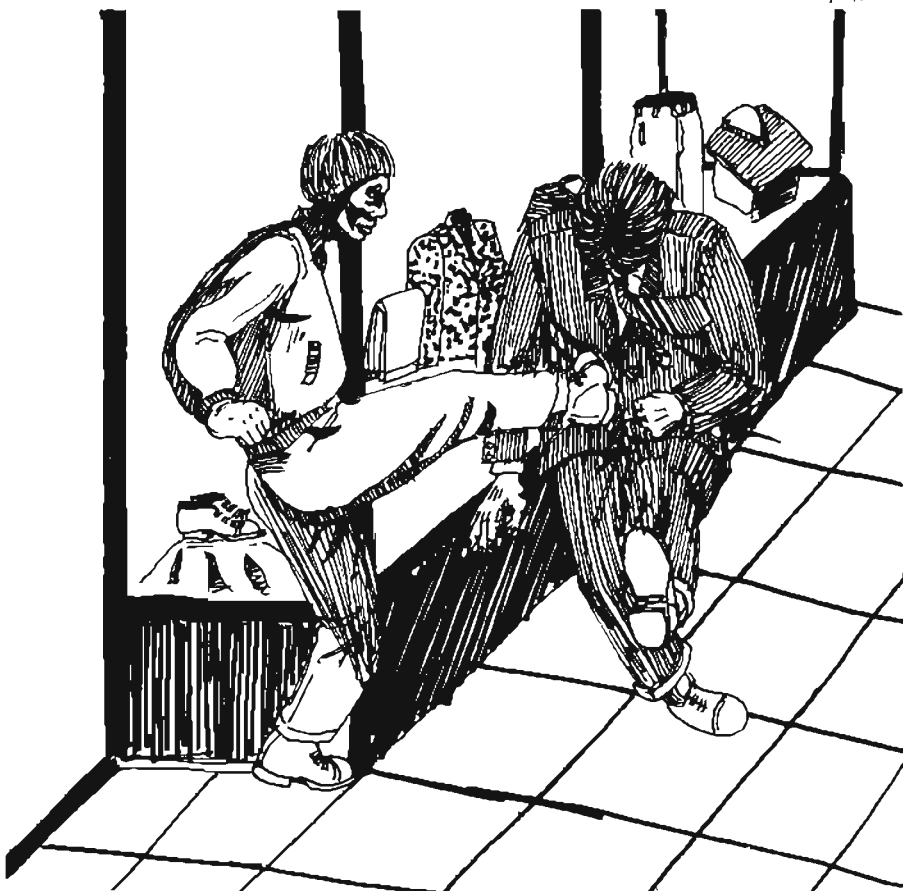
He trudged past a chemist's shop — still open — a second-hand furniture shop, a motor car spares shop and paused to look into a window, behind which stood gleaming motorcycles. He examined each in turn, then continued his aimless journey.

From well behind him came the sound of running footsteps.

Like so many times before, he ducked into the nearest shop entrance and waited. Like so many times before, the running figure soon reached the spot where he waited. Like so many times before, Morris Moodley stuck out his heavy boot.

At the corner, he kept running unaware that the robot was red. The angry squeal of rubber on tar shattered the brittle June evening.

continued on page 45



Poetry

Wind and water on the coast of Africa

I
over the long backs of the mountains
the wind comes, howling
in the morning, through the midday heat
as the moon rises
old Khoisan voices, strong with sorrow
'the Cape is our birthplace, we long
for its beautiful waters'
wind howling wind slashing the water
and the mountains glimmer, rage in the spring flowers

II
the blue current moves out of the bay:
on this hot morning I follow it round the mountain
at my back the wind, small and cold
saying this is the spring, but remember
the winter, the howling winter rooted in this sand,
these mountains

sunlight moves like sleep through my bones;
beneath the white silk sand damp sea pulse
sucking at my toes, my tunnelling fingers;
the voices of people are seagull calls

their bright shapes blow like leaves into the sun:
these are van der Stel's leaves, they grow well here

III
stretched out on the edge of Africa
I lie, still as a shell, sea clean, salt dry
the yellow protea crowns, red aloe spears
reach down, under their tangled leaves
my hair takes root

and the wind rises
shaking the spears and crowns
shaking the sun off my skin
'we long, we long
long as the beautiful waters
as the wild coast
as the mountains curved around us
for our birthplace'

but the roots hold,
and the sea breathes evenly:
under the howling wind I hear it
roaring softly in my ears

Karen Press

Poetry

Knocks on the Door

The children have gone
From the breasts of their beloved mothers
They have left at dawn
Oh! black mothers, in tears.
When they come back
With anger, fire and spears
They will knock harder on this bolted door
Oh! I fear and hate violence
Do you hear me in the three chambers?

Wonga Tabata

Black Mother

(To all suffering mothers of our country, South Africa)

I have looked at your ash grey face
At your dry chapped muttering mouth and expres-
sionless eyes
Muttering about rent increases and rising gst
On a chilly Monday morning

Suffering mother, on Sunday you buried your husband
Killed by lung cancer in a mine hospital
Today you are rushing to George Grey Avenue
To cheer up Pieter and Johanna
Who did not get to tour Europe in their father's jet

Black Mother, you work and laugh during the day
You pray, cry and hope at night
Daylight hides our thoughts and feelings
Darkness is the time for aspirations
Black Mother, FEAR is the ruler.

Wonga Tabata

Coffee for the Road

by Alex La Guma

They were past the maize-lands and driving through the wide, low, semi-desert country that sprawled away on all sides in reddish brown flats and depressions. The land, going south, was scattered with scrub and thorn bushes, like a vast unswept carpet. Far to the right the metal vanes of a windmill pump turned wearily in the faint morning breeze as if it had just been wakened to set reluctantly about its duty of sucking water from the miserly earth. The car hurtled along the asphalt road, its tyres roaring along the black surface.

'I want another sandwich, please,' Zaida said. She huddled in the blanketed space among the suitcases in the back. She was six years old and weary from the long, speeding journey, and her initial interest in the landscape had evaporated, so that now she sagged tiredly in the padded space, ignoring the parched gullies and stunted trees that whisked past.

'There's some in the tin. You can help yourself, can't you?' the woman at the wheel said, without taking her eyes off the road. 'Do you want to eat some more, too, Ray?'

'Not hungry any more,' the boy beside her replied. He was gazing out at the barbed-wire fence that streamed back outside the turned-up window.

'How far's it to Cape Town, Mummy?' Zaida asked, munching a sandwich.

'We'll be there tomorrow afternoon,' the woman said.

'Will Papa be waiting?'

'Of course.'

'There's some sheep,' the boy, Ray, said. A scattering of farm buildings went by, drab, domino-shaped structures along a brown slope.

The mother had been driving all night and she was fatigued, her eyes red, with the feeling of sand under the lids, irritating the eyeballs. They had stopped for a short while along the road the night before; parked in a gap off the road outside a small town. There had been nowhere to put up for the night: the hotels were for Whites only. In fact, only Whites lived in these towns and everybody else, except for the servants, lived in tumbledown mud houses in the locations beyond. Besides, they did not know anybody in this part of the country.

Now and then a car passed theirs, headed in the opposite direction, going north, crashing by in a shrill whine of slipstream.

Dawn had brought depression, gloom, ill-temper, which she tried to control in the presence of the children. After having parked on that stretch of road until after midnight, she had started out again and driven, the children asleep, through the rest of the night.

Now she had a bad headache too, and when Zaida said, 'Can I have a meatball, Mummy?' she snapped irritably: 'Oh, dash it all! It's there, eat it, can't you?'

The landscape ripped by, like a film being run backwards, red-brown, yellow-red, pink-red, all studded with sparse bushes and broken boulders. To the east a huge outcrop of rock strata rose abruptly from the arid earth, like a titanic wedge of purple-and-lavender-layered cake topped with chocolate-coloured boulders.

The car passed over a stretch of gravel road and the red dust boiled behind it like a flame-shot smoke-screen. A bird, its long, ribbon-like tail streaming behind it, skimmed the brush beyond the edge of the road, flitting along as fast as the car.

'Look at that funny bird, Mummy,' the boy, Ray, cried, and pressed his face to the dust-filmed glass.

The mother ignored him, trying to relax behind the wheel, her feet moving unconsciously, but skilfully, on the pedals in the floor. She thought that it would have been better to have taken a train, but Billy had written that he'd need the car because he had a lot of contacts to visit. She hoped the business would be better in the Cape. Her head ached and she drove automatically. She was determined to finish the journey as quickly as possible.

Ray said, 'I want some coffee.' And he reached for the thermos flask on the rack under the dashboard. Ray could take care of himself, he did not need to have little things done for him.

'Give me some too,' Zaida called from the back, among the suitcases.

'Don't be greedy,' Ray said to her. 'Eating, eating, eating.'

'I'm not greedy. I want a drink of coffee.'

'You had coffee this morning.'

'I want some more.'

'Greedy. Greedy.'

'Children,' the mother said wearily, 'children, stop that arguing.'

'He started first,' Zaida said.

'Stop it. Stop it,' the mother told her.

Ray was unscrewing the cap of the thermos. When it was off he drew the cork and looked in. 'Man, there isn't any,' he said. 'There isn't any more coffee.'

'Well, that's just too bad,' the mother said.

'I want a drink,' Zaida cried. 'I'm thirsty, I want some coffee.'

The mother said wearily: 'Oh, all right. But you've got to wait. We'll get some somewhere up the road. But wait, will you?'

The sun was a coppery smear in the flat blue sky, and the country-side, scorched yellow and brown, like an immense slice of toast, quivered and danced in the haze. The woman drove on, tiredly, her whole mind rattling like a stale nut. Behind the sunglasses her eyes were red-rimmed and there was a stretched look about the dark, handsome, Indian face. Her whole system felt taut and stretched like the wires of a harp, but too tight so that a touch might snap any one of them.

The miles purred and growled and hummed past: flat country and dust-coloured *koppies*, the baked clay *dongas* and low ridges of hills. A shepherd's hut, lonely as a lost soul, crouched against the shale-covered side of a flat hill; now and then a car passed theirs, headed in the opposite direction, going north, crashing by in a shrill whine of slip-stream. The glare of the sun quivered and quaked as if the air was boiling.

'I want some coffee,' Zaida repeated petulantly. 'We didn't have no coffee.'

'We'll buy some coffee,' her mother told her. 'We'll buy some for the road as soon as we get to a café. Stop it now. Eat another sandwich.'

'Don't want sandwich. Want coffee.'

A group of crumbling huts, like scattered, broken cubes, passed them in a hollow near the road and a band of naked, dusty brown children broke from the cover of a sheep-pen, dashing to the side of the road, cheering and waving at the car. Ray waved back, laughing, and then they were

out of sight. The wind-scoured metal pylon of a water-pump drew up and then disappeared too. Three black men trudged in single file along the roadside, looking ahead into some unknown future, wrapped in tattered, dusty blankets, oblivious of the heat, their heads shaded by the ruins of felt hats. They did not waver as the car spun past them but walked with fixed purpose.

The car slowed for a steel-slung bridge and they rumbled over the dry, rock-strewn bed of a stream. A few sheep, their fleeces black with dust, sniffed among the boulders, watched over by a man like a scarecrow.

At a distance, they passed the coloured location and then the African location, hovels of clay and clapboard strewn like discoloured dice along a brown slope, with tiny people and ant-like dogs moving among them. On another slope the name of the town was spelled out in whitewashed boulders.

The only other customer was a small white boy with tow-coloured hair, a face like a near-ripe apple and a running nose.

The car passed the sheds of a railway siding, with the sheep milling in corrals, then lurched over the crossing and bounced back on to the roadway. A coloured man went by on a bicycle, and they drove slowly past the nondescript brown front of the Railway Hotel, a line of stores, and beyond a burnt hedge a group of white men with red, sun-skinned, wind-honed faces sat drinking at tables in front of another hotel with an imitation Dutch-colonial facade. There was other traffic parked along the dusty, gravel street of the little town: powdered cars and battered pick-up trucks, a wagon in front of a feed store. An old coloured man swept the pavement in front of a shop, his reed broom making a hissing sound, like gas escaping in spurts.

Two white youths, pink-faced and yellow-haired, dressed in khaki shirts and shorts, stared at the car, their eyes suddenly hostile at the sight of a dark woman driving its shiny newness, metal fitting factory-smooth under the film of road dust. The car spun a little cloud behind it as it crept along the red-gravel street.

'What's the name of this place, Mummy?' the boy, Ray, asked.

'I don't know,' the mother replied,

tired, but glad to be able to slow down. 'Just some place in the Karroo.'

'What's the man doing?' Zaida asked, peering out through the window.

'Where?' Ray asked, looking about. 'What man?'

'He's gone now,' the little girl said. 'You didn't look quickly.' Then, 'Will we get some coffee now?'

'I think so,' the mother said. 'You two behave yourselves and there'll be coffee. Don't you want a cool drink?'

'No,' the boy said. 'You just get thirsty again afterwards.'

'I want a lot of coffee with lots of sugar,' Zaida said.

'All right,' the mother said. 'Now stop talking such a lot.'

Up ahead, at the end of a vacant lot, stood a café. Tubular steel chairs and tables stood on the pavement outside, in front of its shaded windows. Its front was decorated with old Coca Cola signs and painted menus. A striped awning shaded the tables. In the wall facing the vacant space was a foot-square hole where non-whites were served, and a group of ragged coloured and African people stood in the dust and tried to peer into it, their heads together, waiting with forced patience.

The mother drove the car up and brought it to a stop in front of the café. Inside a radio was playing and the slats of the venetian blinds in the windows were clean and dustless.

'Give me the flask,' the mother said, and took the thermos bottle from the boy. She unlatched the door. 'Now, you children, just sit quiet. I won't be long.'

'She opened the door and slid out and, standing for a moment on the pavement, felt the exquisite relief of loosened muscles. She stretched herself, enjoying the almost sensual pleasure of her straightened body. But her head still ached badly and that spoiled the momentary delight which she felt. With the feeling gone, her brain was tired again and her body once more a tight-wound spring. She straightened the creases out of the smart tan suit she was wearing but left the jacket unbuttoned. Then, carrying the thermos flask, she crossed the sidewalk, moving between the plastic-and-steel furniture into the café.

Inside the café was cool and lined with glass cases displaying cans and packages like specimens in some futuristic museum. From somewhere at the back of the place came the smell and sound of potatoes being

fried. An electric fan buzzed on a shelf and two gleaming urns, one of tea and the other of coffee, steamed against the back wall.

The only other customer was a small white boy with tow-coloured hair, a face like a near-ripe apple and a running nose. He wore a washed-out print shirt and khaki shorts, and his dusty bare feet were yellow-white and horny with cracked callouses. His pink, sticky mouth explored the surface of a lollipop while he scanned the covers of a row of outdated magazines in a wire rack.

Behind the glass counter and a trio of soda fountains a broad, heavy woman in a green smock thumbed through a little stack of accounts, ignoring the group of dark faces pressing around the square hole in the side wall. She had a round-shouldered, thick body and reddish-complexioned face that looked as if it had been sand-blasted into its component parts: hard plains of cheeks and knobbly cheek-bones and a bony ridge of nose that separated twin pools of dull grey; and the mouth a bitter gash, cold and malevolent as a lizard's, a dry chapped and serrated pink crack.

She looked up and started to say something, then saw the colour of the other woman and, for a moment, the grey pools of the eyes threatened to spill over as she gaped. The thin pink youth writhed like a worm as she sought for words.

'Can you fill this flask with coffee for me, please?' the mother asked.

The crack opened and a screech came from it, harsh as the sound of metal rubbed against stone. 'Coffee? My Lord Jesus Christ!' the voice screeched. 'A bedamned coolie girl in here!' The eyes stared in horror at the brown, tired, handsome Indian face with its smart sunglasses and the city cut of the tan suit. 'Coolies, Kaffirs and Hottentots outside!' she screamed. 'Don't you bloody well know? And you talk *English*, too, hey!'

The mother stared at her, startled, and then somewhere inside her something went off, snapped like a tight-wound spring suddenly loose, jangling shrilly into action, and she cried out with disgust as her arm came up and the thermos flask hurtled at the white woman.

'Bloody white trash!' she cried. 'Coolie yourself!'

The flask spun through the air and, before the woman behind the counter could ward it off, it struck her forehead above an eyebrow, bounced away, tinkling as the thin glass inside

the metal cover shattered. The woman behind the counter screeched and clapped a hand to the bleeding gash over her eye, staggering back. The little boy dropped his lollipop with a yelp and dashed out. The dark faces at the square hatch gasped. The dark woman turned and stalked from the café in a rage.

The policeman turned towards the next car, holding up a hand, and the mother driving the car felt the sudden pounding of her heart.

She crossed the sidewalk, her brown face taut with anger and opened the door of her car furiously. The group of non-whites from the hole in the wall around the side of the building came to the edge of the vacant lot and stared at her as she slammed the door of the car and started the motor.

She drove savagely away from the place, her hands gripping the wheel tightly, so that the knuckles showed yellow through the brown skin. Then she recovered herself and relaxed wearily, slowing down, feeling tired again, through her anger. She took her time out of town while the children gazed, sensing that something was wrong.

Then the boy, Ray, asked, 'Isn't there any coffee, Mummy? And where's the flask?'

'No, there isn't any coffee,' the mother replied. 'We'll have to do without coffee I'm afraid.'

'I wanted coffee,' Zaida, complained.

'You be good,' the mother said. 'Mummy's tired. And please stop chattering.'

'Did you lose the flask?' Ray asked.

'Keep quiet, keep quiet,' the woman told him, and they lapsed into silence.

They drove past the edge of the town, past a dusty service station with its red pumps standing like sentinels before it. Past a man carrying a huge bundle of firewood on his head, and past the last buildings of the little town: a huddle of white-washed cabins with chickens scrabbling in the dooryard, a sagging shearing-shed with a pile of dirty bales of wool inside, and a man hanging over a fence, watching them go by.

The road speared once more into the yellow-red-brown countryside and the last green trees dwindled away. The sun danced and jiggled like a midday ghost across the expressionless earth, and the tyres of the car

rumbled faintly on the black asphalt. There was some traffic ahead of them but the woman did not bother to try to overtake.

The boy broke the silence in the car by saying, 'Will Papa take us for drives?'

'He will, I know,' Zaida said. 'I like this car better than Uncle Ike's.'

'Well, *he* gave us lots of rides,' Ray replied. 'There goes one of those funny birds again.'

'Mummy, will we get some coffee later on?' Zaida asked.

'Maybe, dear. We'll see,' the mother said.

The dry and dusty landscape continued to flee past the window on either side of the car. Up ahead the sparse traffic on the road was slowing down and the mother eased her foot on the accelerator.

'Look at that hill,' the boy, Ray, cried. 'It looks like a face.'

'Is it a real face?' Zaida asked, peering out.

'Don't be silly,' Ray answered. 'How can it be a real face? It just *looks* like a face.'

The car slowed down and the mother, thrusting her head through the window, peered forward past the car in front and saw the roadblock beyond it.

A small riot-van, a Land Rover, its windows and spotlight screened with thick wire mesh, had been pulled up half-way across the road, and a dusty automobile parked opposite it, forming a barrier with just a car-wide space between them. A policeman in khaki shirt, trousers and flat cap leaned against the front fender of the automobile and held a Sten-gun across his thighs. Another man in khaki sat at the wheel of the car, and a third policeman stood by the gap, directing the traffic through after examining the drivers.

The car ahead slowed down as it came up to the gap, the driver pulled up and the policeman looked at him, stepped back and waved him on. The car went through, revved and rolled away.

The policeman turned towards the next car, holding up a hand, and the mother driving the car felt the sudden pounding of her heart. She braked and waited, watching the khaki-clad figure strolling the short distance towards her.

He had a young face, with the usual red-burned complexion of the land under the shiny leather bill of the cap. He was smiling thinly but the smile did not reach his eyes which bore the hard quality of chips of

granite. He wore a holstered pistol at his waist and, coming up, he turned towards the others and called, 'This looks like the one.'

The man with the Sten-gun straightened but did not come forward. His companion inside the car just looked across at the woman.

The policeman in the road said, still smiling slightly: 'Ah, we have been waiting for you. You didn't think they'd phone ahead, hey?'

The children in the car sat dead still, staring, their eyes troubled. The mother said, looking out: 'What's it all about?'

'Never mind what's it all about,' the policeman said to her. 'You know what it's all about.' He looked her over and nodded. 'Ja, darkie girl with brown suit and sun-glasses. You're under arrest.'

'What's it all about?' the woman asked again. Her voice was not anx-

ious, but she was worried about the children.

'Never mind. You'll find out,' the policeman told her coldly. 'One of those agitators making trouble here. Awright, listen.' He peered at her with flint-hard eyes. 'You turn the car around and don't try no funny business, hey? Our car will be in front and the van behind, so watch out.' His voice was cold and threatening.

'Where are you taking us? I've got to get my children to Cape Town.'

'I don't care about that,' he said. 'You make trouble here then you got to pay for it.' He looked back at the police car and waved a hand. The driver of the police car started it up, backed, and then turned into the road.

'You follow that motorcar,' the policeman said. 'We're going back that way.'

The woman said nothing but

started her own car, manoeuvring it until they were behind the police car.

'Now don't you try any funny tricks,' the policeman said again. She stared at him and her eyes were also cold now. He went back to the riot-van and climbed in. The car in front of her put on speed and she swung behind it, with the van following.

'Where are we going, Mummy?' asked Zaida.

'You be quiet and behave yourselves,' the mother said, driving after the police car.

The countryside, red-brown and dusty, moved past them: the landscapes they had passed earlier now slipping the other way. The flat blue sky danced and wavered and the parched, scrub-strewn scenery stretched away around them in the yellow glare of the sun.

'I wish we had some coffee,' the little girl, Zaida, said.



Alex La Guma

Alex La Guma died on 11 October 1985 in Havana, Cuba, where he was the representative of the African National Congress.

Born in 1925 La Guma came to the attention of the government in 1955 when he helped to organise the people who gathered in Kliptown to draft the Freedom Charter. In 1955 he was arrested along with 155 other people and accused of treason. The trial lasted five years after which the charges were dropped. In the meantime it had caused trialists and their families untold suffering.

In 1960 Alex La Guma joined the staff of the progressive newspaper *New Age*. In the same year he was detained for five months, following the massacre at Sharpeville and Langa. He was again arrested the following year, for organising a strike in protest against the proclamation of a republic by the South African regime.

In 1962 he was placed under house arrest. This meant that, for five years, he would not be allowed to leave the confines of his home. He and his wife were then arrested and put in prison, in solitary confinement. He and his family escaped to Britain in 1966.

For years many of La Guma's writings have been banned in South Africa thus depriving generations of one of their most gifted and assertive literary talents.

Cape Town writer Richard Rive describes La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* as a major South African novel 'that will still be read long after minor writings now acclaimed and recognized will have been forgotten.' and goes on to say 'South Africa will one day have to recognize the major contribution made to its literature by Alex La Guma.'

Other books include *A Threefold Cord*, *The Stone Country*, *Time of the Butcherbird* and *In the Fog of the Season's End*.

Some Thoughts on FOOLS

by Melanie Donald



Ndebele displays compassion for his characters, but has no illusions about the desperateness of the situation nor about the difficulty of finding men and women of vision willing to face the hardships of true resistance.

In his recent *Staffrider* article on Turkish tales, Njabulo S. Ndebele laments the absence of similar stories in Southern Africa. Perhaps this analysis of mainly the title story of his own book, *Fools*, will persuade readers who have not yet been charmed by it that it is a real contribution towards such a literature.

Fools (Ravan, 1983) is, in fact, one of the best books to emerge from this part of the world in recent years. It consists of five long short stories (from 23 to 129 pages in length) written in a style of disarming — and sometimes deceptive — simplicity. It is set in a Nigel 'location' and Soweto. The reader is taken quickly but ruthlessly through the experience of growing up in these notorious circumstances, yet the writing is not grim and its anger is felt as a steady but muted undercurrent. Mr Ndebele's stand is firm but not strident; his greatest achievement is his larger humanity* which is precisely what makes his stories real tales and not political statements merely.

Ndebele displays compassion for his characters, and profound understanding, but has no illusions about the desperateness of the situation nor about the difficulty of finding men and women of vision willing to face the

*Some readers may feel that Mr Ndebele's humanity does not stretch to whites. White characters are cited as the models of materialism of the Soweto housewife in 'The Music of the Violin' who has adopted all the ugliest attributes of western culture, although this story also has a fairly harmless 'liberal' Jewess who gives recipes to well-off black women. The other white character is the epitome of the colour-obsessed oppressor:

hardships of true resistance which must, after all, be a part of every day's decision-making for a black South African. At no point is pure human compassion more touchingly portrayed than in the story 'Uncle' when the local dice-playing toughie, Nzule, is stripped of the mask that hides his cowardice. The boy's own uncle has beaten Nzule in a fight, but the boy feels Nzule's tragedy without the benefit of theories of deprivation or delinquency:

I feel sorry for Nzule. I feel like crying. I really feel like crying. He is no hero anymore. He had run away from the policemen. Now he is running away from stones. I did not like the way he looked when he was running away. Oh Nzule, I want to be friends with you.

'a member of a people whose sole gift to the world has been the perfection of hatred' (p.276). The reason for this kind of characterisation is surely that Mr Ndebele wishes to show another of apartheid's tragic consequences, in human terms. The Vukanis and Zamanis of South Africa can have virtually no normal discourse with, nor personal knowledge of those individuals who are the victims of dissent coupled with seductive privilege and guilt.

I want you to come to my home, and I will go to your home, and we will do many things together. Nzule, you are still invincible. I will tell any visitor from the big cities that you are the one. You are the best. The terror of Charterston. Our own terror. ('Uncle', p.94)

The first four stories are told by boys of differing ages, and the author manages to restrict himself to the observations and, largely, the vocabulary of a child, without becoming insipid. For instance, joy is eloquently expressed, again in 'Uncle', when the child has just seen his uncle perform a magic trick for him and his friends, and his mother arrives to greet their visitor:

It is a wonder and Mother comes in, and Mother comes in, and Mother comes in. And there is Mother, and she embraces Uncle. . . (p.68).

These four stories are tightly structured, so that their impact is far more than simply narrative. Various themes emerge as one realises that nothing is accidentally included:

In 'The Prophetess' the boy is on his way home when he bumps into a coarse youngster displaying his penis in evidence of having succeeded with a 'difficult' girl. This seems to have no bearing on the central story until one realises that it demonstrates one of the chief concerns of the story — the importance of hearsay, gossip and reputation — on a new level.

The history homework with which Vukani is struggling at the beginning of 'The Music of the Violin' is as unjust in its interpretation as the dismissal of teacher Maseko, and a symptom of the same iniquitous system of education. These threads in turn tie in with the idea of the child who battles to outgrow superstition and prejudice and asserts his right to freedom.

Every story has its fools — frivolous fools, or unthinking victims of peer group pressure, bourgeois gentility or vanity — but there is also always someone to provide the boy with flashes of far-sightedness. The final word on the fools comes on the second-last page of the book:

Is there ever an excuse for ignorance? And when victims spit upon victims, should they not be called fools? Fools of darkness? ('Fools' p.278)

As the tone immediately conveys, this title story has passed through adolescence and into adulthood but, as in the other stories, the socio-economic setting is still given in passing, with consummate casualness.

When it grows dark, Zamani considers lighting a candle, but the lack of electricity is not made into an issue; the popular fishmonger wears the same green jersey 'every day in every season' (p.222); the location constables take no notice when Zani is stabbed only eighty yards from them, but act with brutal vigour when he holds a political poster up in the air; and we see the group areas passing by as Zamani takes a walk through the township.

The unprotested but vicious reality reaches and holds the reader's sympathy.

In 'Fools' the difficulties of having a child-narrator are absent, and we have instead a fifty-five-year-old school teacher telling the story in the first person. This is clever, because we meet Zamani from the inside, as it were, and have to an extent identified with him by the time we are forced to face, one at a time, the details of his fallen state — the spittle drooling down his cheeks as he tries to raise himself from the railway waiting room bench; the fact that he had embezzled church funds as his way of expressing disgust 'with the Church of Christ' (p.166); the fact that he had seduced Zani's schoolgirl sister, Mimi, three and a half years before, and been convicted of raping a child. Mimi had borne Zamani's child. We know that this is a man capable of great insight and sensitivity;

but it is precisely this kind of person that is harmed most by systems of social injustice. He has become a bold, inspiring teacher and had never submitted to the spineless sycophant who is his principal, and he is unquestioningly taken as a leader; when Zani is stabbed in a beer hall, Buti greets him gratefully,

'Tee,' he said, 'you've come at the right time. What do you think of this wound?' (p.180)

Zamani was reading a book about civilisations, whereas his rather formidable wife never read outside of her (nursing) profession.

Yet Zamani's behaviour was base. Perhaps the same repressed tensions that made his eyelids blink and flutter continuously were finding an outlet in his anti-social behaviour; he was certainly making no attempt to analyse them. His wife, understandably, reproached him for not talking to her about Mimi, 'The only language I recognised in you was your degeneration.' (p.199) Their marriage relationship is crucial to the story, and it requires very careful reading to discover what is at issue. Nosipho happily married an eligible, handsome teacher who had in fact been caught by her father, the priest, embezzling church funds and blackmailed into the match. She became the unsuspecting butt of his repressed anger and came in turn to treat him with thinly-veiled contempt. Although Zamani admired Nosipho in every way, he could never learn to express love towards her because he knew that the marriage was the price he was paying for protection, and he never seemed to be able to pay off the crushing 'moral ransom' (p.172) he owed his father-in-law. Zamani never attempted another act of protest, and the outrage he felt turned inwards, upon himself. He found Nosipho beautiful, but said she overwhelmed him 'with the self-assurance of her womanhood.' (p.210) Sooner or later his dissatisfaction with himself must have conveyed itself to Nosipho, and become the contempt she felt.

Although Nosipho does not come to life as fully as the male characters do, she is sufficiently convincing to convey some of the anguish she has endured in a sterile marriage. In fact, her statuesque quality arises partly from her stoic reaction to her situation. Zamani thinks, on one of the occasions when it seems they may reach each other,

We smiled at each other, and I wanted to tell her how beautiful she was. But I didn't. I could never bring myself to the frivolity of telling my wife such things. (p.203)

Before he could say with confident urgency at the end of the story 'I had to get to her.' (p.280), Zamani had to regain his self-esteem. He had, in his misery and frustration, had an affair with Candu a teacher in Springs. During their last meeting he was not only impotent, but suffered nightmares of self-disgust with what he was doing. It was on his way home from this night out that he had woken in the waiting room to see his alter-ego, Zani, scornfully watching him drooling. Later that morning he actually ran pathetically after his wife, who stopped in the smoke of a rubbish dump fire to summon the taxi he had failed to pay. Without acknowledging her husband, she assured the driver that she would pay for both trips — a gesture hardly designed to promote his self-confidence.

It was in front of Zani that Zamani prostrated himself in ultimate self-degradation. He knew perfectly well that Zani and his wife had been having an innocent conversation when he came home drunk and eavesdropped at the door,

but a deep, irrational impulse to be unreasonable asserted itself, and I banged on the door. . . .I wanted to see them run into each other's arms when I came in.' (p.239)

Instead, he was greeted with 'such peace in their faces, as if they were daring me to make a fool of myself.' (p.240)

We know that this is a man capable of great insight and sensitivity; but it is precisely this kind of person that is harmed most by systems of social injustice.

Even as he admires Nosipho's stern beauty, he accuses her of taking 'a small boy' (p.240) as a lover. Zamani knows he has no right to feel such jealousy, and the heart-rending scene finally ends as he falls to the floor. He falls asleep there, too shattered by drink and humiliation to rise.

This is the lowest point in the relationship before it improves. Before they were interrupted, Zani must have told Nosipho about the embezzlement and its consequences, and she developed an understanding of her husband's unhappiness. When Zamani woke up the next morning, Nosipho brought him water.

It occurred to me that this was the first act of kindness in years that Nosipho had shown towards me which was not done out of a sense of duty. It had been an effortless act of considerateness. I did not even thank her for it, because somehow the articulation of gratitude would have diminished the serene genuineness of the moment. (p.258)

Nosipho had been forced to look at her husband's behaviour in an entirely new light in which it did not appear as heinous as before, although certain deeds still rankled, for instance the rape he had committed — how had this happened? It was certainly not sheer thoughtlessness: As Zamani was rebuking one of his pupils for circulating an illustration of sexual intercourse, he said that what struck him was not so much

the organs themselves but that they . . .had no people attached to them. (p.212)

He remarks to himself

Poor fellow! At his young age he already thought sex was some disembodied obscenity. (p.212)

His conviction on the charge of rape had cost him his job for a while, but the shock of the experience evidently did not subdue him so much that he could contain the temptation to seduce his ex-pupil, Mimi, when she called at his house one sensuous twilight to tell him she had passed matric. We are given a powerful description of Zamani's loss of rational control

in my infinite gratitude, I squeeze the warm shoulders with a deep inner certitude that I would never let go (p.194)

He no longer understands what he is saying, as images of fecundity usurp his mind.

See, floating on the water, thousands of acorns, corn seeds, wheat and barley, eyeballs winking endlessly like the ever changing patterns on the surface of the water, and the rain of sour milk pelting the water with thick curds. (p.195)

As Mimi runs crying down the road

I close the door and return to the darkness of my house. I can feel a convulsion of weeping gathering inside me, for I know the words ringing in my mind: I'm a respectable man! I'm a respectable man! I'm a respectable man! (p.195)

When Mimi's child was born, he stopped beating his pupils. A profound self-examination had begun at last, but it was to be slow, and to suffer regressions.

The act of heroism that finally raises the protest, 'I'm a respectable man!' to the level of belief is again precipitated by Zani, who invites Zamani to help him stop people from mindless frolicking on the Day of the Covenant — the anniversary of the defeat of the Zulu king, Dingaan.

Both were guilty of taking protest action that could not succeed: Zamani misguidedly embezzled church funds to punish an institution in which he was disillusioned. This harmed his self-image and, for many years, his marriage, but the church went more or less unscathed; Zani wanted to walk into a community as a relative stranger and start an instant uprising. They both cared deeply about their people's plight, although in Zamani this caring had long been repressed and distorted by a sense of hopelessness, and he himself described what this could lead to once it had completely swallowed a man; writing of the black policemen, he said

They were all employed on the recommendation of the township's Advisory Board, most of whose members were also on various school boards. They were the destroyers of hope, for they knew nothing about hope; they were part of a world completely overcome by hopelessness. And it was this hopelessness that brought everything . . . to the level of its own dreamless sleep. (p.226)

The principal's response is a third possibility. Zamani actually understands this and thinks, after the principal had reminded him of his excellent record with the government

When people have very few choices, of what use is morality? Is it doing what has to be done? Perhaps it is not contempt I should be feeling, but the profoundest admiration. (p.220)

The necessity for morality is, however, confirmed when, much later, Zamani watches the principal talking to his 'baas', the Boer

. . . . the more the principal pleaded for forgiveness, the more he so piteously annihilated himself to become the ultimate justification for contempt. (p.273)

Zani helped speed up Zamani's self-examination and so helped him to regain his self-respect. He had set an example when he laughed to the principal's face and said

with a composure I had not seen in him before, 'May I respectfully ask why you must raise your voice at your teacher in front of the children he teaches?' (p.218)

In addition, the men help each other to re-assess their unhealthy attitudes towards women. In a scene whose significance for Zamani has already been discussed, Zani leaps to the defence of Nosipho, although he could barely manage a wave for his own lover on the station. He came to see, by observing and talking to Nosipho, that far

from being the distraction that could lead him 'into a ditch' (p.207), she could be a true partner. Zamani's neglect of his wife brought his own neglect into focus. Zani's lover comes to life mainly through her tender, loving letter, as a profound but not ponderous woman. (Mimi, who is portrayed as sweetness itself, and feels none of her sister's bitterness, is also made to speak through a letter. We do not read it, but Zani says it is poetic). Mimi's mother, MaButhelezi, is another important portrait of a woman. She makes her living out of selling herbal cures and home-brewed beer. She saw Zamani for the first time, after he had become the father of her grandson, when he brought Zani home, wounded, from the beer hall. Her composure was enormous. She made no effort to examine the wound in her son's arm.

No, it was far from fatalism. It was simply the result of the deepest understanding; that sometimes one could deal with the most harrowing of challenges with a calculated indifference. That way, one was assured of maximum vigilance without the indignity of anxiety. (p.186)

Perhaps there is a general warning in these sketches against not appreciating a woman's strengths. But it would do this story an injustice to attempt to tie all the threads into neat didactic tassels. Zamani is going to hurry home to Nosipho at last, and Zani is indeed re-appraising his ideas, but the achievement of this book is that it does weave so many threads into its touching, colourful, amusing, horrifying, unfinished tapestry.

Zamani was fascinated by Zani, and wanted to know him better from the moment he first saw him.

A 'Boer,' duly inflamed by the celebrations, made a grovelling idiot of Zamani's infamous principal, and chased Zani away. He turned to Zamani and demanded, 'Why are you not running!' Unlike Zani's, Zamani's political ideas had not been precisely articulated so that his courage was as unpremeditated as the violent eruption of his sexual frustration had been. He was simply not capable of giving the man the satisfaction of fleeing. He notes, almost as an observer would,

... he was infinitely stronger than I. But he would have to beat me. It was not until he actually started lashing at me repeatedly, that I knew I would not give him the kind of victory he wanted. (p.275)

As Zamani realised that, at last, one of his silences 'of desperate action' (p.275) would carry meaning, he started laughing. The whip was still thrashing him, but this time he was handing out contempt instead of being on the receiving end. His cathartic laughter made the Boer weep.

The blows stopped; and I knew I had crushed him. I had crushed him with the sheer force of my presence. I was there, and would be there to the end of time: a perpetual symbol of his failure to have a world without me. (p.276)

So it is that Zamani of the twitching eyes, almost by accident, finds that this act of passive resistance was a way of refusing to be one of the fools who aim the laughter in the wrong direction. For in spite of his brief appearance, the Boer and the system he has created are a monumental

presence throughout the story. Zamani, for instance, has to admit that the pupils who have received his wisdom

have drifted into the oblivion of factories, prisons, and into a kind of indescribable, all-pervasive aimlessness. (p.207)

And when Zani remembers how he and his friends were drawn away from science experiments to politics, he makes the point that

we should have stuck to our science. You see, too much obsession with removing oppression in the political dimension, soon becomes in itself a form of oppression. (p.236)

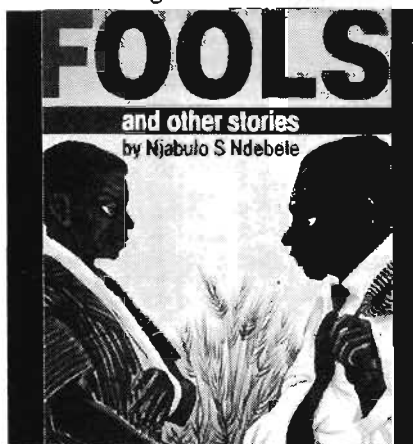
This is not because he thinks they should have capitulated, but because

Somewhere along the line, I feel, the varied richness of life is lost sight of and so is the fact that every aspect of life if it can be creatively indulged in, is the weapon of life itself against the greatest tyranny. (p.236)

Nosipho had been forced to look at her husband's behaviour in an entirely new light in which it did not appear as heinous as before.

Zani reacted to the dilemma with fiery arrogance. He came back from his school in Swaziland to liberate Charterston, ready or not. He refused to take one of the expensive taxis that proliferated in the absence of an adequate bus service; he asked to address Zamani's class because 'every minute, every second should be an instance of struggle.' (p.214) In his urgent haste, Zani forgot to put his message in a form that could be understood by his audience: He failed to get through to the children or the patrons of the beer hall, where he told a man that he had the mind of a chicken, and was promptly stabbed.

How then does this young man of fierce and lonely principle relate to the profligate Zamani? Zamani was fascinated by Zani, and wanted to know him better from the moment he first saw him. To him, Zani represented 'the new breed' and he confesses to an 'impulsive feeling that they should do better than I.' (p.208) On the other hand, Zani initially saw Zamani as an example of the immoral apathy that he had come to redeem, but gradually found that he wanted the teacher's company and had an uneasy ally in him. Perhaps the two men were not so different after all, and represented two valid responses to a situation that enraged them both. ■



PRAISE-POEM OF THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT

They have been through fire and steel, they have conversed with stones — Yannis Ritsos: 'Romiosyne' for Nelson, Nomzamo, Zinzi, Zenani, the comrades who live, and our dead.

I
Our shouts are peaked in a range of voices,
Our hands harvest fruit from fruits of strength,
Our comrades are a million men and women.

For twenty-three years they have lived
entombed in stone.
They converse with silence
and the chains that shackle them
shackle thirty million of us.

They walk through the furnace,
they measure distance by army roadblocks,
and time by section *twenty-nine*.

their names: comrade organiser
comrade delegate
comrade rank and file.

their address: a suitcase
between here and there,
a secret cell
and the catacombs of silence.

their meals: tension and cigarettes
their personal lives: the interstices of
committees and agenda
their love-making: under matters arising
their destiny: death — and our liberation.

II
the new tsars ride by helicopter
the imperious arm points:
'Kruispad, Khayalitsha,
— van daar tot daar. . .'

and it is done.
this epoch's cossacks
ride hippos, ratels,
use guns not sabres
gas not knouts;
the whips remain whips.
And in Cradock, Crossroads, Langa
upon the dust of our roads
red blotches are our tombstones.

Our ghettos are loaded onto lorries:
beds, pots, corrugated iron;
banished by warlords
exiled to Babylon
For the hands that shape metal,

steer machines,
for daily commuters of the abyss
who hew gold four kilometres down
suffocating in the inferno,
for our workers:
- the compound
- the dompas
- the Roman deportation.

Our comrades travel door upon door,
defying fear and fatigue;
arguing, explaining,
strengthening people,
building organisation:
- the unions
- the movement
- our resistance.

And when they are seized:
Goniwe, Mxenge, Mkhonto —
the bodies lie 'disappeared'
through the fields of our land.

III
A Rolihlahla!

Izwi labantu
Ikhakha lenkululeko!
Ikhakha lelizwe!

Born prince, you become the people:
Student, you taught your teachers,
Lover, you chose your wife.
Youth Wing who organized the Elders,
Volunteer-in-Chief who defied apartheid,
Charterist who proclaims these freedoms,
Trialist whose patriotism they call treason,
Prison reformer who boycotted potatoes,
Envoy who travelled through Africa,
Miner who works underground,
Lawyer who defends the nation,
Accused who indicts the law,
Captive, you hold a government captive!

Nomzamo! Zinzi! Zenani! Sechaba!
Mayibuye!
makabuye:
Nelson Rolihlahla AmaaaaaaaaaaaaaanDela!
Rolihlahla AmaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaanDela!
AMAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA-
AAAAANDELA!

by Keith Gottschalk



Bongive Dhlomo's exhibition at the Botswana National Museum and Art Gallery brought to my mind the fact that there is a new art growing in South Africa. It is an historical event in our art that the climate there has developed to the point where it has given birth to a woman artist who can look so directly at the situation around her. Surrounded by Bongive's work, I could not help but go back and reflect on the growth of art within our society.

How can any graphic artist make public observations and suggestions on the state of the visual arts at home? The act of doing so carries with it the risk of implicating that artist as spokesman; an idealistic, perhaps arrogant exercise. On the other hand I find it equally dangerous that we should carry on the worn out culture of resignation when major decisions are made over our work, indeed over our lives as a people. This paper is far from

Thoughts on

representative. Nevertheless I think it is necessary that certain things be said by the visual artist in my country. Failure to do so implies grave ignorance of those things which make or, possibly, even break our lives as a people.

I have often been asked why, in South Africa, when whole communities are threatened with extinction by a soaring cost of living; when whole communities suffer dismemberment through forced removals; when the majority of the people are declared foreigners in the country of their birth; when people are crudely and ruthlessly suppressed through rushed pieces of legislation, detentions, the massacre of workers and students; when, therefore, whole communities resist this genocide



Bongiwe Thamsanqa Mnyele

through organising themselves into civic organisations, trade unions, women's and student organisations; there has been disturbingly little visual arts output in the country or abroad which is organically related to these community efforts. Nor has there been a groundedly political voice from this quarter, let alone a broad art movement with an obvious national commitment. Such is the extent of the concern.

It is my contention that the prolonged strife and struggle that manifest themselves in cultural work, namely in the visual arts, can be traced to the root of the national political situation. Any understanding of the development of visual imagery must, therefore, recognise this.

That principle which governs traditional art still is valid today; i.e. that art must have a function: a walking song, the sculpture that serves as a chair, the majestically decorated houses of the Ndebele speaking communities. The subject matter is drawn from the actual activities of the people in their living surroundings, the source and supreme function of art. We may go further and say that the actual act of creating the visual imagery is informed by the community and nourished by it, consciously or unconsciously, and that it is the community which will or must act as audience. Again we can take the risk of stating that the skills of execution, the intimate workings of individual imagination etc. cannot exist outside human experience, in this case the community.

In contrast the development or underdevelopment of visual art in South Africa in this century, was shaped by the factors that wield political power. With effective

employment of capital and other means such as high technology, skilled manpower, the state of the arts was determined and controlled. Art galleries, churches, schools, all formed and added the processing machinery, the finishing touch.

Most indigenous artists in South Africa seldom managed to acquire formal education beyond secondary school. And to compound the problem no formal educational institution ran an arts course, at least for Africans; hence the responsibility was taken over by foreign mission stations. It is important to point this out in order to understand the workings of the system at an intellectual level. Fort Hare only introduced the art curriculum in the middle seventies, and the course is at degree level. This means that even a highly talented person cannot be enrolled without a matriculation certificate. I am not sure if this situation has changed. Other schools like Endaleni in Natal, offer the course but don't go beyond the level of crafts and handwork as teaching aids. Mission art schools offered the course but confined themselves to the various art techniques and European art history thus carefully avoiding state confrontation.

The art that sprang from this experience was seldom carried beyond biblical themes, African landscapes, wildlife, myths and legends. No exploration of the immediate social political phenomena. Where an artist dared attempt to reflect a political theme, treatment of

this issue lacked depth of involvement. The work seemed rushed and lacked conviction. Sometimes this type of work seemed too self-involved and was devoid of that outward thrust; it lacked an upright posture, an elevated head, a firm neck, and a tight muscle. To put it another way: the images were totally abstracted without an obvious course, distortion of the limbs was acute. The subject matter was mystified and to this extent the work lost integration with real things in our life; the work sagged under a heavy veil of mysteriousness. Perhaps this is the essence of the work. The disappointing fact about this approach to art is that the picture is deprived of that essential dynamic element: immediacy of communication with the community, the natural makers and consumers of art.

Perhaps the problem lies in the fact that the artist had begun to look for a different audience, in the galleries and the critics who asked for 'strange African art'. It is at this stage that the political motives (or clarity) of the artist are brought into sharp focus: his class interests as opposed to those of the people. As Dikobe wa Mogale once said, 'Art is not neutral.'

The elements of distortion, mystification, abstraction, are not negative in themselves and can be put to positive and effective use, as in the indigenous idiom. This calls for maturity of temperament, clearer social awareness and skill of the working hand. In my opinion we have not



been successful enough in maintaining control over any of these facilities. The same goes for the elements of anguish, pity, shock and surprise.

With developments at home today, the country is obviously in grave need of a new calibre of cultural worker, notably in the visual arts and song. The kind we have now has yielded too willingly to the dictates of negation. We must now create this new man and woman whose visuals and songs will be informed by the most pressing needs and demands of their time, place and circumstances: they ought to be articulate but simple so as to be accountable to their work and with clear political insight, a skilled hand and firm revolutionary sentiment.

With the absence of this calibre amongst us, is it any wonder then that no collective spirit, no single-mindedness of purpose, no solid, patriotic, consistent art movement has taken root among our struggling people? Is it any wonder that no union of the visual arts is forthcoming in our country? Is there any wonder that the exhibition of committed art that was being organised by *Staffrider* failed to take place due to the absence of work in this direction (see *Staffrider*, Vol 3, No 4)? Is it any wonder that the art collective in Katlehong received Piet Koornhof and other government ministers as guests during their exhibitions? Finally and most crucially, is it any wonder that the house of the leader of the art collective was petrol-bombed by the disgusted community of

Katlehong (see *Rand Daily Mail Extra*, Oct. 5, 1984)?

But there have been exceptions, those workers who suffer constant state harassment, detention, exile, death, and madness. These artists deserve our political support and respect. I must take the risk and include names at random: Dikobe wa Mogale, Gavin Jantjies, Lionel Davis, Peter Clarke, Gamakhulu Diniso, Manfred Zylla, Bongiwe Dhlomo and others. The ones listed here vary broadly both in terms of community involvement in their work and general political activity. But disturbingly, it is idiosyncratic of our artists that when they develop political consciousness they automatically desert the art profession for 'something more practical and real', as one put it.

This analysis is filled with shortcomings, but it is understandable. Dikobe, Gavin, and Bongi, like all artists today, have been taught to work too much as individuals, away from the collective. This must be resisted. The system of fragmentation, the tendency towards individualism, exclusiveness and isolation is as moribund as that of divide and rule.

In contrast, there are just the beginnings of a new approach to art growing at home. As the grassroots organisations gain in strength, some artists are finding a new home for themselves and their work. Mpumalanga Arts Project, Community Arts Project, the Johannesburg Silkscreen Workshop etc. We are beginning to



Thoughts on Bongiwe

see banners, posters, and graphics in the trade unions, civics, women's organisations, the UDF. These graphics are the birth of a new culture, conceived in the hopes and aspirations of the community, nourished by the people's organisation.

Dikobe was one of the first graphic artists to actively respond to the demands of his country, and in taking appropriate action met with the heavy hand of the state. Dikobe was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for military attempts to overthrow the racist state.

Before his arrest he stated with clarity and typical articulateness the shortcomings of the present state of art and appealed for the collective creation of the new cadre. Allow me to express my respect for this man. Allow me to express revolutionary anger at those whose racist deeds are depicted in the work of Bongiwe: forced removals, insensitive resettlement. We hail the fighting communities that inspire Bongiwe's work.

To Bongi herself I must point out though that her pictures need more concentrated working. They deal with serious issues that affect our lives, but this is done with somewhat half-heartedness, for example the rubbish bin and the figure next to it (an old woman?) are mere shapes, dead images. There's no feeling of corrugated iron, no wetness, no stench. The work seems extremely hurried and can easily degenerate into the realm of trite and defeatist 'township art'.

But make no mistake, Bongiwe is a committed artist. In South Africa, where women are doubly oppressed, it takes courage for a female visual artist to emerge and assert herself as she has done.

There are certainly ways of improving our work, of destroying the negative image. We must change our understanding of the profession. We must read, study, travel, and practice the profession in community development projects. We must learn to open ourselves to popular opinion and take criticism and do practical organisational work within the arts. We must convene and attend seminars and workshops whether or not they are within our profession. These are the things which inform and nourish our artwork. Our destinies are determined by them. It is our duty to avail our services as cultural workers as well as members of the community of the liberation struggle.

Finally we must consider adopting the graphic technique in our work for its scope and elasticity in regard to the particular nature and size of the developments in our country. We should also utilize fully the scientific means available to develop the graphic image of our country. These include the camera, printing press etc. These have to be conquered and tamed to suit our needs and social climate.

Apartheid is huge and ruthless. We must employ equally huge graphic methods to complement the efforts of our people; work big in size and concept, organise around unsentimental principles. There can never be artistic freedom or freedom of expression from a people in captivity. This is enough on which to base our cultural work and organisation. To create paintings and songs of revolutionary optimism and unity between the old and the young, men and women and whole communities.

Let us dip our brushes into bold colours of paint and confidence and let us daub our walls with murals, posters, writings, cartoons, all soaked in the conscious language of revolution. We must restore dignity to the visual arts. The writing is on the wall.

The thoughts in this paper are hurried. The problems that beset my country may deem this the green idealism of a slave. But to reach out and grasp this vision is our task and our joy, both as cultural workers and as members of our communities.

Forward with the creation of a new calibre of cultural worker! This was the call made at the gathering on Art Towards Social Development and Culture and Resistance in Botswana in 1982. And in the land where the people have become actively critical of their enemies, such as in the Vaal, Soweto, Kattlehong, Tembisa, Grahamstown, the demands made upon us as cultural workers cannot be more clear.

Our people have taken to the streets in the greatest possible expression of hope and anger, of conscious understanding and unflinching commitment. This calls for what all progressive art should be — realist, incisive, and honest. ■

Staffrider pays tribute to Thami on our back cover

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WORKER POETS

The effects of the growth of the workers' movement in South Africa are increasingly being felt beyond the factory gates. Not only is organized worker power giving rise to a new political consciousness but it has also created the social base for important new cultural developments. Poetry is one of them. The following poems are all from workers who are clearly involved in the unions or, as in one case, a closely associated organization.

FOSATU 'SON OF VICTORY'

by M.L. Mokhawane

Years ago in South Africa
A son named Federation of South African
Trade Unions was born,
Some call him FOSATU
A son so young, talented, respected and feared,
Brought everything to victory,
Oh, what a miraculous child he was,
Son of Victory
FOSATU, your birth so broad and fair,
Won hearts of young and old,
Male and Female,
While some asked, 'Will he make it?'
And some pointed fingers at him,
Son of Victory,
FOSATU, you brought light where there was darkness,
You came like water in flood onto the vicinity of Sasol,
You fell like snow onto the heads of the oppressors,
As the years went by and by,
You grew from strength to strength,
You brought everything to victory,
Son of Victory,
FOSATU, because of your respect,
To both young and old,
Struggling and Oppressed,
Mother luck will always be with you.

You are the Pride of Africa,
Wherever you pass puppets are left puzzled,
Since your birth,
You brought everything to victory,
Son of Victory,
FOSATU, now you are strong enough,
Where are those who pointed fingers at you?
Let them come nearer to see your way of Victory,
Where are those who swear at you,
Let them open their ears and hear how you succeed.

Even when there is danger you defeat,
You survived from the mouths of the lions,
Where are those who thought Synthol boys will go
forever?
Let them know that the boys are back.

Where are those who thought busfares will rise?
Let them know that those were their dreams not
FOSATU's.
Where are those who thought we will ever get pay
monthly?
Let them know that time has come that we should pay
fortnightly.

FOSATU, you really brought everything to Victory,
Within a year operating in Sasol?
May you see many more years of SUCCESS,
SON OF VICTORY.

FOR BROTHER ANDRIES RADITSELA

by Nise Malange

Your death has come to me from hundreds of miles
away
It has shocked me but did not surprise me
It has shocked the workers but did not surprise them.

I have a few words to say — my mouth is a grave
without flowers
My mouth is the empty coffin when the corpse is gone
It is like a river without water
But it has faith in your death.

If I had strength enough I would go and revenge your
blood
our blood
I would carry a bazooka and go straight for the
murderers

Worker Poetry

I would go to the murderers' concrete capitals and shoot them all.

Comrade, I did not come here to open the wound nor to mourn
I am here to curse the Minister of Law and Order
I am here to condemn death in detention
and I am here to say: 'Qinani basebenzi, lomthwalo unzima.'

Your blood, Andries, will not be in vain
Your blood will be a moral lesson for us to punish oppressors
treason, detention and murders
Your blood will give power to your comrades,
To the workers, to your family and to us all.

Andries asikhali ngawe ufe okwe qhawe ezandleni zamagwala.

WORKERS SAY...

by Makhulu wa Ledwaba

WORKERS SAY
More job, higher wages
EMPLOYER SAY
Not now, not tomorrow
but sometime later.
EMPLOYER SAY
Overtime now, double up production
WORKERS SAY
Not today, not tomorrow
but sometime later.
'Those who can hire can fire,'
workers are told
overtime now or. . .

WORKERS SAY
Those who hire now and fire now
This they will have to know,
That we are now like ball of fire
running through drought-stricken
farms of cheap labour.
We are the sun that refuses to set
when darkness goes through
poverty pockets.

A LUTA CONTINUA

by Sthembiso Hlongwane

Unity! Workers of the world unite!
Stand up and fight for your rights
Wathint' abasebenzi, washa! Bhasobha!
An injury to one is an injury to all!
Unity is our only weapon.
United we stand, divided we fall.

Influx control, Section 10 rights —
to banish me to a barren 'homeland. . .'
Hang on! Did I say home?
Job reservation, retrenchments, unemployment —
to keep me at the bottom of the ladder.
But why me?

I'm advised to get sick for only 10 days a year,
Then I'll get my sick leave pay.
I'm expected to work like a machine;
more production, less pay!
Poverty? Oh! At least you talk about
something familiar to me.
So what? SONQOBA SIMUNYE!

Talk of workers' rights and soon you
endorse your passport to gaol.
Nevertheless, 'fight on Comrades!'
How many Aggetts and Raditselas must die
before workers are given an ear?
AMANDLA NGAWABASEBENZI!

Workers in Poland did it,
Workers in Zimbabwe did it,
and today their voice is respected.
Mineworkers have done it in South Africa
and the Oppenheims now have sleepless nights.
Spar workers have done it in South Africa,
So why can't all workers do it too.

Who can dare deny the undisputable —
that we, the workers of South Africa hold the key
to the right future of our beloved country.
We aren't deterred by gun-wielding cops —
for we hold all the Aces!
MATLA KE A BASEBETSI!

If God be for us who can be against us?
Together we shall build a free South Africa,
Where all shall be equal before the law,
Where there shall be no more forced removals,
Where there shall be racial harmony,
Where there shall be no more slavery.
A luta continua! Power to the Workers!

We salute all who died for the struggle;
We honour all who serve jail terms for the struggle;
We remember our brothers and sisters in exile
All for the cause of the workers' struggle
To them we say, 'ALL YOUR LABOUR CANNOT
BE
DUBBED 'FUTILE' while we tread this world.

PHAMBILI NGOMZABALAZO WABASEBENZI!
'SONQOBA SIMUNYE'

Worker Poetry

PRAISE POEM TO FOSATU

by Alfred Qabula

You moving forest of Africa.
When I arrived the children were all crying,
These were the workers,
industrial workers,
Discussing the problems
that affect them in the
industries they work for
in Africa.
I saw one of them consoling
others,
Wiping their tears from
their eyes,
I saw wonders, 'cause even
in his eyes the tears did
flow.
Worker, about what is that
cry Maye?
You are crying, but who
is hassling you?
Escape into that forest,
the black forest that the
employers saw and ran
for safety.
The workers saw it too
'It belongs to us', they
said,
'Let us take refuge in it
to be safe from our hunters.'
Deep into the forest they
hid themselves and when
they came out they were
free from fear.
You are the hen with wide
wings
That protects its chickens.
Protect us too with those
sacred wings of yours
That knoweth no discrimination.
Protect us too so that we
gain wisdom.
Militant are your sons and
daughters.
One wonders what kind of
muti you sprinkle them
with.
Sprinkle us too that we take
after them and act likewise.
FOSATU has given birth
His sons are spread all over
Africa
Even overseas you find his
sons.

FOSATU you are the lion
that roared at Pretoria
North,
With union offices every-
where
whilst walking, thinking
about the workers' pro-

blems, I saw a fist flying
across Dunlop's cheek.
Whilst Dunlop was still
shivering,
Perhaps Bakers was asking
'What did my neighbour do
that he is being hurt like
that?'
I saw a combination of fists
bombarding Bakers on his
ribs,
until Dunlop was concerned,
He called the shop stewards
and asked:
'Is MAWU now going to
cause trouble at Bakers?'
'No, Banumzane.'
'Who is organising at Bakers?'
Of course Sweet Food and
Allied Workers' Union.'
'But where does it come
from?'
'From FOSATU.'
'This MAWU, where does it
spring from?'
'Also from FOSATU.'
'Same constitution?'
'Yebo.
Same policy, same constitu-
tion, don't worry Jim, it's
still another MAWU.'
Chakijana? Wake up and
wear your clothes of power
and wisdom.
Keep your gates closed
FOSATU.
Because the workers' ene-
mies are ambushing you.
They are looking for a hole
to enter through in order to
disband you.
Oh! We poor workers, dead
we shall be if they succeed
in so doing.
Close! Please close!
You are the mole that was
seen by the bosses' impi-
mpis coming slowly but
surely towards the factories.
Fast ran the impimpis and
reported to their bosses and
said:
'Baas, Baas, thina bukile lo-
mvukuzane buya losayidi
kalofekthri kathina.'
'Yah, yah;
What is the mvukuzane
my boy, tell me,
what is it?
Is it one of FOSATU's unions?
You are a good muntu

Mina azi akhela wena 6
room house lapha lohome-
land kawena.
Thatha lo-machine gun, vala
logates.
Skhathi wena buka lo-union
bulala lo-union
Skhathi lo-union yena ngena
lapha fekhthri kathina,
amashares phelile.
Lo-union thatha yonke.'
Whilst still wondering what
to do,
There came a messenger and
said:
Better leave everything as it
is,
'Cause the union is already
holding a meeting with the
workers in the canteen.
Not only here — there at
Sasol as well.
FOSATU, we have chosen
you to lead us.
Time and time again we
have been electing leaders,
Electing people whom we
trusted,
Fellow people with whom
we were born and grew up
together.
People who knew all our
sufferings,
Together with whom we
were enslaved.
We had elected them because
we believed they were
a lamp to brighten our way
to freedom.
But to our dismay,
After we had appointed
them, we placed them
on the top of the mountain,
and they turned against us.
They brought impimpis into
our midst to inflict
suffering upon us.
Some of us, those who were
clever, were shot down to
the dust with bullets.
Others were shut behind
the walls of darkness.
Others decided to flee the
land of their birth.
Is FOSATU also going to
hug you with those warm
hands?
His hands that know no
racism?
Prayed we did to our
Mvelinqangi,
kneeled we did, and prayed

to our ancestors and said:
 We pray to you for a leader,
 We pray to you for a leader.
 Mvelinqangi and the
 ancestors have answered us,
 and sent to us FOSATU!
 Don't disappoint us
 FOSATU,
 Don't sacrifice us to our
 adversaries,
 To date your policy and
 your sons are commendable
 We don't know what's to
 happen tomorrow.
 Listen I am a Sangoma,
 You have come to me so
 that I tell all about you.
 I have thrown my bones
 and called on my abalozi.
 My bones and my amadlozi
 are telling me this:
 Yebo, you have good and
 handsome sons.
 Also they are intelligent and
 quite healthy.

Good Mnumzane, I am
 writing you a letter to ask
 permission to use this
 ground.
 We will be discussing and
 reporting to our members
 about all that we have
 achieved.
 Here is the agenda so that
 you may know about what
 we are going to discuss.
 There you are big man,
 your refusal is a challenge.
 Get hold of him and pull
 him by the jacket.
 Put him into the judgement
 box.
 Come Senior Judge.
 Pass judgement on him for refus-
 ing us permission to use this
 ground.
 Why do you refuse us
 permission to use this play-
 ground?
 The old man said this and
 that and he was left
 disappointed because the
 Judge granted permission.
 Don't play with fire, my
 boy, because you'll get
 burnt.
 You are the metal loco-
 motive that moves on top
 of other metals.
 The metal that doesn't bend
 that was sent to the
 engineers but they
 couldn't bend it.

Teach us FOSATU about
 the past organisations be-
 fore we came.
 Tell us about their mistakes
 so that we may not fall foul
 of such mistakes.
 Our hopes lie with you,
 the Sambane that digs holes
 and sleeps in them, whereas
 others dig holes and leave
 them.
 I say this because you teach
 a worker to know what his
 duties are in his organisation,
 And what he is in the
 community

Lead us FOSATU to where
 we are eager to go.
 Even in parliament you
 shall be our representative.
 Go and represent us because
 you are our Moses —
 through your leadership we
 shall reach our Canaan.
 They call you the disrupt-
 ionist because you dis-
 rupted the employers at
 their own meeting.
 Because you man of old,
 asked a question:
 'Did you consider the
 workers?
 Have you really planned
 about FOSATU, the workers'
 representative?
 No!
 Well then we can't continue
 because FOSATU doesn't
 laugh when they see some-
 thing that makes workers
 look laughable.
 The meeting was disrupted.
 All that remained behind
 was beers, whiskies and
 disappointment.
 The cakes and the cool-
 drinks were also dis-
 appointed.
 Hero deal with them and
 throw them into the Red Sea.
 Strangle them and don't let
 loose,
 until they tell the truth as
 to why they suck the
 workers' blood.
 I am coming slowly and I
 am watching all that you
 are doing.
 You're great FOSATU.
 Bayethe!
 Amandla kubasebenzi!

Power to the Workers

George Mathebula

Power is in our hands,
 Our muscles powerful they are.
 Power in our brain,
 Our power greater than their gold.
 Without our brain and muscle,
 Not a single wheel can turn.
 The unions make us strong.
 Power to the workers.

I can hear the workers crying.
 Out of resentment and frustration they cry.
 Out of exploitation they cry.
 Out of authoritarianism their tears fall,
 Yet their voice never dies.
 Their tears seeds of unity they plant.
 Their tears seeds of solidarity grow.
 Their tears are worker power.

Friends of unhealthy life we're not,
 Health is the word.
 Friends of exploitation we're not,
 Justice is the word.
 Friends of authoritarianism we're not,
 Democracy our unions shout.
 Mad machines we're not,
 Human beings yes, workers we are.

Listen the workers are singing,
 Courage is the song.
 The sun is shining in our unions,
 Bright sunshine of unity,
 Shining sun of worker solidarity,
 Bright sunshine of worker participation,
 Shining sun of democracy,
 Yes the sun is shining.

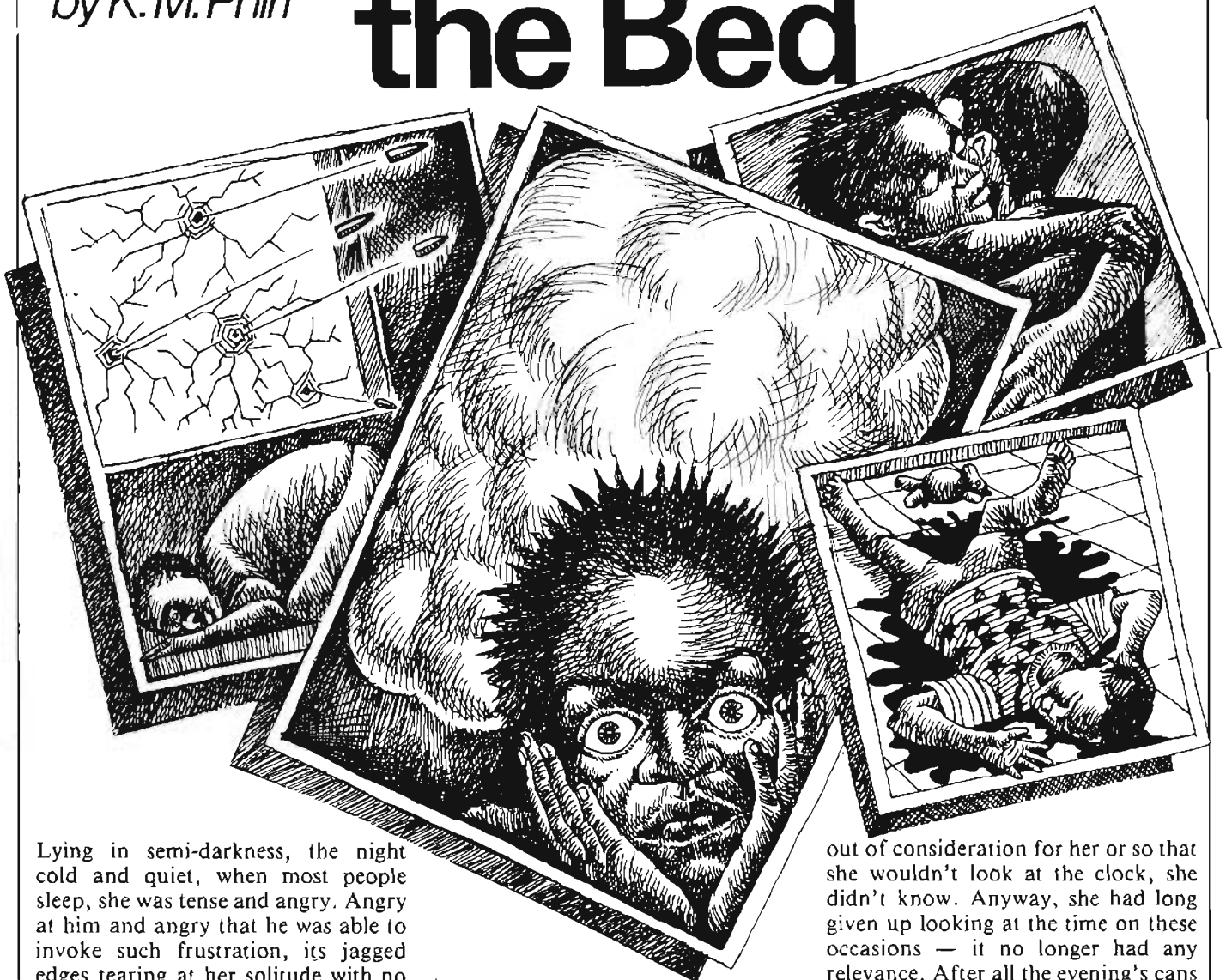
Workers of the world unite,
 March along with power.
 All the workers side by side,
 It won't take long before
 exploitation is buried.
 Stand up workers, rise up,
 Rise up to win the day.
 Work dignity your right,
 Victory is certain.

Our journey long it is,
 Unity will make it short.
 Solidarity will hasten the pace.
 The unions make us strong,
 Power to Abasebenzi.
 Without our brain and muscle,
 Not a single wheel can turn.
 Power to the workers.

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Hide Them Under the Bed

by K. M. Phiri



Lying in semi-darkness, the night cold and quiet, when most people sleep, she was tense and angry. Angry at him and angry that he was able to invoke such frustration, its jagged edges tearing at her solitude with no apparent route to release. If she tried to discuss the problem, there would definitely be an argument. She would have to listen to endless tirades and would somehow end up guilty. His defence was always attack.

No, it was best to maintain her harsh silence, that silence which ate away at her being, her identity and independence of spirit. It was a silence that caused introversion, an ice cover that only she could feel. This was a deception that nobody condemned. For the sake of uncertain peace she was prepared to contain feelings of incredible intensity. As far as she was concerned he had the perfect freedom. As long as dinner was kept warm in the oven, life was fine. If he went out, there was no time limit. A quick drink with some friends, ten minutes, five hours, so what?

She kicked all the blankets off the bed in a sudden burst of fury. It was the fact of being taken for granted she detested. That underlying assumption that she would always be there; that she would naturally come home from work and deal with the meals, the children, the home in general. She swore out loud at him and their friendship. It was freezing and her feet felt numb. Muttering to herself she begrudgingly re-made the bed, remembering to tuck enough sheet in on his side so that he wouldn't complain. And just in time; she heard the front door unlock and swing open. In bed more quickly than she thought possible, her heart beating rapidly, her body still. He wouldn't notice.

He undressed in the front room so as not to wake her. Whether it was

out of consideration for her or so that she wouldn't look at the clock, she didn't know. Anyway, she had long given up looking at the time on these occasions — it no longer had any relevance. After all the evening's cans of beer had made their way into the toilet he crawled in beside her, not even suspecting that she may be awake. A heavy leg and arm wrapped her into a tight parcel sealed with a kiss. The next minute he was snoring, not to be woken until the late morning or lunchtime.

She lay for a while, more relaxed, slipping off into the darkness. Whether she had been asleep or not, she couldn't tell.

Suddenly she heard gunfire, rapid popping noises. Then she saw flashes of light which she assumed to be grenades from their small compact explosions. She had never experienced these before, but she knew. She nudged him.

'They're invading! Bobby! What are we going to do!'

They were both up. Stunned.

Listening. The noise surrounded them.

'Don't turn any lights on,' Bobby managed to say as he ran to phone the police. He lay on the floor dialling in the dark. The window shattered.

She looked out from the corner of the kitchen window. She could see them running, crouched with guns. Some were getting into a white Kombi.

'Get down!' Bobby yelled. 'Stay on the floor . . . the police say we must wait, that this is not the only incident.' She heard his disappointment.

Then they were deafened by a loud ear-splitting explosion. The horror and fear on their faces were frozen in the bright light of the blast.

Tshidi heard her own scream well after it had escaped. More windows shattered. She felt the glass as she half crawled towards the children's bedroom.

'The kids, Bobby.' Her voice screeched, tormented by feelings of impotence.

'Bobby, I don't know what to do. What about the kids?'

Rushing into the small bedroom, she couldn't help sobbing. The youngest was still asleep despite the commotion. The eldest looked at her in astonishment, wondering more than anything why he was being wrenched from his bed.

'Is it soldiers, Mummy?' his sleepy voiced questioned. She pushed them both under the bed.

'It's okay, it's okay,' she reassured, covering them with her body and stroking their small heads. Thoughts raced madly inside her brain.

'Listen, Binks,' she said to the eldest, hugging him tightly, 'I want you to look after your little sister, and whatever you do, stay here.'

She wrapped them in a blanket and left the room feeling calmer. In the hallway, Bobby held her close to him.

'I've put them under the bed next to the wall,' she whispered.

'Yes, good, hide them under the bed,' his words slid with his warm breath onto her cheek.

They stood together, waiting. Then he made a move towards the larger window.

Her voice trailed him, 'Please don't go out! They might still be there.'

'I think they split before the last explosion,' he answered, looking at her standing in front of him, hugging her arms close to her body. The back of her nightdress hung limply around her legs, the rest had been in-

congruously stuffed in lumps into her jeans. He noticed for the first time that, somehow amidst all the confusion, she had managed to pull on a pair of jeans.

Not even a dog barked in the suddenly silent neighbourhood.

Bobby spoke. 'Tshidi, maybe somebody out there needs help.'

Footsteps grated gravel across the concrete entrance. Their hearts were gripped with the tightness of fear. There was a soft knock.

Bobby started towards the door then stopped.

'Ke mang?' he asked cautiously.

'Ke Mogomotsi,' came the urgent reply.

Tshidi felt like laughing. They had assumed the worst.

Mogomotsi, come in Rra.'

The man's face was bleeding. His pants were torn.

'It's nothing,' he declared. 'I rolled out of the car into the ditch on the side of the road. Thank God there's no street lighting there. I hid in a culvert while they blasted the car to pieces. Hey, it's heavy, Bobby! We were coming from Dee's place . . . ' He looked at Tshidi. Taking her hand he started walking towards a chair.

She didn't feel sick. She didn't experience horror. She felt anger surging up within her. A deep hot anger.

'Howzit, Tshizizi? How are the kids?'

After he had been sufficiently reassured that everyone was okay, he continued. 'Ke ne ke ba floppa. I was scared, I really thought it was the end.'

Tshidi felt fear creeping back into her bones and went to lock the door.

'Don't bother, they've gone,' Mogomotsi was shaking. 'I saw them, twelve Kombis full, yelling and hooting their victory all the way along the road. You know, this is real intimidation. International rules and regulations don't matter to them. Territorial integrity, sovereign rights, they're desperate, they're hitting out. Just like the neighbourhood bully picking on a small quiet kid. It's intimidation . . . ' He was interrupted by the next door neighbours, Billy and his wife Mavis, carrying their two boys and a bottle of whiskey. Binks came out of his hiding place, excited at the chance to play

with his friends at such an odd hour. Tshidi took her daughter onto her lap and sent the boys to play in the bedroom.

Bobby was uneasy and Mogomotsi appeared to be in a state of shock.

'I think we'd better go and check over there, somebody may need help,' Bobby said looking around at them. Mogomotsi nodded in agreement. Billy, who had selected the most comfortable chair, looked at them both in amazement.

'Nn-n-n-o-o, no thanks Jack, I'm staying right here,' he stammered. Tshidi smiled. That was Billy Bird all right. They had privately nicknamed him Billy Bird because of his sharp pointed nose and thin lips. His eyes were small and close together and he stuttered badly. Bobby's intense dark eyes caught Tshidi's and softened into a smile. He knew what she was thinking. Billy Bird had every right to sit there if he so chose. It was not necessarily cowardly. Who knew if there were more of them around or not. Perhaps there were snipers waiting for fools to venture forth from their houses. Mogomotsi jumped up from his chair, stopped to give Billy Bird a look of disgust and went outside with Bobby. Mavis and Tshidi followed leaving Billy inside with the children. It was icy cold outside. Another neighbour joined them. Mavis was either suffering from the cold or from guilt about leaving Billy. She went inside saying she was going to make tea. They stood for some time not really knowing what to do. Then, as Tshidi's eyes grew accustomed to the dark, she saw a leg, a perfect sculpture of a human leg. The small foot, the delicate calf bending at the knee to form the thigh.

'They're dead, Bobby,' she said flatly. 'They both must be dead.'

He stared at the sight. They all did. She didn't feel sick. She didn't experience horror. She felt anger surging up within her. A deep hot anger. It wasn't possible. She went inside. Bobby, Mogomotsi and the neighbour, a Norwegian man, stood in silence, looking. They were overcome by a feeling of uselessness and vulnerability. The Norwegian broke the silence.

'I think we'd better wait until the police come. They know how to handle this kind of thing. There might be unexploded bombs amongst the rubble.'

Zombie-like they went inside. The room was warm. They cracked the whiskey bottle. Mavis and Tshidi drank tea. Mogomotsi, glass in hand,

was pacing up and down the room.

'Come on, guy, sit down,' Bobby implored.

They talked of death, of what they had witnessed. Their descriptions were minute in detail. Billy Bird, as always, managed somehow to make them laugh.

A scar on his right temple was a reminder that not everyone appreciated his wry sense of humour.

'They were innocent!' Tshidi said too loudly.

Mogomotsi gazed at her for some time and then spoke.

'You know, Tshidi, innocence doesn't count. They are innocent in terms of what? In terms of their killers' criteria of guilt? They are going to justify this raid and we are all going to say "But those girls weren't any part of that kind of thing." That's what we mean by their innocence. Innocence is relative to guilt.

'But do we agree with their definition of guilt in the first place? Do you see what I mean, Tshidi?'

She nodded, looking down at the floor.

Mogomotsi continued. 'We think of innocence because we have basic human rights here. Innocence has a place but what does the word mean if you don't have those rights? Innocence'

'Okay,' Bobby interrupted. 'We see your point.'

Tshidi and Mavis got up and started clearing up the cups and emptying the ashtrays. They went to the bedroom to try to persuade the children to sleep. Sitting next to Tshidi on the edge of the double bed, Mavis told her about her first reaction to the noise and how scared she had been. They spoke softly until the children had dozed off and then tiptoed out, closing the door quietly behind them.

The whiskey had seeped into the conversation which had become repetitive. The two women were not on the same plain when they entered into the group. Nobody wanted to sleep, nobody could sleep. The phone rang with various concerned relatives and friends checking if all was okay and reporting on other incidents. They all needed each other's company. In the early hours of their work day they listened to the first news broadcast on the radio. Their fears were confirmed. Rumours heard over the phone were turning into truths. Tshidi made coffee; four cups, strong with lots of sugar. By seven they were ready for work.

Mogomotsi had washed himself and polished his shoes to their usual shiny state. He put his arm around Bobby's shoulder and they left together talking of some plan for the day. Mavis and Billy Bird left their children to sleep and went home.

It was quiet again. Tshidi was alone with the shattered glass. She gazed at it for some time before collecting the broom and sweeping it up. The small pieces tinkled into heaps which she scooped up and threw into the bin. She pulled the curtains open allowing the fresh cool air from the broken windows to intermingle with the stale cigarette smoke that still filled the room. For the time being, the larger pieces of glass could go out the window, she would see to them later.

The children were waking. They hadn't slept for long. She began to prepare porridge.

'Mummy, why did the soldiers break our windows?' asked Binks indignantly. Tshidi looked at her son, her mind turning, lost for words.

'It was their guns that did it,' answered Mavis's son walking into the kitchen.

Before long the children sat down to their breakfast.

They didn't want to go to school but she hurriedly washed and dressed them and sent them off all the same. The two youngest ones continued sleeping.

There was space. Time free. She sank into a chair closing her eyes. She wasn't going to work. It was nice being alone, her body began to relax. The news again . . . sixteen dead, so far no names — but they already knew. Friends of friends, neighbours of friends, the phone had provided them with the details. The newsreader's voice was dulled by his attempt to hide emotion.

'One of the victims of the raid was a five-year-old boy. He gave himself away to the attackers when he called to his mother from his hiding place under the bed. They pumped round after round of automatic gunfire into his small body'

Tshidi began to shake, her whole body trembling, completely out of control. The numbness of her mind broke in a flood of tears. Grief, shock, disgust, anger . . . the tears released a million emotions that had welled up, locked away from her conscious mind for the past eight hours. Words escaped through her sobs.

'Yes, hide them under the bed. Hide them under the bed.' ■

Poetry

IN THESE DAYS

by Mike Nicol

How often are we to arrive
in a different country
having set out
in all good faith
to find the climate much the same
and the people unsettled.

How often to know
the sadness of harbours
or cities' late streets
or to find an address
in an unexpected quarter
which we must have known.

But this is not a place
we would call home.
Just as others, fleeing a war
stare from ship's rail
as new land
fills the horizon and dread
their coming, so we too
fear that hope may desert us.

All about is the destruction
of houses. Fires flare
on mountains, towns are
lost beneath mud.
In these days everyone is an enemy,
rumours disguise the spy
to put off the chaos,
stop preparations for the worst.

I cannot forget that coast:
the boulders heaped into the sea,
the perfect day broken
by distant gunfire
of naval manoeuvres.
All know it. All know
the carefully plotted campaign,
the organised fear
that strikes at the heart.

But you must know that love
asks more than occasional moments,
more than a smile of complicity
and a reassuring touch
in the quiet night:
demands violence and pain,
a street fight and a child's death,
if we are to find a country
waiting, peaceful, ours.

Language, Literature and the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa

by Daniel P. Kunene



The Problem Defined

The contemporary South African scene makes exacting demands on the writer who chooses to accept the challenges of the current political realities of that beleaguered country. 'Chooses' is almost certainly an inept word in this context. Nadine Gordimer, the noted South African novelist and critic, has observed that 'Black writers choose their plots, characters and literary styles; their themes choose *them*.'¹ In other words, the themes arising out of the contemporary milieu in that country stare the writer in the face daring him to ignore them. If he does, he will be irrelevant to the human drama daily enacted there. If he accepts the challenge, he inevitably situates his characters within the daily trials that surround the black person's life. 'In this sense,' says Gordimer, 'the writer is the voice of the people beyond any glib political connotations of the phrase.'²

The writer is the synthesizer and conduit of the concerns of the society for which he claims to speak. As such, he may be regarded as not only having a stronger-than-ordinary sensitivity to the human problems of his

milieu, but also a strong sense of empathy with his audience. Since, however, language, in the sense of speech, is his only means of reaching that audience, his task becomes complicated and more difficult if any of his readers employ languages different from his own. In his effort to reach them, therefore, it is incumbent on him to be linguistically versatile and temperamentally attuned to their emotional needs. This is a challenge that faces every committed writer in South Africa. The message is one. It is the message of liberation and the creation of a new society. The linguistic environments in which the audiences have been nurtured differ to varying degrees.

The widest gap, both linguistically and culturally, is that between white and black South Africans. This is mentioned here because the need arises every so often for the black writer to address his message to his white neighbour. This division between white and black is how all discussions of the South African socio-political situation begin, or should begin. After all the problem in that country is the problem of colour politics. White racist supremacists have, over the years, unleashed a relentless

propaganda, both direct and by insinuation, that has defined hard lines that divide the people by colour, *not by class*. We are a despised people for the simple reason that we are black. Steve Biko has said that

in South Africa, after generations of exploitation, white people on the whole have come to believe in the inferiority of the black man, so much so that while the race problem started as an offshoot of the economic greed exhibited by white people, it has now become a serious problem of its own. White people now despise black people, not because they need to reinforce their attitude and so justify their position of privilege but simply because they actually believe that black is inferior and bad.³

This message is conveyed also by Walter Rodney in his *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. And, needless to say, it is a lesson that has, unfortunately, had to be learnt by blacks in the process of trying to cope with their social environment. The writer addressing himself to the white oppressor has to control his anger at the same time as he finds ways of making the English language do his bidding.

The writer's first duty is, of course, to maintain a dialogue with his black brothers and sisters whom he must constantly inspire with the message of hope. In doing so, he must come to terms with the fact that these brothers and sisters speak either Zulu or Sesotho or Setswana or Xhosa or Sepedi or Ndebele and so on. So the linguistic challenges multiply. The immediately contemporary South African situation highlights these problems in a most singular manner. This is because one of the demands on the author today is that he, like the oral narrator, must stand face to face with his audience and harangue them with his own voice. Again, as in a typical oral narrative situation, the audience feedback is immediate and not always concurring. But that is another problem to which we shall return. For now, we wish to draw attention to the challenge posed by the fact that the audience receiving the writer's or poet's or dramatist's message is in most cases a multilingual one. What must the committed artist do in order to overcome this problem, or perhaps even make it in his favour?

When the struggle has progressed to a certain point, the demon of fear is conquered. The politics of fear are replaced by the politics of confrontation, for the oppressed can now speak to his oppressor from a position of equality. This stage was reached quite decisively in the late sixties and early seventies. For the writer, the problem of choosing a suitable linguistic medium then becomes more complex. For, let it be stated almost superfluously, that white people as a group do not know the African languages, and any black wishing to talk to them has to defer to this white man's deficiency. The most recent example of this is the English-language poetry that gushed out of the students of Soweto and other black townships following the bloody massacre of school children by police beginning 16th June, 1976 and continuing with varying degrees of savagery to this day. The students struggled with the English language, they struggled with form, but their message was strong and unequivocal, and, while also serving to galvanize the struggling masses, its most prominent feature was that it spat in the face of white authority.

This, then, is the broad context within which the writer has to choose the language or languages he will use to address his respective audiences.

The Traditional Oral Praise Poet

Creating a militant poetry in the African languages is a challenge that faced the oral poet in the nineteenth century as the Boers encroached more and more on the African's land during the so-called Great Trek and beyond. The contemporary young activist poet of the seventies and eighties can take courage from, and also feel humbled by, the fact that his activity is nothing new. He has a tradition to fall back on. He has poetry of high calibre that used powerful imagery and direct exhortation, that was created in the heat of the wars of dispossession. His courageous forefathers resisted the invaders, and his artistic predecessor immortalized them in his poetry of praise. He is therefore able to measure his own efforts against his glorious past. One must emphasize here first the necessity to become aware of this poetry, for I have no doubt that many of the younger poets have, unfortunately, never availed themselves of it. The pride and humility which will, of necessity, follow such an exercise will be to their advantage.

Here is an example. During the War of Disarmament (also known among the Basotho as *Ntoa ea Lithunya* or The Gun War) in the latter part of the nineteenth century resulting from the British Administration's decision to deprive the blacks of their guns, the Basotho found themselves split into the 'Loyalists' (Mateketa) and the 'Rebels' (Marebele). One of the most outstanding rebels who fought personally in many of the battles was Chief Maama. In his glorious career, he performed many outstanding feats including his killing of Erasmus, the savage Boer soldier who played havoc among Basotho warriors as he skilfully drove his equally fearsome grey horse into their midst. Maama therefore deserved the highest praise for his deed. Being himself a poet of no mean order, he composed a long poem based on the episode, creating numerous eulogies for himself in the process. Often Maama assumes a dramatic posture as he chooses to address himself to this or that audience, defined in the poem. To his peers and comrades-in-arms he says:

Le se mpate bahlankana beso!
Ha le ke le re ke nna ka mo thula!
Ha le re ke nna ka bolaya pele?

Do not hide my actions, young men of my country!
Will you not say it was I who struck him?
Will you not say it was I who killed first?⁴

To the white people, the enemy, whom he refers to as the white men 'by the sea', he speaks through the surviving Boer soldiers.

He refers to Erasmus as the 'child' of the white people for whom the message is intended:

Ba re: 'Re le tjee re tloha re tswa ntweng,
Re tswa kgabong ka ha Ramabilikoe.
Ka mona ka ha Mafa le Ramabilikoe,
Ka mona ha Suhlane le Rampoi,
Kgalong la Boleka le la Mathebe,
Eitse ha re bapala motho a wa.
Ngwan'a lona o jelwe ke Koeyoko,
O jelwe ke Koeyoko ya Letsie,
Koeyoko, Seja-bana-ba-makgowa?'

They said: 'As you see us here, we have just returned from battle,
We've just come from the flames at the place of

Ramabilikoe.

Not-far-from-here, at Mafa's and Ramabilikoe's,
Not far from here, at Suhlane's and Rampoi's,
At the mountain passes of Boleka and Mathebe,
It happened, while we were playing, a man fell.
Your child has been devoured by the Koeyoko,
He has been devoured by the Koeyoko of Letsie,
The Koeyoko, Devourer-of-the-children-of-the-white-
man!

Of course 'the white men by the sea' did not hear him. Neither were they intended to in a physical way, firstly because they were not present when the poem was recited, and secondly because the words spoken were in Sesotho. Why then does the poet engage in all the game-playing? The fact is that these words were all intended for the Basotho audience who derived pride, courage and a boost of their morale from the knowledge that their warrior was capable of doing such a deed to their enemy. The poet was sharing with the home-side, the Basotho, the sense of confidence, of daring the enemy. He was telling them there was no room for fear and diffidence in their ranks.

Language Diversity and the Felt Need for Unity

The Boers, in their northward wanderings, first met the Xhosa, then the Zulu, then the Basotho, and so on. (This is, of course, after they had virtually wiped out the San as 'vermin'). The poets in these language groups all composed poems similar to the one quoted above. There was a growing realization, however, that despite language differences and sometimes even conflicting interests at the local level, the new threat called for a united voice and united action. Politically this was to happen in a decisive way in 1912 when the first organization to unite all blacks under one banner was formed, namely the South African Native National Congress which was later to become the present African National Congress of South Africa. This was a direct response to the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 under a constitution that excluded all blacks from participation in the political life of South Africa. The composition of the leadership strongly reflected this sentiment. It included John L. Dube (Zulu, President), Walter Rubusana (Xhosa, Co-Vice-President), and Sol T. Plaatje (Tswana, Secretary-General). It was a recognition of the fact that the Union united Boer and Briton, and brought the erstwhile independent provinces under one central government, in order to facilitate a more thorough exploitation of the blacks.

'The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. If one is free at heart, no man-made chains can bind one to servitude.'

At about the same time as the war between the whites and the blacks was passing completely from the battlefield to the political arena, around the turn of the century, the blacks were consolidating their newly acquired skill of writing. The verbal artist was henceforth going to be able to write down his compositions on paper. Such well known writers as Thomas Mofolo, John L. Dube, S.E.K. Mqhayi, and Henry Masila Ndawo were producing the beginnings of a written literature. This period may be characterized as one in which written African literature was in its infancy. For reasons of survival, this

literature largely steered clear of political themes. It also gave a wide berth to themes and concepts that might be considered offensive to the missionaries who, after all, owned and controlled the printing works and publishing houses.

Poetry, however, was another matter, for it was here more than anywhere else where war imagery could be, and was, easily adapted to the new phase of the struggle, or the new war whose warriors were the educated man, the political or civil leader, and so on. Heroic poetic techniques are found in abundance in poems of this nature in which persons of worth are praised while they live, and lamented when they die. An excellent example of this is provided by S.E.K. Mqhayi in his anthology of poems, *INzuzo*.⁵

Since this presentation is intended largely to examine the contemporary scene, we must, rather abruptly, take a giant leap into the sixties, the seventies and the eighties and see what happened, and is happening there.

The Contemporary Scene

This period is one characterized by a new political awareness referred to as the Black Consciousness Movement. What makes this period so unique is that, beginning in the late sixties and continuing throughout the seventies and into the present day, the young black students in the 'bush' colleges turned the tables on the authorities. The colleges had been established by the government with the intention to control the minds of the students, yet, by a strange irony, it was precisely out of these colleges that a new and revolutionary definition of the struggle and the role of the black person therein were born. This was the political coming-of-age of the blacks. Steve Biko, the 'father' of Black Consciousness' stressed that the first prerequisite was self-liberation. He said that 'the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. If one is free at heart, no man-made chains can bind one to servitude.'⁶ This underscores the need to conquer fear before one can stand up and declare one's own views with conviction.

The spirit of daring manifested itself in the political sphere through acts of defiance such as the workers' strikes in Durban and Port Elizabeth in the early-to-mid seventies. The workers knew that it was illegal for blacks to engage in strike action, and that they were risking heavy fines and sentences. Organizations such as the South African Students Organization (SASO), the Black People's Convention (BPC) came into existence. The word 'black' took on a new significance, symbolising both the new sense of liberation and the unity of all oppressed under one, positive defining concept. Thus the intellectual process and political action reinforced and constantly redefined each other.

For purposes of this discussion, the importance of this new sense of confidence, self-identity and lack of fear is that the white man suddenly became willy-nilly part of the black writer's target audience. We must therefore examine the question of communication, through literature, with white authority by blacks whose mother tongue English is not. Mongane Serote, one of the contemporary young black poets, interviewed by Michael Chapman in 1980, made the following significant statement: 'I am not English-speaking. I have worked hard at the English language. I didn't complete high school, and of course the English press made me very conscious of the fact that English isn't my home language. There was no way that could stop me from writing. I worked hard. I spent nights at the typewriter writing and re-writing.'⁷

The most obvious follow-up question Michael Chapman might have asked, but did not, is: 'Why then do you write in English?' To which Serote might conceivably have responded: 'If I wrote in my own language, this interview would not be taking place!' Or perhaps Serote might have said: 'If I wrote in my own language I could not convey to my oppressor and tormentor this important message: 'I do not fear you any more!'

It seems to me it is just as well that the question of why the contemporary black South African writers write in English should be asked, not by the white South Africans, English-speaking or otherwise, but by the black critics and ultimately by the black writers themselves. It is not a futile academic exercise, but a practical approach to a problem of communication. Surely there must be a strong reason why Serote would 'work hard at the English language.' It is one thing to spend 'nights at the typewriter, writing and re-writing.' It is quite another to decide what language this process is to take place in. Serote chose English. He could have 'spent nights at the typewriter writing and re-writing' in Sesotho. The question then is relevant and important: Why in English?

This question quite clearly sometimes bothers some of these writers, and they feel the need to confront it head-on. Siphso Sepamla wrote in 1976 that he had sometimes questioned the correctness of the English used by black writers, including himself. As regards the question whether English should be abandoned as a medium his answer is an emphatic 'No, never.' Later he declares his belief that 'writing in English is going to be strengthened' because of its common use on social occasions, the clamour for its use as a medium of instruction in schools, its use in industry, the influence of the English-language newspapers among blacks, and its use in the neighbouring black independent states.⁸

I have no doubt the question, if seriously posed, would evoke a miscellany of responses, some flippant, some arrogant, some confused. Some people might even wonder why they hadn't thought about it before. A few might take it seriously. Perhaps some might even see some absurdity in performing poetry in English in the black townships. Some might have had experiences similar to those reported by Sepamla who says:

I owe nobody an apology for writing in English. Yet inside me is this regret that at the moment there is a handicap that mars complete communication between me and my audience, particularly the black audience.

He believes there have been ominous rumblings of discontent in the black audiences, and that the artists may, in fact, be alienating the people:

When people talk of izifundiswa (the educated) or when they say khuluma isiZulu (speak Zulu) ha re utlwe bua seSotho (we do not hear, speak Sotho) then the divisions begin. Those who speak in English will tend to avoid such hecklers. And what will happen to the effort of uplifting ourselves and those down there? I think we have a serious problem here. I have watched the same problem rear its head when such stage productions as *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *How long?* are presented. Either people have gone to sleep or they have shouted khulumani isiZulu . . .⁹

One wonders what questions arise in the minds of writers and performers faced with this hostile reaction from their audiences. Does this not make them doubt the wisdom of oral performances of this nature being carried out in

English? One would hope that such performers would not be tempted, as Sepamla fears they might, to avoid black audiences who indulge in such interjections. If that were to happen, then the alienation would be complete.

When we go back to the interview of Serote by Chapman, then we see how the ironies multiply. Michael Chapman's next question to Serote is: 'Whereas your first two collections seem directed at both a black and a white audience, *No Baby Must Weep* (1975) indicates a distinct shift in perspective, and seems directed primarily at fellow blacks. Would you comment on this?' Serote: 'It's directed at Africans in particular. Look, I don't simply want to write for the colours of skins. I want to try to understand the complex issue of the scale of privileged positions in South African society, which includes the white, the Indian and the coloured-- I have been called a 'kaffir' by all of them. This is complex, but I have become increasingly aware that it is the Africans who hold the tools of liberation in South Africa. And it is to them *No Baby Must Weep* is addressed.'¹⁰

The claim that a book written in English is addressed to blacks makes no sense unless one specifies that it is for those blacks who have acquired enough English to be able to read and understand it. Then we would understand that it is not intended for the masses, counted in millions, who do not have that skill.

Ezekiel Mphahlele, interviewed in 1979 by Noel Chabani Manganyi makes a similarly surprising statement. Referring to the mid-fifties, he claims that the then-budding, elitist group of writers who were mostly journalists working for *Drum* magazine, wrote a 'proletarian literature'. 'People were really writing furiously in a lively, vibrant style. It was quite a style of its own, an English of its own . . . There was, as I say, a new kind of English being written. Significantly, *it was the black man writing for the black man*. Not addressing himself to the whites. *Talking a language that would be understood by his own people . . . Ours was really a proletarian literature.*' (my emphasis).

Even restricting one's comments to Johannesburg, one cannot see stories written in English reaching any significant number of workers, let alone the millions of rural Africans and migrant workers for whom *Drum* an urban magazine, was so totally irrelevant.

The problem with the *Drum* generation of writers is that they failed to place their writing within the context of the long tradition of verbal art, both oral and written, especially that devoted to the struggle. A knowledge of the tradition and an acknowledgement of its contribution to the long, continuous fight against the forces of oppression would have broken this self-imposed isolation and instilled a salutary sense of humility, if not of pride. It might also have opened the eyes of the *Drum* group to the fact that a proletarian literature can only be written in a language that is understood by the masses.

Mphahlele himself, commenting on the *Staffrider* generation of writers, strongly advocates this sense of tradition. 'What I see in *Staffrider*' he says, 'is a real, vibrant literature. But it lacks a myth. By myth meaning this, what you are saying, that there is a tomorrow. That literature captures the agony of the moment. It has no resonance because it has no past either. It has no past to work on. We were just saying earlier that our present day writers have been cut off from the fifties. They don't even know that it existed. They think literature begins with them. So there is no resonance going to the past and no resonance going to the future. This is what we must move beyond.'¹²

Sound advice which, however, fails to come to terms with the fact that 'the fifties' were not the beginning of African literature either. Mphahlele's dismissal, elsewhere, of African-language literature as 'Anaemic writing that is meant for juveniles'¹³ is too facile a way out. There is a bit more to African-language literature than that. What needs to be done is to break down these walls of isolation and let tradition flow.

The problem of language choice and what motivates the black writer to choose one language as against another is therefore also a problem of attitude. 'The fifties', no less than 'the seventies', failed to look at the literatures written in the African languages for guidance and inspiration. For, even though there was no 'school' as such, there is an unmistakable periodicity noted. There is no question in my mind but that the era of the oral heroic bard ought to be regarded as a literary period whose major instigating force was the immediate danger of the loss of land, property and liberty, a compelling motif and a unifying force.

Since writing meant that publication was the passport to reaching an audience, and the means of publication and dissemination were in the hands of someone other than the composer of the verbal art, the introduction of writing brought in a 'middle man' between the artist and his audience. The ideological and commercial interests of this 'middle man' became a powerful instrument which he used to control the artist. That is why written prose fiction showed so little of the daring and outspokenness of the oral poetry and prose. It is curious, however, that written poetry and song were less inhibited in their criticism. Reuben Caluza composed the words and music of the song 'i-Land Act' which was a bitter attack on the notorious Land Act of 1913.¹⁴ Many similar songs were written by other composers whose intention was to keep up the African's awareness of his plundered rights. Needless to say that in order for 'the fifties' and 'the seventies' to have had the greatest possible impact, they should not have forgotten or ignored these earlier artists of the struggle.

English and African-Language Writing

Not all African writers in English are motivated by a sense of commitment to social change. I would suggest that for some, the promise of wide exposure and possible recognition in the white-dominated field of literary criticism is a strong factor. This ensures that even a mediocre piece of writing will at least be talked about, if not given a prominence way out of proportion to its merit. It is therefore relevant to ask what makes a mediocre poem written in English a better poem than an excellent one written in Sesotho? Mrs. N. M. Khaketla, one of the best poets I know, wrote many a poem in her native language Sesotho in which she indicted the British Colonial Administration in Lesotho before independence. Her husband, also a poet in addition to his other literary activities, had just been expelled from his teaching job at the Basutoland (now Lesotho) High School for political reasons. Their daughter, born shortly after this event, was named *Molelekeng* ('Chase-him away/Chase-her-away'). Mrs. Khaketla wrote a poem¹⁵ in which she wove the name of her daughter into her husband's (and of course her own) harassment at this time. The poem is written in dramatic form in which the persona assumes different roles and creates a lively contrapuntal dialogue among the several 'voices' or 'characters'.

From the third line of Stanza 4 and for the whole of Stanza 5, the persona's voice is interrupted by a white man's voice, a government official in Maseru. The voice speaks through a letter the white man is writing. This could also be considered to be the persona-as-poet's-husband suspending his own words in order to quote the white man, who says, *inter alia*:

Stanza 4 (partial)

'Moshemane ha a ikentse kheleke,
A bile a khanya ka ho bua haholo,
O tla ruta bana ho rola litlhong.
Le 'metsetse kamose, Forei Setata
Etlere ha a bua polesa le thunye

...

'When a boy brags of being so eloquent,
And makes a habit of speaking too much,
He will teach the little ones to put aside their modesty.
You must throw him across the river, into the Free
State

Where, the moment he opens his mouth, a policeman
will shoot him.'

...

Stanza 5 (partial)

...

'Moshemanehali enoa oa khantsa
E ka hoki, o ja a ntse a rora,
O halala sengoatho le phophi ea lebese,
O batla polokoe le khamelo e lolobetse.'

This overgrown boy is too proud,
He is like a pig that grumbles as it eats,
He is not satisfied with a piece of bread and a
drop of milk
But demands the entire loaf plus a milk-pail full
to the brim.'

A wealth of imagery. Sesotho proverbs rearranged and woven into the fabric of the poem. A name, a child's name, undergirding the major poetic image, the 'chase-him-away' image. And then the inevitable return, the epic hero come back to oust the usurper. The richness of the imagery, the easy flight into metaphor, symbol, and allegory, are all facilitated by the fact that N. M. Khaketla draws her inspiration and her testimony from the constantly bubbling spring, the *Ntswanatsatsi*, of Sesotho culture. Words are released from their daily

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meanings to re-emerge with cultural codings that engage the reader in the fascinating game of 'do-you-recognize-me?': 'My mother had not even the smallest piece of cloth to cover her naked shoulders;' 'My father rejects me though I have come from his loins;' 'My little mother is not telling the truth;' 'The beast I earned;' 'I am fit to be given a wife.' *Mother, father, little mother, beast, (cow), wife*, these are surrogates for meanings much deeper than their surface denotations. Yet Mrs. Khaketla never got to be interviewed by any of the numerous white self-styled experts of African literature. But that is not the real tragedy. The tragedy is that African-language writers of Mrs. Khaketla's calibre were never taken as a

Days with Poona Poon

Memories of a poor white childhood

by Luli Callinicos



This is the story from the Depression era, the early 1930s. A white boy, the son of Greek immigrant parents, grows up 'black' in Denver, Johannesburg — on the wrong side of the tracks. Today he is a doctor. As he says, 'Could you imagine if I wasn't white, hey?'

'As far as I can remember we were the only whites living with blacks — with coloureds and blacks. We lived in a semi-detached house and next door there was a coloured woman who was a shebeen queen. Her name was Mrs Mynhard. She was quite an affluent member of our community, considering our standards of living at that time. She had a car.

We were sharing our rooms. In the front bedroom was a coloured woman

living there. The lounge was our bedroom, and the dining room was occupied by an African man and his wife. But you mustn't forget that there were changes. We had actually Europeans living with us in the beginning — Germans, the Stoppels — they were a German couple — she was divorced — then they left and then a coloured couple moved in.

At the back of the house was the 'native quarters', a run-down, ram-

shackle little place and that was occupied by a couple.

Across the road from us there was an Afrikaans family, living on the corner of Crystal and Sanders Streets. Their son was quite a lad, had up for many charges — assault, rape, was one of them.

Round the other side, in another portion of the area, which wasn't very far from us, lived a lot of 'neat' Europeans — they were the miners and

other similar workers. Some of them lived in houses that belonged to the mines — they were quite wealthy in that they owned motor cars and they had a home of their own. We were the poorest in the community — there were none other poorer than we were.

My father was working. It was the time of the depression . . . he had a job in a butchery as a blockman. He received somewhere about R12 a month at the time. He used to commute to work on a bicycle which had a broken handle. I remember that, and he had a carrier in the front. He used to put me in the carrier and take me for a ride. That was my form of entertainment.

My mother didn't work. She couldn't speak English very well, you know. She wasn't skilled in any form of work.'

String beans and hard rock bread

'My mother used to economise in many ways. We used to go early in the morning, on Wednesday morning, to Fotheringham's Bakery, which was three or four miles away. She would take one bag and I would take one bag. We would get there as early as possible so that the coloureds and Africans wouldn't take first position in the line. When the bloke opened up the hatch, he would give the less stale bread to the first in the queue, and those at the end of the queue would get the rock hard bread, which was two or three days old.

We would buy about a dozen loaves of bread, and we would go home and she would keep the bread until we needed it for our meals, and she would soak it in a basin of water. By the time it came to the last loaf of bread, which was about a week after we had bought it, it had turned a bit mouldy — then we couldn't eat it, so we had to make sure we ate as much as possible as soon as possible.

Our meals consisted principally of beans, string beans. This was our staple food — we had that and nothing else, just the bread. Usually the meal would last us two or three days. She would just heat it up — stewed beans, with tomato.

At the weekends, the best time of all, Maud Mynhard — she was very kind to us — would send over a plate of chicken and rice, pumpkin, and potatoes. I remember it to this day. So we would have a plate of potatoes, rice, chicken, and pumpkin — we would have chicken for that week. She was very good to us. My parents when

they were alive always remembered her and were grateful to her. She was quite well off, you see.

The perils and rewards of brewing

Maud was related to a woman up the road who was also a shebeen queen. I'll never forget the story she once told me about Detective Smit, who was the terror of the area because he would raid regularly. We used to stand cavey — we used to watch out to see if these blokes were coming, and we would signal. We would be standing up to six blocks away at various points and there would be somebody standing there. And of course then they would get rid of the beer, which they had dug into the ground. They used to dig quite deeply into the grass.

They used to come with long spikes, the police, and they used to dig into the ground and they would hit the drum, you see. So they would dig all over the ground, trying to find the drum. So what they did, in order to avoid the detection of this beer, they used to dig deeper than what the spike was, the length of the spike, so that they couldn't reach the drum — say twelve feet deep instead of six — and then they would put a pipe connected to the beer and they would suction off the beer. She and Helen, who lived up the road, were very wealthy women — to me at any rate. In my eyes, nearly everyone was wealthier-than we were; we were the poorest, and they were exceptionally rich. She had a motor car, and a European boy friend.

The mines were close by. It was not the industrial site it is today. There were hundreds of blacks, pitching up at weekends, coming to drink, and every weekend there was either a death, a murder, or a rape — there was never a weekend when you didn't get one of these things happening. So that is how they made their money. So blacks were involved — Indians, there was an Indian family across the road. They were well off as well.

Poona Poon and the Panthers

We were all well integrated, we all had very few problems with each other. There was a sense of community, a sense of camaraderie, and there was a sense of belonging, too. Our common enemy was the cops, because they were denying them a living.

One of my very good friends was

Poona Poon, and his brother. They were blacks. I remember he was a very good piano player — he had a piano at home. He lived around the corner and he used to play the piano very well. He had nine toes. He taught himself and he was very good. He lived in a little *kaya* — a nice house — they were also involved with liquor.

But there was a general sense of happiness, and there was a general sense of belonging. There was the outside world, even in our groups that were formed which involved blacks and Indians — the Python Gang, the Panther Gang, and the Eagles. We fought the Europeans from Rosher-ville — the mining area. But there wasn't any colour discrimination. We belonged to the Panthers and even I went along to the Good Hope bioscope and the Rio bioscope, because I felt I belonged to them, you see.

My mother, of course, and my father I think, suffered very badly from it all . . . My father was much too frightened to do anything, he didn't want to get involved. I remember he was bitten by a dog once which belonged to one of the European friends I used to try and fraternise with, and he wouldn't take any action because he was scared of the law. He didn't have any money anyway. He was a frightened man at the time.

They never really felt that they belonged. But I identified myself as a black. I went to bioscope with them, I dressed like them. I wore takkies — if I went to the Rio bioscope I wore black takkies. We went to the mine dumps together. We went to the 'slippery slops' together. I didn't identify with the Europeans. We spoke Afrikaans — it wasn't an English environment. It was a very broken-down Afrikaans that we spoke.

I was actually afraid of Europeans. We used to go to their schools — the very school that I eventually went to — begging for food. I didn't see it as begging at the time, you know. We used to go and stand at the gates and wait for the breaks, and the children would come out. They always gave me the food, you see, because I was obviously European — I never realised it at the time. They always liked taking me, the other kids, because the other children saw me as a European amongst the blacks, you see, and they would hand me the sandwiches, so I would share with my friends. And I remember once when I was looking in the dustbins at the school, for food that had been thrown away by the other school kids,

The Black Mamba Rises Again in Victory

The Victors of wars,
But then retreat.
The Builders of nests,
But then like an ant-eater
you then desert.
Heavy are your blows,
they leave the employers
unnerved.

On your side are your
brothers even at the New
Jerusalem
Let it be workers! they say,
The heaven above also
approves.

Ngudungudu, the woman
who married without any
lobolo,
Busy boiling foreigners'
pots,
Yet yours are lying cold.

The humble bride,
Affianced with the
bridegroom's consent.
Yet others are affianced
with their father's consent,
Even the Japanese have now
come to be your
bridegrooms,
So! Bride why entwined by
chains,
Instead of being entwined
with gold and silver like
others.

The Black mamba that
shelters in the songs,
Yet others shelter in the
trees.

Ancestors of Africa rejoice,
Here are the workers
coming like a flock of
locusts,
Here is the struggle,
Sikhumba and Mgonothi
are mesmerized,
Asking what species of old
mamba is this?
Dying and resurrecting like
a dangabane flower.
It was stabbed good and
proper during the day,
At Sydney Road right on
the premises,
To the delight of the
impimpis,
And the delight of the police.
There were echoes of
approval there on the TV at
Auckland Park saying:
Never again shall it move,
Never again shall it revive,

Never again shall it return,
Yet it was beginning to
tower with rage.

The old mamba that woke
up early in the morning at
St Anthony's,
On rising it was multi-
headed,
One of its heads was at
Mobeni,
Njakazi, the green calf of
MAWU, can bear me out,
Another of its heads was
at baQulusi land at
Ladysmith,
On rising it was burning like
fire.

Even Sikhumba — the
leather that overcomes the
tanners,
Sikhumba who knows no
race,
Who stabs an old man and
a young man alike,
Using the same spear.
Who stabs a man's bone,
Inflicting pain in the heart.
But he is now showing a
change of heart,
Let's sit down and talk, he
now says.

The spear that thundered at
dawn at St Anthony's,
The spear that devoured the
father and the sons and the
daughters,
Then the men came
together,
Devouring them whilst
singing,
Yet the songs were just a
decoy.

Rife are the rumours,
That those who defied the
unity have sunk,
To the throbbing hearts of
employers.

You black buffalo,
Black yet with tasty meat,
The buffalo that turns the
foreigners' language into
confusion.
Today you're called a
Bantu,
Tomorrow you're called a
Communist,
Sometimes you're called a
Native.
Today again you're called
a foreigner,

Tomorrow again you're
called a Terrorist,
Sometimes you're called a
Plural,
Sometimes you're called an
Urban PURS.

You powerful black
buffalo
Powerful with slippery
body,
The buffalo that pushed
men into the forest,
In bewilderment the police
stood with their mouths
open.

Rife are the rumours,
That those who defied
being pushed into the
forest,
In exile they are,
One Smit is in exile across
at the Bluff,
One Madinana is in exile
across the Umgeni River,
Both can bear me out.

Praise poets, messengers,
observers,
Run in all directions,
Stand on top of the
mountains,
Report to Botha at Pretoria,
Report to our heroes on the
island,
Report to the angels in your
prayers,
Say unto them — here is a
flood of workers,
Why tease the mamba in its
century old sleep?
The writing is on the wall,
No stone shall stand on top
of the other till eternity,
Tell them — the borrowed
must be given back,
Tell them — the chained
must be chained no more,
Tell them — these are the
dictates of the black
mamba,
The mamba that knows no
colour,
Tell them — these are the
workers' demands,
By virtue of their birth-
right,
By virtue of their struggle.

Dunlop workers, I'm taking
my hat off,
I'm bowing to you with
respect.

Mi Hlatshwayo

the 'watchboy', the *matshigalane* — we used to call him the *matshigalane* — chased me away. We were always looking out for the *matshigalane* because he was the one who always caused problems with us kids.

Schooldays and a 'Helping Hand'

When I went to the Hellenic School — I was seven or eight when I started — I had a skin disease, I was malnutritioned, and I had tuberculosis. The social welfare department sent a social welfare officer to check up on whether I was being fed properly and regularly. The Transvaal Helping Hand Society used to hand us food parcels which my mother used to sell in order to clothe me. They wanted to take me away, as a matter of fact — they wanted to put me in an institution and my father fought against it.

When I went to school I was always shy, frightened. I felt I was equal, but I was intimidated, first of all by their wealth and also by their appearance. They looked clean, and I never had a bath. It was maybe once a month I would have a wash. My feet were black. I remember a white boy who came to see us once only. I was very friendly with him at school. I was quite old then, I must have been about eleven or twelve. And I was playing with my friends, and my feet were black. I used to go to bed like that; we never had sheets. We used to sleep between blankets and the place was swarming with bugs. My feet were black and I was so embarrassed because this friend of mine was a nice boy. He left me his bicycle — he died early in life, leukaemia I think. And his mom came to visit us — she was a widow — with this young bloke, and caught me in my natural surroundings. I was very embarrassed about my home. I became conscious of my poverty. You see, I was fairly old at the time . . .

Then they put me apart in class because I was covered in sores, and because the other mothers protested that their children, their kids, were sitting next to this bloke who had — what was the name of my disease? — *vuilsiekte*, which means filthy disease. Then of course the school doctor who used to come around had to bandage my legs, because my legs were never bandaged properly, and these sores were always exposed, especially on the flexes of the arms, the flexes of the legs, behind my ears. Of course this created tremendous emotional trauma in me at the time. I would go out dur-

ing the break period and I would sit by myself, you see.

I remember I was one of the fastest swimmers. Do you know why I was one of the fastest swimmers in the school, eventually when we did sports? Because I used to swim in Rosherville Dam, you see. And I used to swim across the dam and back. This is how I used to entertain myself with my African friends. And when I went to school I was quite a good swimmer. But I didn't want to go swimming because I couldn't put my trunks on because there I was, covered with sores. And that was the picture.

Moving up

We must have stayed in Denver about twelve or fourteen years. Then we moved from there and we stayed next to the railway station. The house was very old and broken down. I think I must have been about fifteen. We had moved out of Moddergat. We had moved from Denver into Malvern; we moved into the area of the Europeans, but on the border . . . And when I look at those houses today, I can't believe that in my child's mind these were magnificent dwelling places.

Our Malvern house was pure corrugated iron — it wasn't brick, it wasn't anything else but corrugated iron . . . All the windows were barred. You never had a window you could open because of the robberies, and the fights that used to take place. I never knew what it was to have an open window. There were bars, and the windows were tied with wire, and we had no fence because that had been knocked down and people used to walk right past our front door, the Africans, so that they could go to the shebeen that was next door, you see . . . And it was right on the railway line. You could hear the trains passing right through the night. But it was ours, our own little spot, and it was definitely nobody else's.

Then we moved from there into Jules Street, and that was our first brick house, and the windows could be opened. I'll never forget that, because I could open the windows, and I used to always have my bed next to the window so that I could see the stars. It was quite an experience for me — I had never known that before.

And then I turned eighteen and our conditions improved. My father began to earn more money and he became a partner with a chap for the name of Keele, who took him for a ride — made him work very hard. He had one afternoon off, and that was a

Thursday. And he used to work through all the festive holidays. There wasn't a day he had off except on a Thursday afternoon. He would come home, and in the afternoon he would go to the market place, my mother and my father — that was the big occasion, when things had gone better — and we would buy vegetables and come home and we would have a good meal.

That is how things slowly improved.

The Meeting

'What happened to your other friends? Did you still keep in touch with them?'

Yes. I'll tell you a rather sad story about that. This chap with the nine toes, hey, who was a good piano player? Poona Poon was an African boy, a good friend of mine. It was quite a few years ago, I was outside the Colosseum bioscope — and I think was unmarried at the time. And this African chap came across, he saw me, and approached me. And I looked at him and there was just something about him that triggered off . . . some memory in my mind, of something past, you see. And he said to me:

'Are you . . . Jack?'

So I said, '. . . Yes.'

And he said, 'My name is Poona Poon.'

So I said, 'Poona Poon from Denver?' He said, 'Yes.' So I said, 'My God!' and I threw my arms around him and I hugged him. And he was as stiff as a ramrod — you know, he didn't reciprocate in his affection. I hugged him and I squeezed him and I said, 'Poona Poon, it's so beautiful to see you!' I said, 'What are you doing? What's happened to you?'

And then he said to me, 'Baas,' he said, 'can you give me a job?'

I almost hit him, you know that? I almost hit him I was so cross. Here I was trying to — you know what I mean — I saw him as an equal. I always saw him as an equal. And I thought to myself, 'My God! How can you ask me for a job?' You know what I mean? That was one story. That was the gap that developed after we left.

'I suppose part of the difference was that as a white you were able to rehabilitate yourself?'

Yes! Could you imagine if I wasn't a white, hey? . . . 'Baas, can you give me a job?' And he was a good pianist! He played well. We used to sit and watch him play. He played by ear — he never had any lessons of any sort . . . Ja, it's a long road we've travelled. ■

Even while he was drawing the knife out, his other hand was pulling a thick envelope from the man's inner pocket. The cleaned knife was swiftly replaced, then he straightened and walked quickly away.

'Police! Help!' When he heard the scream, Morris began to run.

At the corner he kept running unaware that the robot was red. The angry squeal of rubber on tar shattered the brittle June evening.

Almost instantly a crowd formed around the fallen man. A stranger, braver than the rest, knelt at his side, cushioning the bloody head with his hand. With his handkerchief he kept wiping the blood that poured from the man's nose.

'Doctor. Get me a doctor,' Morris muttered through bloody lips.

'Don't worry. An ambulance will be here just now. You'll be okay. It's not serious.'

Morris squeezed his eyes shut; drops of blood appeared at their corners. The man took Morris's hand in

his, mistaking the wet nail varnish for blood. In the excitement he was oblivious of its strong smell.

'Are you saved?' he asked.
'Saved? Oh, you mean that! Uh-uh. I don't think so.'

The man was aware of the circle of shoes around him. He swallowed hard, thinking about what he was going to say next.

'Someone can forgive you for everything you've ever done. He can take away all your guilt-'. He broke off when Morris started coughing.

Soon the spasm subsided. 'What do I do?' he asked, barely audible.

The man's lips were close to Morris's ear. 'You only have to accept what He -'

An ambulance siren drowned out the rest of the conversation. The crowd parted to allow the vehicle access to the injured man.

Michael carried a tray. Piled high on it were exquisitely ripe fruits; at least a dozen different kinds. Behind him a score of winged creatures bore

a variety of exotic foods. Glorious light poured down around them, only to be reflected off the mirrored road and back into brilliant heavens. Ecstatic joy emanated from every face.

As if from nowhere, Gabriel came among them, gently flapping his satin wings.

'You have a newcomer?' he asked, as he surveyed the procession.

'Yes, I do,' Michael replied.

Gabriel inspected the fruit. 'Anyone I know?' he asked.

'You may. His name's Morris Moodley.'

'Christened Ganas Moodley?'

'The same one.'

'You will tell me his story sometime, now won't you Michael?'

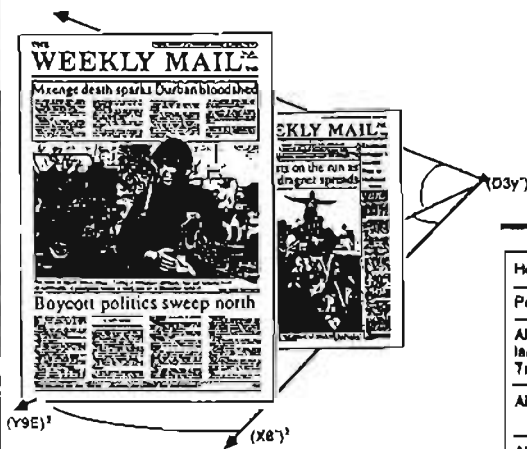
'Of course I will, Gabriel. Of course I will.'

'I'm told he came very close to being lost,' Gabriel said, as he helped himself to the golden apple at the apex of the pile. ♦

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source of inspiration by either 'the fifties' or 'the seventies', for 'the fifties' and 'the seventies' considered themselves sufficient unto themselves. So they never learnt humility.

One can mention many other cases of militant writing. Jac Mocoancoeng's poem 'Exoda'¹⁶ uses the metaphor of the movement of the Israelites out of the house of bondage, to preach the message of freedom. No white man read it, for it was written in Sesotho. S. M. Mofokeng wrote the play *Senkatana*¹⁷ based on an old Sesotho legend in which the young man, Senkatana, left alone with his mother after an enormous monster has swallowed all living things, goes and slays the monster with his single spear and releases its captives. The message of liberation again is quite clear. No white critic read it. But again the tragedy is that no black man seems to have read it either. It is a safe bet that one day when an African writer receives the Nobel Prize, it will not necessarily be for the most meritorious work, for no other reason than the linguistic inaccessibility of many excellent works to those entrusted with the frightful task of selecting the winner.

Conclusions and Some Practical Suggestions

Once the black writers confront the question squarely and honestly: Should we or should we not write in English? it is predictable that the answer, by an overwhelming majority, would endorse the continued use of English. However, the affirmative answer would result from reasons as complex as the South African situation itself. Having come to that conclusion, they would have to devise a *modus vivendi* whereby they can retain the respect of their black audiences at the same time.

I would suggest, as the first prerequisite, that, in reading to black audiences, the readers *must* read in one or other of the black languages of South Africa. It doesn't really matter whether one reads a Zulu poem to a predominantly Sesotho audience. There might be no way of determining this predominance, anyway. A Mosotho in such an audience will appreciate your Zulu or Xhosa or Ndebele etc. even if he may not understand much of what you are saying, just as readily as he will feel offended by your English which to him is a measure of your alienation from your own people.

Given the government's ethnic zoning of the townships, an assessment of the linguistically dominant group in any given township audience might not be too difficult a task, thus turning this divide-and-rule trick into advantage. One is constantly inspired by the fact that the South African Students Organization (SASO) and the Black Consciousness Movement arose out of a ghetto college which was subverted by the students to a beneficial use quite in opposition to its original purpose.

When the poets read in the situations described above, they must never miss the opportunity to explain that they also *have to* write and read in English because they have a message for the white oppressor who would otherwise not understand what they are saying. They might even go to the extent of translating some of their more militant poems into an African language, just so that their audience might partake of the joy of this new-found emancipation. For it is an act of self-emancipation to be able to confront your oppressor face to face and tell him in uncensored language what you think of him. The poetry suddenly becomes alive with the I (Black man) you (White man) confrontation, in which the accusatory 'you' is hurled like a barbed spear at the white oppressor. The language explodes with swear words like *shit* and

fuck, and images of violence such as *throw up*, *vomit*, *throttle*, *retch* which are scattered all over the poetry. Yet these are neither swear words nor words of violence. They are an expression of freedom as legitimate as the shout 'I'm free!' They constitute an explosion of the bottled-up feelings of forced restraint over these many centuries. Sharing this feeling will make any oral performance session much more consciously an educational event aimed at consciousness-raising.

Composing originally in an African language and later translating into English may be another way of boosting the morale of one's black audience. Let the poem be born in the black language. Such poets would be in good company. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, after all, reached the hearts of the Kikuyu people much more readily and deeply when he reverted to writing in Kikuyu; Mazisi Kunene composes in Zulu and translates into English. They would also be in the company, of course, of the old oral poets and creators of myths whose tradition continues in some contemporary poets writing in praise of modern heroes. As regards the so-called 'coloureds,' the Indians and the Malay, the principle would be the same as for the Africans--continue writing in their languages, i.e. the naturalized forms of English and Afrikaans, which are found, to varying degrees, in writers like Alex la Guma, Adam Small, Achmat Dangor, and so on. Of course these groups will have to make an effort to acquire some knowledge of an African language. After all the black man has been, and continues to be, the one called upon to meet all the other groups in *their* territory, linguistically speaking. Such efforts should be serious, and not mere tokens.

'What I see in Staffrider is a real, vibrant literature. But it lacks a myth. By myth meaning this, what you are saying, that there is a tomorrow.'

In summary, we may state some of the writer's problems as follows:

Firstly, even as the story gets born in his head (hopefully in his heart as well) the writer must seriously ask himself: For whom is my story intended? Bearing his audience constantly in mind will help him focus his plot and motivate his characters with a great deal more purpose and conviction. He will, hopefully, realize, even as he picks up his pen, that a story intended for the proletariat, for the millions and millions of labourers, ought to be written, not in English, but in the languages of the people.

If the story is intended for a readership that includes English-speaking people, both in South Africa and elsewhere, then of course it will be inevitable to write it in English. This will facilitate communication among all shades of blacks in South Africa. One way to achieve this is, of course, to engage in extensive translation projects with a clear purpose in selecting the works to be translated. This means translating both into and out of English.

Secondly, the writer might take his cue from the many African-language writers who have stated their intended didactic messages quite openly in prefaces and introductions to their stories. Not that writers *need* to use prefaces and introductions. One does not want to summarize a story for one's readers. The message is to be carried in the mind of the writer as he begins to write, and constantly thereafter. This will determine whether the work is intended to be a contribution to the struggle, or is purely

for entertainment, or to satisfy the writer's ego, or as a commercial venture, and so on. Many of these are, in any case, not mutually exclusive. We are talking more about emphases than mutual preclusions.

Composing originally in an African language and later translating into English may be another way of boosting the morale of one's black audience. Let the poem be born in the black language.

Thirdly, assuming a given work has a didactic purpose, and given further the necessity for oral communication with audiences in the townships throughout South Africa as the writers and poets perform their works, the question arises whether such sessions are used optimally to raise the political consciousness of the audiences involved. As stated earlier, the artist here has the opportunity to engage his audience, and be engaged by them, in a direct dialogue in which ideas are shared, something possible only in oral performances. When the audience interrupts and shouts 'Theth' isiXhosa, asiva!' or 'Bolela Sepedi, ha re kwe!' and so on, the performer must immediately engage the interrupter, whom I refuse to call a heckler, in a dialogue describing the problem of language choices, of audiences targeted, and so on as already described above. It is important, and it bears repeating, that a member of the audience who is suddenly moved to say something, whether the comment is approving or critical, is not heckling, but is asking for a dialogue.

If we as artists constantly speak to our people with wisdom and clarity, we will strengthen them against such onslaughts when they do happen.

Fourthly, the oral performer or performing group must in one way or another always include the message of unity to their audiences. The question of the high degree of mutual intelligibility among their languages, and of their cultural homogeneity must be underscored. It must be emphasized that ethnic separation in the locations is intended to divide the people, and it must not be permitted to succeed. The students in the ethnic colleges have not allowed this physical separation either to divide them or to stifle their minds. There is an even greater danger on the horizon, and we must prepare for it now. After we have attained our independence, there will be numerous neo-colonialist interests waiting to sow dissension among us. We have seen it done in other black independent states. In the latest such case, namely Zimbabwe, these imperialist forces play up the language differences between the Shona and the Ndebele. They make it appear that the country's politics are defined along tribal lines. They in fact create the 'tribalism' and then proceed to criticize the government of Zimbabwe for it. And it was this same falsification that subverted the victory of the united black liberation forces against Ian Smith's illegal occupation of Zimbabwe. Lancaster House sabotaged this victory, making it appear to be a victory of Mugabe against Sithole, i.e. Shona against Ndebele, and Smith's defeat by the joint forces was never mentioned.

If we as artists constantly speak to our people with wisdom and clarity, we will strengthen them against such onslaughts when they do happen.

My final statement is this: The theoreticians, the leadership, the strategists, and the enunciators of the

ideology on which political action is based, will probably find English a useful tool. At the grassroots level, however, there is a compelling need to talk to the people in their own languages, thus reinforcing their pride and their sense of identity.

FOOTNOTES

1. Nadine Gordimer, *The Black Interpreters*, Johannesburg: SPRO-CAS/Ravan, 1973, p.11.
2. Gordimer, p.11
3. Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (A selection of his writings edited with a personal memoir by Aelred Stubbs, C.R.), San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978, p.88
4. Daniel P. Kunene, *Heroic Poetry of the Basotho*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971, p.60.
5. S.E.K. Mqhayi, *Inzuzo*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press (The Bantu Treasury Series), 1957 (First published 1953)
6. Biko, p.92.
7. Michael Chapman (ed.), *Soweto Poetry*, Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill Book Company, p.114.
8. Chapman, p.117.
9. Chapman, p.116.
10. Chapman, p.114.
11. Chapman, p.42.
12. Noel Chabani Manganyi, *Looking Through the Keyhole*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981, pp.36-37.
13. Ezekiel Mphahlele, *The African Image*, New York, Praeger, 1974, p. 205.
14. *The Natives Land Act of 1913*, one of the early pieces of legislation passed by the government of the Union of South Africa founded in 1910. The aim of the Act was to remove Africans occupying land on which owned farms (which meant virtually every single farm in South Africa). It created hundreds of thousands of homeless people taking to the roads with their cattle and meagre personal belongings, not knowing where they were going.
15. N.M. Khaketla, 'Molelekeng,' in her collection of poetry *Mantsopa* Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1963, pp. 10-13.
16. Mr B.M. Khaketla's middle name, which means 'Surprise,' 'Amazement,' etc. It is translated in the poem as 'Surprised-One' since it is used as the proper name of a person.
17. Jac. G. Mocoancoeng, *Tseleng ea Bophelo le Lithothokiso tse Ncha*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press (The Bantu Treasury Series), 1955.
18. S.M. Mofokeng, *Senkatana*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press (The Bantu Treasury Series), 1952 (1961 reprint in the revised South African orthography).

by Jean Gray

Pula!



'Oh, Mrs Molefi, I'm late arriving this morning. Please would you make some urgent telephone calls for me before you go on with that typing.'

'Dumela Rra.'

'Oh, yes, dumela Mma. That's right. I know. I should greet you before I say anything else, Mrs Molefi. I keep forgetting.'

'Yes, Mr Eagleburgher, you keep forgetting.'

'Isn't it a lovely day again today, Mrs Molefi? So lovely and hot, and not a cloud in the sky. I do so love the weather here.'

'Yes, Mr Eagleburgher, not a cloud in the sky.'



'Dumela Mma.'

'Dumela Rra.'

'Good morning, Mrs Molefi.'

'Mr Eagleburgher, you have already said: "Dumela Mma", and that's the equivalent of saying: "Good morning, Mrs Molefi", so you don't need to say, "Good morning" as well.'

'Oh, that's right, Mrs Molefi'. I keep forgetting.'

'Yes, Mr Eagleburgher, you keep forgetting.'

'Isn't it a lovely day again, Mrs Molefi. So lovely and hot, and not a cloud in the sky. I do so love the weather here.'

'Yes, Mr Eagleburgher, not a cloud in the sky.'



'Dumela Rra.'

'Dumela Mma. O tsogile jang?'

'Ke tsogile sentle, Rra. Wena, o tsogile jang?'

'Ke tsogile sentle, Mma, and how are you this morning Mrs Molefi?'

'Mr. Eagleburgher, you have already said: "O tsogile jang?" to me and that's the equivalent of saying: "How are you?" So you don't need to say: "How are you?" as well.'

'Oh, that's right, Mrs Molefi. I keep forgetting.'

'Yes, Mr Eagleburgher, you keep forgetting.'

'Oh, what a lovely day it is again today, Mrs Molefi. There's not a cloud in the sky, and it's so lovely and hot. I do so love the weather here.'

'Mr Eagleburgher, why do people like you from the north always talk about the weather every day? The weather has been exactly the same every day for the past ten months, so what is there to talk about?'

'Oh yes, I suppose you are right, Mrs Molefi. I don't know why I do it. I suppose it's a habit I brought with me from my own country.'

'Yes, Mr Eagleburgher.'



'Dumela Rra.'

'Dumela Mma. O tsogile jang?'

'Ke tsogile sentle, Rra; wena o tsogile jang?'

'Ke tsogile sentle, Mma. There you are, Mrs Molefi. I got it right this morning, didn't I? I didn't go and say anything unnecessary as well, did I? I didn't forget!'

'That's right, Mr Eagleburgher, you didn't forget.'

'What terrible weather today, Mrs Molefi. It's been raining ever since I got up, and I had to drive here through rain all the way. Oh I wish it would stop.'

'Mr Eagleburgher. The whole country, led by the President, has been praying for rain for the past three months to end this terrible drought.'

English Academy Conference

4th~6th September 1986

In marking twenty-five years of existence, the English Academy of Southern Africa has called a Conference on English language and literature in South African society, 1961 to 1986.

Given the issues of direct social and political concern at stake in South Africa today, the nature and purpose of this Conference need to be stated clearly.

This Conference is called under the sole aegis of the English Academy. In no way is it associated with the Republican or Johannesburg Festivals this year. The English language is the prerogative of those who use it and it is their concerns which the Conference intends to pay attention to. Furthermore, the focus of the Conference will not be only retrospective — we of the present must consider the future.

It is intended that the nature of the Conference should be shaped by the participants. Cultural, linguistic, educational, political, industrial and social groups, as well as individuals are expected to attend, where *their* concerns, derived from *their* experience can be expressed.

It is for these reasons that the Conference will not consist of a series of formal papers delivered to a largely passive audience. Instead, opportunities for expression and interchange will be the paramount concern of the organizers.

Suggestions for the shape and nature of the Conference are being sought from many quarters. Individuals and organisations are encouraged to make proposals for the Conference programme, a programme which will have sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of all interest groups.

Apart from the many regular conferences on writing, drama, language and publishing which take place in South Africa, two conferences need to be kept in mind. The first is the 1974 conference on 'English-speaking South Africa Today' in Grahamstown. There the concerns of English-speaking middle-class whites received overwhelming attention.

Then there is the 1983 conference on 'Culture and Resistance' in Gaborone. At this conference it was decided that the next such gathering should be inside South Africa. This has not happened as yet.

There is no doubt that to launch a conference on English which will have truly wide representation at this time in our history is an ambitious and risky affair. Any number of circumstances could wreck it. To talk language is to talk politics; to talk about the past twenty-five years of English in South Africa is to talk about the present; and to talk about English in the present is to talk about a future South Africa.

And that is the challenge which this Conference poses.

The English Academy's conference is therefore being planned to be representative, flexible and open. What happens will be largely determined by those who are present. This is the spirit in which advice and suggestions are being sought, and those are the terms upon which the Conference is being planned.

Michael Gardiner
Conference Organiser
27 St Andrew's Road
Parktown
2193

Tel: 642-7373 (w)
648-0729 (h)
Code 011

Amandla Ngawethu

Amandla Ngawethu, 'n Afrikaanse debuutbundel van Patrick J. Petersen, het sy verskyning gemaak 11 September 1985 by die Genadendalse Drukkery. 'n Relevante bundel met 'n relevante boodskap. Dertig gedigte wat veral die swartleser sal boei. Dit kan nuttig gebruik word by massavergaderings, skoolboikotte, protesoptogte, begrafnisse, ens.

Prys R3,92 (AVB ingesluit)
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Thami Mnyele

In the early hours of June 14 1985 South African soldiers sneaked across the border into Botswana and killed twelve people in their beds. They did this on the pretext of getting rid of A.N.C. guerillas but a six-year-old Batswana boy was also killed in the skirmish — shot under his bed where he lay hiding.

Thami Mnyele was among the South Africans shot to death.

One of South Africa's most promising young artists Thami left South Africa in 1978 to live in exile in Botswana. Always a staunch campaigner for freedom in the country of his birth Thami's geographical distance from South Africa did not deter him in his fight for freedom and his involvement in South Africa's culture of resistance grew while in exile.

In Botswana he joined the African National Congress, an organisation he always spoke of with fondness and respect. He was also active in Medu, a Botswana-based group of exiled South African cultural workers who hosted the 1982 Conference on Culture and Resistance in Gaborone.

Thami's discipline, hard work and clean living earned him the respect and admiration of hundreds of cultural workers and people from all walks of life.

Like Thami we must fight our huge and brutal enemy so that one day soon our children may wake up from their beds to a peaceful world and not be dragged from underneath them riddled with bullets.



VILLAGE FROM THE PORTION OF MY MIND

Abstract painting by Thami Mnyele

A livid wind sweeps
with monstrous brooms
Leaving 4 huts 4 cows
donkeyleg skeleton, a shrub
and frail dew-ridden cobwebs.

Moody colours are torpid
while entombed
Grey is more palpable
Cannibal rocks emerge
as the soil is airborne
to Chieftainess Moon.

The sap of beings floats
like a creamcoat
Salty voices crawl
like witchwhispers
Seashells domesticate mixed bones
But the white-hearted sea
sifts 4 fleshy faces
glued to the pale-blue firmament
without shedding a single spark.
Tantalizing mama
evokes and fans fires-in-eyes
Hungering faces cry:
'Mama, nyanya!
'Mama, nyanya!'

But a cloud-chunk drizzles
and blazing hope fizzles.

Nape Motana

WE CAN'T MEET HERE, BROTHER for Thami Mnyele

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

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

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

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

Chris van Wyk