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Chris Mann
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John Torres on Reinaldo Ferreira

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The fiery thunderbolt of Négritude — that cult of black consciousness in the art of this continent and of black people who relate to this continent — which a few decades ago lit up the African literary scene (particularly in French Africa) has largely disappeared from the African literary landscape. This seems true, especially of poetry. The cult's greatest apostle has always been Léopold Sédar Senghor, President of the West African Republic of Senegal and one of the outstanding statesmen of our time.

It will not be the object of these few introductory lines to essay a new literary evaluation of a man who in so many senses of the word is perhaps one of the most enigmatic persons to have crossed the tumultuous post-War African scene. One of the abiding tragedies of our country is surely that so very few people have cared to read and understand the poetry and the cultural and political writings of this man who has combined in himself an emotional abandonment to the African scene, a profound and equally committed love to France and the French language ('the language of the gods'), a commitment to the cause of the black man of this continent, a keen appreciation of Western political thought and a sympathetic although almost sad understanding of the position of the white man in Africa. In his sixty-seventh year now Senghor's influence, both political and literary, has been waning and there are even consistent rumours at present about his impending disappearance from the political scene. And yet, despite these facts of life which are now also making themselves felt in the political and literary role of Senghor, it remains probably true to say that future generations of African poets and statesmen will see in him perhaps the greatest African to have stepped across the African and world scene; a man who fired the imagination of a generation of poets, who strove to explain the situation of the black man in this world, who worked hard to give the latter an understanding of his mission in a world dominated by the white race. Long after the curious fulminations of the Sekou Touré, the Kaundas and the Bokassas — not to speak of the white counterparts of these gentlemen in our clime — have been relegated to the oblivion to which they rightly belong, people will still find enjoyment in the verse of a man who believed that poetry had to remain true to its musical origins and whose
verse closely approximated this ideal; they will still consider the strangeness of the rôle of this philosopher and poet at the helm of one of this continent's more enlightened regimes; and they will still marvel at the phenomenon of a man so profoundly committed to the cause of the black world acting as the stylistic draughtsman of the French Constitution while serving as a minister in France.

Senghor's poetic voice has not been heard now since the appearance of his last volume of poems Nocturnes in 1961. In a letter to me last year he included a manuscript of thirty poems which were to appear soon in France. This may in the meantime have come about. In what follows I produce translations of extracts from a few poems from this collection which, should be added, are very much outside the main stream of Senghor's earlier poetry.

In his earlier poetry Senghor's social and political commitment, his engagement, to the black man's rôle in the world, permeated (although with some notable exceptions) his poetry. The poems from the present volume are all love poems which lack the extreme engaged nature of his early poetry. As such they are no longer geared to the concept of love against the backdrop of blackness or of Africa — although the African milieu is still palpably present — but to love and amorous emotions plain and simple. And yet the reader who is familiar with Senghor's earlier poetry will recognize many of the images — the dyali (African troubadour), Joal (Senghor's birthplace which often epitomized Africa and his youth), the signares (young girls; a word of Portuguese origin), the saudades (plaintive Portuguese songs), the pirogues (dug-out canoes), the multitude of African place names etc. Touching perhaps in this respect are several references to his supposedly Portuguese origin (Senghor: Senhor = man) to which he had first referred in an earlier poem Élégie des Saudades:

I hear in my guts the shadow-voiced lilt
of the saudades.
Is it the ancestral voice, the touch of Portuguese
blood which emerges from the mists of the ages?
My name which returns to its source?

Although his own country has been practically at war with Portugal for about a decade now Senghor still talks with the greatest admiration of the greatness in the Lusitanian spirit. It is not difficult to imagine that in all African countries — including our own — there will be few present day rulers who will vaunt, say, their touch of Portuguese or Afrikaner blood in their veins or, in our case, the blood of the Bushmen, the Hottentots, the Africans... It is, albeit in a trivial way, a measure of the greatness and the universality of Senghor that the possibility of having an unknown Portuguese ancestor is a matter of pride, flowing directly from his catholic tolerance and his love for diversity.
The volume from which the poems are taken is called *Lettres d'Hivernage*, a name which Senghor elucidates in a short explanatory preface:

'Hibernation in the Sudan-Sahara region is the rainy season. In Senegal it starts in June and ends towards the end of October. The word has been coined by the colonial army which, as in the case of the Roman conquest of Gaul, wintered in its castra during the inslement season. Hibernation is thus the period of summer and the beginning of winter. But there is also the wintering of a Woman.'

And here then we have the key to these poems. They are the poems of a man at the acme of his life with the shadows of eclipse imminent on the horizon. They are obviously highly personal in nature which give them — at least to someone who knows the man behind them — an additional poignancy. Although these poems somehow lack the vitality and the authenticity of Senghor's earlier verse they must nevertheless be welcomed as a rare and precious commitment to beauty by a statesman of our continent, whether black or white.

The translations are literal rather than free with retention of the original punctuation.
YOUR LETTER MY LETTER . . . .

Your letter my letter, if it were impossible
If Hitler if Mussolini, if Rhodesia if
South Africa, if the Portuguese cousin
If if and if, but we have the white phone
No, red phone. Satellites which
revolve around Mother Earth.
Do they revolve, who cares? Across the
dark space garlanded with stars
Across the walls the chains the blood, across
the mask and death
We possess the telephone of the aorta: our
dialling code is undecipherable.

BEFORE NIGHTFALL . . . .

(EXTRACT)

Before nightfall, a thought of you for your, before
I become ensnared
In the white net of anxieties, and the promenade
to the limits
Of the dream of desire which precedes the twilight, amongst
the gazelles of the dunes
To revive the poem of the kingdom of Youth.

YOU PINE . . . .

(EXTRACT)

You pine for Dakar its sky its sand,
and for the sea
I pine for you, with autumnal
adolescent bliss
I’m singing as I write, like the good artisan
shaping a piece of golden jewellery.
And then I’ll dance, light and serious, the dance
of my Lady
And for my only Lady!

5
TA LETTRE MA LETTRE . . . .

Ta lettre ma lettre, et si c'était impossible
Si Hitler si Mussolini, si la Rhodésie l'Afrique
du Sud, le cousin Portugais
Si si et si, mais nous avons le téléphone blanc
Non, téléphone rouge. Satellites qui tournent
alentour de la Terre-Mère.
Tournent-ils mais qu'importe? À travers les
espaces noirs fleuris d'étoiles
À travers les murs les chaînes le sang, à travers
le masque et la mort
Nous avons le téléphone de l'aorte : notre code
est indéchiffrable.

AVANT LA NUIT . . . .

Avant la nuit, une pensée de toi pour toi, avant que
je ne tombe
Dans le filet blanc des angoisses, et la promenade
aux frontières
Du rêve du désir avant le crépuscule, parmi les
gazelles des sables
Pour ressusciter le poème au royaume d'Enfance.

TU TE LANGUIS . . . .

Tu te languis de Dakar de son ciel de son sable,
et de la mer
Je me languis de toi, comme d'un bonheur adolescent en automne.
Je chante en t'écrivant, comme le bon artisan
qui travaille un bijou d'or.
Alors je danserai, léger et grave, la danse de
ma Dame
Et pour ma seule Dame!
YOUR LETTER . . . .

Your letter a burst of roses in September
Precious. I read it in the light of the lamp
against the rickety railing.

I smell the scent of the park in bloom, the
leisurely promenades and the undergrowth
And the fragrant flowers in the shade, the bloom
of the cyclamens.
I see the odour of the roses, the aroma of old wines
which rise
And from the beach comes the perfume of your skin
of burnt bread

Your skin of red gold. The perfumes of
the jujube gush forth, humming with cicadas
Sometimes I think of you so intensely! that's the splendour
of grief
Like the physalian flame in the pit of my
chest
My only refuge from despair, the kingdom of Youth.

I'm walking on the beach at Joal-Popenguine
The sand on the soles of my feet : the embrace
of my ancestral home.
Joy of a walk in the blonde sand, which glides
away silkily
Pleasure of muscles which play around freely on the
beaches of Eden
Joy of a swim in the lukewarm water and the
primordial placenta
Joy to swim in the sea water with the mouth ajar.

And then marching on to get lost, where
the sea grapes and the wild strawberries grow.
Who will again take me to the plateaux of Ethiopia, where
on one leg the shepherd
Rests in the shade of his flute?
In the distance the reply of a flute.
TA LETTRE . . .

Ta lettre floraison de roses en Septembre
Précieuse. Je la lis sous la lampe et la lisse ambiguë.

Je sens le parc en fleurs, les promenades lentes et le sous-bois
Et les douces fleurs d’ombre, la lumière des cyclamens.
Je vois l’odeur des roses, l’arôme des vins vieux qui montent
Et de la plage monte le parfum de ta peau de pain brûlé.

Ta peau d’or rouge. Sourdent les senteurs des jujubiers, bourdonnant d’abeilles de soleil.
Parfois je pense à toi si fort! c’est splendeur de douleur.

Comme flamme de physalie au plein de ma poitrine.
Contre le désespoir, mon refuge mon seul, le royaume d’Enfance.

Je marche sur la plage, à Joal- Popenguine
Le sable sous la paume de mes pieds : le baiser de la terre maternelle.
Joie de la marche dans le sable blond, qui déboule joyeux
Plaisir des muscles qui jouent libres aux plages de l’Eden
Joie de la nage dans l’eau tiède et le placenta primordial.
Joie de nager, la bouche ouverte à l’eau au sel.

Puis de nouveau marcher me perdre, jusqu’aux raisins marins aux cerises sauvages.
Qui me rendra les plateaux d’Ethiopie, où le pâtre sur un pied se
Repose à l’ombre de sa flûte?
Au loin résonne une flûte amébée.
STEPHEN GRAY

CYCLOPS

Beneath your forehead eyes grow together
your right breast holds waterways

do not think with your merged eye
why those frail garments should have to tangle

tie shirt underpants flipflap sandals
on the swellings of the same eiderdown

we've been through all this before
yet now I find I'm getting lyrical

buck graze on the ripe green of your armpits
veldfires rise on the stubble of your thigh

in case that sounds too corny I check your eye
watching the permission of an eventful hour

the clap of contact's thrashed us round before
tonight you stare out the dial of the alarm

usually we have a limb too many too bent
but now I think we have none at all

we nibble on stars rubber goods sighs
your iris goes purple with a passion

have my resistance it's all yours
I've abandoned what used to help me out

as if by some venereal telepathy we hear
ripples out of you through concrete and highways

till I'm sure the whole of Joburg rocks into
erotic signalling in helpless alignment

so we're going overtime my tender beauty
over cracking ribs and 50 watts and tomorrow
anyone who reads this might wonder if it's meant to shock and what they're missing

but all I can admit is I never know why we keep resorting to such acts

until your palms press down on my kidney and my teeth bite your collar like a dog

when we again achieve more agreements more concern than any lovers ever before

close your eyes now and scald away from us it's you I really wrote this for

and your lash on my ear as your body rolls past determined not to lose hold.

EGGS

O Johnny with a pair of eggs shacked up between his legs

what's he gonna do with all that juice throw it in hell let heaven loose

O but he's purely white cracking his shells in the dead of night

what's he gonna do with all that man bleach the sheets with albumen

O he has a dream of his native land lying upside down with outstretched hand

Poor Johnny's got the secret of life doesn't want to share it with a knife

O Johnny hears the pitch black drum breaks in a sweat as the colours run.
my friend I dream he was my friend in need maybe or just a friend somewhere haunted at least misty and dark perhaps dark shrouded he came but I can’t easily in my mind’s eye recall what was then and just see in the past a drifting in my friend drifting in yes that’s it

he was older or maybe younger my friend than me I could never tell the circles shrouding his eyes like sores dark worldly and then I never can tell with those people these or those? Ah a question and swirling ever returning and I feel I never will know those or these people these or those

what’s more and answers knowingly after I’ve knocked on my skull and produces factually and chronologically arranged like the good bookshelf I sometimes all alone and even then blushing call my brain is that my friend he was black you see there was no sign of white at all though I never saw him totally without his clothes and yet he was educated and civilized and that I find not altogether reassuring after my own education until I was seventeen because being black or maybe you’d prefer dark brown or burnt umber say a savage he was supposed to be yet there was no shadow of doubt that savage he was not and without even the use of emphasis for emphasis’ sake I feel the need to emphasise his was his once upon a time being as you may have guessed I fear his death is truly past as they say and that he is overturned in some grave somewhere but unknown they took him one day or early morning it’s hard to tell and yet I hear it’s more common for extraction to be effected while the victim or perhaps they prefer accused or even patient is firmly in the lap of sleep with little hope or motive to guide himself out of snoring unconsciousness and really it is all beside the point and all not just this but all yet suffice it to say they took him and even more towards the wondrous thoughts they will come to repeat the exercise I feel very soon with me and hence I write write and having written who knows what or where the later times will perhaps catch up or if at all and so put an end or stop I write

my friend I will tell about because they took him away and left no-one no parents or children perhaps because he was young I could not tell no no aunts uncles cousins just me his friend my friend yes they came and no-one knows or even whispers
why it's the fright I feel yes the fear and no-one wants to
have his brother for denouncer to descend in wrath and all makes
me mindful of the late lamented Revolution sweeping in its vigour
across France gathering all accused in its sharp bristles and
casting them to the guillotine and knitting women
oh of course I admit we have no guillotine or knitting women
but we are cursed with bars of soap and perhaps they are worse
because that's the essence of my friend and his demise at least
that was the reply sealed official and amptelik that my recurring
enquiries solicited perhaps just to stop further recurrence
and if nothing else it did with its terseness just that
but bars of soap are guilty they said and even furnished a
full description of the accident they said which cruel fate
they said had cast in the way of my friend I said and they are
hungry our enemies
he slipped in the shower on one of those bars of soap with
the RSA stamped on and in falling he collided with a tap
unfortunately they said in the direct path of his fall so sudden
and unwilled the tap tended to break his fall as well as his
cranium they said and the official letter made no attempt whatever
to distinguish between the fall and the head as if in the domain
of the antiseptic corridors of old public service establishments
a fall is as good as a head any time and therein is the crux
and that is why they will come one of these days and I feel
sure at about 4am to carry me off or at least my body because
at all times my thoughts remain in my head you see I argued
about his head and their fall but they weren't so well enamoured
in those antiseptic corridors to my scorn of their explanations
it's hard or any other as far as I can tell and simply gave
out in anger instructions to me to cease forthwith from arguing
that is
but fight was what I had even in plenty sometimes and fought
I did in every channel open to me without exception and what's
worse in some which weren't open to me you see but still they
were not amused and there's a law I know can keep me away from
all company forever in an emptiness indivisible
except that of fatal bars of soap eternally with no-one no
no friend no cousin even to wonder what and why and it's even
when I think of that I see the lack of direction in my course
and I see therenever should have been at all because they put
an end to it with which Iswyl fought and that's a circle with
weak ones on the circumference and them the outside and I feel
there's a noose or point and desolate is bleakness with reason or rhyme
and excuse that tender in all humble for an end or just remission to break
smash and ravage the aimlessness of remorse and scream I need scream
MIKE NICOL

THREE POEMS

AS PARENTS

They were meant for children and homes
And the sweaty armpits of his office shirts.
Her pregnancy (always half-expected)
Then the marriage in a magistrate’s office:

She, in an off white wedding dress.
Money made them middle-class, afforded
Her weekly set and rinse, but mannerisms
Never entirely disappeared. Awkward in company

They spilt drinks, used the wrong language,
Thankful for middle-age they went out less,
Retired early to read. Now and again,
After office parties, stimulated by pretence,

They tried. Sensing impotence gave up
But not before she, in a last attempt,
Bought a negligé that wore short
Above her varicose legs. And so, fraught

With bedrooms they had failed in, they read.
The underwear crumpled in the chair,
Now too common to arouse, yellowed
With washing. On honeymoon her blouse

And bra beneath his trousers had implied
Intimacy. The thought of soft clothes
Touching where it mattered had obsessed
Him, but with routine that soon died.

Photograph album stereotypes, caught nursing
Children, grandchildren: in life always together
They saved for a double grave, with hopes
For memories, perversely recalled, of a younger age.
from AN EASTER SEQUENCE

3. LOOKING FOR EASTER-EGGS

I have never seen the great chocolate hen
Mother told about. It settles on the Christian
World once a year: eggs laid how and when
Not even the Greeks can say. A short reign
Then it’s gone. I walked through town
Chancing in at every Greek cafe
Only, again and again, to be turned down:
No Easter-eggs left by Saturday.
Christ that was the last straw,
The old custom slipped us by,
Even Salimino said he was sure
The hen had been too quick to lay and die.
Easter, my love, has sprung its clocks:
No egg nestles in your tissue-box.

THE DUSTMEN

There is still a sense of apprehension, even fear
(A black apparition, nostrils flared
Suddenly in a childhood yard)
As rounding the corner chanting
Songs they may have sung as impis
Running on Rorkesdrift, five dustmen
Shirts open, brown chests heaving
Bear down on me. Somewhere behind
The municipal lorry grinds in first.
The dogs keep their distance
Wary of the double-headed sticks
That smashed heads and bodies once.
Then they’re passed with a whistle
And thud of rubber bins
Like distant guns emptying the rubbish
In a cloud of ash and eggshells.
Dogs take up the bark from
Neighbour to neighbour, further away.
After five years, wind broken
They're paid off, wheezing and coughing
To prune someone's garden.

KATHERINE LEYCESTER

Ivan Petrovanovitch
observe — the Kremlin stands
brooding on the vast expanses
of the Red Square stones
where shouting thousands welcome heroes
where munitions guns
roll in a glorious angry surge —
where you my Petrovanovitch
assume that you are free to walk —
you who like a flea was shaken
from the coat of that old lion
that lost its teeth in nearly mawling
half the world — bid your goodbyes
to your own mother — Moscow
where the Red Square broods
silent on the multitudes —
some far forgotten chilly desk
is what awaits you — Ivan
Petrovanovitch.
III Calling

A cog is prisoner
Forced to turn a single way
Is forced to see itself
The ragged cog
That it was made to be.
Cogs turn one way
And can have no warmth, or softness
Only the dirty heat of friction
Or the coldness of disuse.

Blondel!
I feel her warm and breathing
And was about to touch
But a toothy arm thought better.
I hear a crescendo of your singing
Urging
With your warm and meady breath
What I cannot heed,
'My saviour.
Blondel! Blondel!
Just see the bars the bastards forged.

blondel,
let's spin a ballad
where we are kings, and we can stroke the grass.
The following eight poems form section 2 of Book 1 of Reinaldo Ferreira’s *Poemas.* The original edition was printed by the Government Printer in Lourenço Marques in 1960, and is now out of print. A second edition was due to be published in 1968 but I have not as yet been able to get a copy. The following translations were made from the original edition.

The anonymous editors of this first edition were all, I believe, Reinaldo Ferreira’s friends or literary acquaintances. They are only anonymous in the sense that they did not sign the long preface that introduced his poems to the Portuguese reading public. I have met some of them, but it is not for me, as a second-hand interpreter of Ferreira’s work, to name them or to attribute any of the remarks made about Ferreira in the preface to any particular persons. The preface is written in a very complex literary style full of allusions to Proust, Valéry and other literary figures.

“Thus his (Ferreira’s) work is intelligent and striven for, possibly only provisionally completed, always awaiting a greater degree of perfection. Some may be surprised that his work is considered to be imperfect and incomplete, while others that such perfection could be attained by one, who during his life-time appeared to be so detached from everything. Here we are touching on what we consider to be an essential point. The Poet sees no reasons to believe in the unity of a world that seems to him to be absurd and chaotic. Life is, so he says himself ‘a blind flight into nothing’. Having given up hope of faith in a world or a God whose unity would cover and resolve all doubts and contradictions, for the Artist there remains a really terrible liberty: to decide or to choose. If belief in a guiding spirit has no validity, because it is ingenuous, the Artist has the right to choose any convention: this will then serve him as a guiding principle.

The editors suggest that like Paul Valéry and Fernando Pessoa, the famous Portuguese poet who went to Durban Boys’ High School and was regarded by Roy Campbell as being probably the most original Western European poet writing in the 20th century, Reinaldo Ferreira combined a disorganized and
unconventional personal life with an almost fanatical search for perfection in his literary work. That is why he put off publishing his poems although these had been circulated amongst his friends and acquaintances, and one or two had appeared in the local newspaper. He felt that they were not ready to appear in a book in their final form. Before his untimely death he had begun to assemble his poems in some sort of order, and the editors followed his wishes as far as they could and these eight poems appear in the order Reinaldo Ferreira intended they should.

REINALDO FERREIRA

FROM POEMAS

I

Martha,
protagonist of an imagined tragedy
that I did not make,
from waiting that I should create it,
in my intention happily she slept.
There, slept also in that ancient sleep,
Ilda, Michael,
the lyrical Rachel,
and all those
who feel they are not with me.

Scents only
and dust before dust.

Now I call her in vain,
as one who sees a child
taken away in a coffin,
but does not understand,
and absurdly, in the middle of
the night
I call to her who hides —
— Martha! Martha! Where are you?

I don’t know if she hears me, only
that no answer comes.
II

In the afternoon we wandered
we, you and I,
but three.

Discreetly I am silent
so my good sense
you'll praise;
in vain I do not speak
so that what I think
you hear —

Better it would be
that someone else you took
like this
and though far away
you thought only of me.

III

If I never said that your teeth
are pearls,
it is because they are teeth.
If I never said your lips are corals
it is because they are lips.
If I never said your eyes
are of onyx, or emeralds or sapphires,
it is because they are eyes.
Pearls, and onyx and coral are things
and things do not sublimate things.
If one day, I should praise you
with common phrases
certainly I would seek in poetry
in landscape and music
transcendental images
for eyes, lips and teeth.
But believe me, sincerely believe
that all metaphors are too pale
to say what I see,
and I see lips, eyes, teeth.
IV

That of the two of us
I am the most sensible,
- is your delicate way
of saying that I am the older.
It is true enough
that I am older in years
but to assume therefore
my good sense
is to span so great
an abyss,
that you certainly must say it
with irony and no sympathy,
for the error in which I live,
the error of having wrinkles
and never looking at a mirror . . . .
I never knew,
that of the two,
    I am the eldest.

V

I live in the hope of a gesture
that you must make.
A gesture, clearly, is a way of saying
because what is important is the rest
that this gesture has to have.
It has to have sincerity
and not appear premeditated;
it has to be convincing
but in a different way
from prepared speech.
Without expounding on it,
I cannot resist
the temptation to say
that the gesture is not only this . . . .
When you, all confused,
knowing that I am waiting,
show me that you hesitate
only because you know not
where to begin.
What a temptation to speak!
Because, of course, as you can guess,
I know this gesture,
but if I say it, it no longer is . . . .
VI

I place no hope in anything more
and if I did
it would have to be an ambition so measureless
that it would no longer fit
into what is left to me of life —
An ambition, so unreal,
so paranoid, so great
like the greatness of Spain
with Granada and the Escorial.
Because this hope that I place
in seeing you one day
move out of truth into a dream,
is like being the manager of
some exhausted estate;
To the world we give our best,
but the world gives us nothing,

VII

From Coppelia I have kept three melancholy letters,
a ribbon, and the faded bud of a rose
that took its perfume from her hair.
Obviously Coppelia does not exist,
neither do her letters.
She is only real because I miss her,
because I did not have her
I believe in her, and believe
in the memory of whom she was in my past;
in the furtive walks we had together;
in the stars we placed;
in some kiss we exchanged;
in the exhaltation of a certain soaring dance;
in the sensation of being by a cloud embraced;
and in the gentle, pure and well-filtered emotion, of some time when her hand
paused between mine.
This is Coppelia, to whom, if by chance
she had been born, or lived,
a severe father would have denied me,
and a lyrical illness would have
torn her from me,
without having possessed her
so that from another, or dead, a virgin
untouched and alive,
in me she could live forever....
From the field of the dead,  
in a strange land  
whence we passed  
absorbed, the two of us —  
We left untouched by melancholy,  
because we went so alive, so free  
and together.  
In vain, over the graves  
of the foreign dead  
a visible oblivion  
in a land with no votive roses  
called to us.  
But we continued going  
happy, happy,  
and the womb of the earth  
dreamt of roots around us.  
But we continued, going  
in the hour that briefly passes,  
living it only.  
And our presence  
in the field of the dead  
in a strange land  
embodied — passed — passed  
The present —

WHITE POETRY PRIZE

The Department of National Education is once again offering a great deal of money (R750 and R500 first and second prizes) to South African poets. We would draw the attention of our readers, and in particular the poets amongst them, dizzied as they will be by these enormous sums, to the condition that Whites only may enter this competition. The fact that poets such as Oswald Mtshali, Adam Small and Wally Serote are therefore excluded seems a very good reason for not participating.
CHRISTOPHER MANN

OLD PROFESSOR

How she storms
Reckless as one
Who never scrounged with a small hand
But threw herself out
Wide as a salt pan
And let the sun
Beat down the brine
And squandered
All for the rough bright crusts.

Books that have not blufféd her
To serenity
Block the walls
And with a high enquiring
Sweep
She ridicules them with an arm
And cackles at the pause.
“I
Am English to the marrow” she says,
“I have sons, sons.”

In rouge and rings
She banteréd like a deft coquette,
And we match the cheeks
To the red ragged stars of mercurochrome
Splashed on each shin.

She can yowl down her husband for pitching
Salt behind his shoulder
Then whisper to the table,
“That
Is the sweetest man in the world you know.”
GIRL WITH CHILD

She wished upon the thorn trees speech
Walking barefoot the sunned river.
I saw her spread her arms to reach
The greenness crowding in upon her.
Through her wrists she listened: noisy
The saps with fire. She like the one
Cool propulsion within each tree
Stood between the flame of earth and sun.
How it hurt, having the wet pain
Running hot within her, and the press
Of the whole world there. I saw her
Standing barefoot in the sunned river
Her hands against her dark brown dress
Pressing herself there again and again.

VALEDICTION

Waves clutter the easy seas royal deeps.
Kelp riding discours the swells.
Wind cuffs the surface but cannot get in.
The sea takes what it wants, no more.
So the lonely moon is turned into salt water.
And your calm tears have something of its dustiness in them.

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THE MINOR POET'S AWKWARD AGE

Peter Porter: *Preaching To The Converted* (O.U.P.) £1.00

Most of his readers will rate Porter higher after the new book. Some of them may also find themselves coming to terms with a disappointment which, once recognized, looks to have been inevitable. He has reached the minor poet's awkward age: the better he writes, the more clearly there stands revealed a limited emotional range; or, to give it in fustian, a want of passion. This is a more difficult judgment to reach than it sounds. I will always want to read the poem about Hardy, well worth giving in full:

**Thomas Hardy At Westbourne Park Villas**

Not that I know where in this changed district
He may have walked under unwarming sun
Through a hedged righteousness already bricked
Up to the pale sky and the many chimneys clouding it,
Nor where black steeple, tar-gate, and gun-bright anthracite held back the Spring and the exact green to bring it.

Though the smoke's gone now, the old frailty shows
In people coming unexpectedly out of doors
Hardly renumbered since his time: each house knows
As many stories as in the iron sublime we call Victoria. Suicide, lost love, despair are laws
of a visiting Nature raging against proof and practice
and changing all.
Here, rather than in death-filled Dorset, I see him,
The watchful conspirator against the gods
Come to the capital of light on his own grim
Journey into darkness; the dazzle would tell
Him these were the worst of possible odds —
ordinary gestures of time working on faces the
watermark of hell.

Here is a poem that succeeds in conveying the banked-down passion and relentlessly prosaic despair of Hardy in a metric manipulated in a manner learnt from Yeats. (See especially the way the syntax is nursed to launch the long last line in each stanza.) One can see how good this is by comparing it with a familiar poem by Auden, Porter's master in ways that make the comparison helpful. His memorial poem for Yeats, making a much more obvious use, in its last section, of the great poet's metrical gusto, fails to give the apt critical definition, to glimpse and momentarily recreate a unique contribution to the modern spirit — claims which I think can be made for Porter's poem. True, Auden's task is complicated by the job of memorializing; Porter's cooler vantage-point probably suits both poets better. It is still remarkable, and important for the essentially harmonious linking of Porter and Auden, that Auden was able to celebrate Yeats at all.

The qualities we are assessing here are three, though all are interrelated: the almost extreme empathy exercised by this breed of poet-critic towards radically different kinds of art, a finely-tuned but curiously impotent sense of the age, and a great dexterity in the application of form to content. The first and last of these qualities seem self-evident in T.H. At Westbourne Park Villas. The second relates to Porter's choice of Hardy as subject at this point in time.

The poem suggests, without any fuss or the 'preaching' of Porter's habitually self-deprecatory and ironical book-titles, that the sensibility evolved by Hardy largely in response to personal experience and as a consequence of his own disposition, is of particular relevance and, perhaps, utility now. We have, as it were, caught up: Hardy's stoicism suddenly seems to confront a more than personal end. Porter's poem is not the only reminder we've had recently of Hardy's claim on the temper of a later age than his own: when, not so long ago, F.R. Leavis reviewed a new translation of the modern Italian poet, Montale, he spelled out, in a manner full of benefit for any young English poet within hearing, the vital connection with Hardy. Of course the truest gratitude to a dead poet is paid by a new poetry
which has felt and transmuted the relevant core: here I think the strain in English 'minimal'-verse represented by Ian Hamilton comes closest.

This is supposed to be a review of Porter, but that he goes under when we start to give the attention to Hardy which, on Porter's own valuable indication, is his due, is the next point. Porter is able to value Hardy without being touched, as a poet, by summoning the ghost so vividly. Or perhaps it's truer to say that he is touched, but only in passing — otherwise the passion of Hardy couldn't flicker as it does in Porter's poem. But elsewhere in this new book he is passionless enough when handling Hardy's own themes. Here are two rough samples which represent the poets in typical vein, both writing near their best. The proportion of lines given to each can stand as a comment in itself:

Nothing but the calm
of history dying, the beautiful
vulgarization of decay
Empire gone, the pensioner
will ask for a single stick of gladiolus
in a laughing shop.

I am almost in love
with the small black Queen in the wind
and I will not notice that the beach is full
of mussel shells and crab claws
and the smell is unimaginable
yet like your mother's corpse,
that the torn feather is a terrible
catastrophe, and I am cold
and lonely on an unimportant strand.

(Porter: *Seaside Resort* – the poet with Victoria's statue at Eastbourne)

And tomorrow the whole of me disappears,
The truth should be told, and the fact be faced
That had best been faced in earlier years:

The fact of life with dependence placed
On the human heart's resource alone . . . .

(Hardy: *A Plaint To Man*)

One grants Porter, more readily on the strength of the new book than ever before, an ability unmatched in contemporary English (not American) verse to take the pulse of the age, and his books
can be read as a temperature chart covering the progress of his patient (metropolitan Europe) over the last twenty years. "The world’s a hospital: we won’t get well," he said in an earlier book — hardly an original thought, but he has never left the bedside. Neither is he — what he called another English poet — "the laureate of low spirits", being well acquainted with the excited fantasies of high fever. Since *Once Bitten Twice Bitten* and *Poems Ancient and Modern* he has moved away from satire (though it was never quite that) towards a helpless indentification with the patient: this has been in keeping with his increasingly complex diagnosis of the age, and the accompanying realisation that it cannot be detached from the web of history. He has come to see himself, the Australian "who didn’t leave Brisbane in order to take it with me wherever I go", as a latter-day provincial come to Rome in the Decline ("If I can’t be Martial or Pliny, at least I can aim at Ausonius or Claudian"). With the expansion of his judgments of contemporary manners into universals has come a style that makes wary flights towards the grand — Yeats has been useful here, but Porter is secure enough as a stylist not to be swept away as Theodore Roethke was.

The conspicuous advance in the latest book is the kind of thing that happens, at the end of the poem *Seaside Resort*, in the lines quoted above. The Emperor is beginning to walk about in a new suit of clothes. People talk glibly about a poet having ‘found his voice’ as if that was the end of the matter. This book reminds us that there is a further identity to be won. If the reader ‘trusts the poem, not the poet’, this can also mean trusting — in the sense of accepting a current of feeling as genuine and responding to it — the poet-in-the-poem (to avoid the confusing terminology of ‘personality’, ‘mask’, etc. as used by Yeats and others.) In the lines at the end of *Seaside Resort* the poet-in-the-poem is emerging from a Prufrockian role which Porter used to use extensively and still does (see a poem like *Affair Of the Heart* in the new book.) Traces of it linger — the deliberate “and I will not notice” — but this is not self-parody in the cause of emotional passivity in an ‘impossible’ situation. There is the charm (or is it a little affected?) of being "almost in love/with the small black Queen . . ." that we must decide about; there is the shock line ‘yet like your mother’s corpse’ which seems to create an immediate intimate audience not previously revealed in the poem, and in any case disturbs us by demanding recognition of a deeper layer of feeling; more ‘heart-mysteries’ around the torn feather, and then the retreat (or is it one?) into a more Prufrockian position in the resonant last line.

I am rather uncertain of the poet-in-the-poem in this instance. At any rate he seems to be there. But when one turns to the other
sample, the difference is such that Hardy seems to be feeling at a
different gut-level entirely. Different kinds of poem? Yet Hardy
seems to reach this seriousness, this passion, quite effortlessly
and repeatedly: it's his characteristic note. (For the new, forth­
coming Porter see these poems in the new book especially:
_evolution, Notes to a Biographer, In the Giving Vein_.)

Of course poetry need not bare the heart in the ‘confessional’
sense in order to be serious: no-one requires from Eliot a dozen
tell-all lyrics on his first marriage in order to be sure that he
really did face up to things. But that Porter is now beginning to
speak more directly in his verse spurs the question his most
admiring readers may have been deferring: how serious, how
good is he really?

As good as Auden: if the poem about Hardy is the one you come
back to, the comparison with Auden is equally hard to shake,
lying in wait at every page, every too-predictably run-on line.
You can't miss it on page one, where another poem about Time
has the Audenesque title, _The Old Enemy_, and the lines,

> the death of God requires a merchant's dignity
> and so they tip their fingers in an arch
> that runs from Christ's erection
> to a Landsknecht leaning on his arquebus.
> Those centuries were twice the men
> that MGM are — God loves music
> and architecture, pain and palm trees,
> anything to get away from time.

Auden in the serviceable hints from art and letters that strew
the volume, in the ingenious manufacture of plausible comundrum
and fully-fledged epigram, in the carefully flighted elegance
anchored by a racy line in home-truths, Auden most of all in
the air of tired sagacity and doleful recognition.

Yet: one will go on reading Porter, except when he sends one, by
a direct or an indirect route, to a Hardy or a Montale. He is still
as indispensable as a good newspaper. Whereas reading the
current poetry of Auden can be a bit eerie, unless you were
around before the war. Sometime after the turn of the century
a careful critic, his sense of the past untroubled by those waves
of nostalgia and counter-nostalgia that afflict our relations with
five or so decades, will make the fine gradations. Only the great
poet gets through a lifetime of verse without discovering that, a
few books on, he is “preaching to the converted.”
Clearly, Roy Campbell was more a South African poet by birth than profession. He began by considering himself ‘African’ in the mystical sense of that word, partly because he believed it, and partly because it suited him as a good approximation of his natural exuberance as well as a useful persona. But he did not believe it for long and after Rowland Smith’s book*, nor should we. Dr Smith is from South Africa himself. He was educated at the University of Natal, and taught there and at Wits before going to Canada where he is an Associate Professor at Dalhousie University.

Campbell was eighteen when he left South Africa for Oxford where he spent a year, in 1919. But his Greek was not good enough and he did not enter the University. Augustus John was to ascribe Campbell’s lack of success to his separation from Africa, which John, with some geographical licence, locates on the Zambesi. It was at Oxford that Campbell was given the nickname ‘Zulu’. Later, he was to become the model for ‘Zulu Blades’ in Wyndham Lewis’s novel *The Apes Of God*. At Oxford, Campbell read a great deal and met the sort of people he wanted to meet, the Sitwells among them. Simply by evoking these names, it becomes clear that Campbell’s social and literary career advanced in England in a way that his academic studies did not.

In 1924, he published *The Flaming Terrapin*. After reading Dr Smith’s book it will be impossible to overlook the extent to which the French symbolists were behind Campbell’s poetry from *The Flaming Terrapin* onwards. Of course, this has been pointed out before. In a preface to a selection of Campbell’s verse published by Maskew Miller in 1960, Uys Krige emphasised the symbolist influence and reminded his readers that Campbell himself acknowledged his French borrowings with a typical flourish, later going so far as to dismiss the whole of *The Flaming Terrapin* as ‘bad Rimbaud’.

*Lyric And Polemic : The Literary Personality of Roy Campbell*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal $12.50
The poem was enthusiastically received. Therein lay the beginnings of Campbell's fame and the glimmering of his future problems. For one thing, in the Terrapin Campbell reveals his admiration for the implacable doings of absolute power

* a great machine,
  Thoughtless and fearless, governing the clean
 System of active things

— The Flaming Terrapin

— an admiration which was to intensify in his Spanish period. Dr Smith considers, rightly I think, that the poem drew praise for its un-European exuberance; that is to say, its 'African' qualities which have always attracted English intellectuals for romantic reasons: darkness, heat, mystery and so on. And yet, as Dr Smith observes, the Terrapin reveals

* an inherent danger in the 'foreign' quality of his responses and values. As he grew older it became increasingly difficult for him to abandon the role of outsider with a down-to-earth heroic answer to most problems.

The chapter to which many readers will turn with anticipation deals with Campbell's return to South Africa, the beginning of Voorslag and the poems that went to make The Wayzgoose (1928) and Adamastor (1930). When, in 1924, Campbell came back to Durban, to the Technical College where he taught briefly, to Plomer and van der Post, and with them, to Voorslag, he was in an Africa with which he did not identify himself. Moreover, while the Zulu may evoke rare thrills in the English psyche for complicated reasons, and still does, as witnessed by the national exclamations of delight the Zulu dancers evoked when they visited England with Umabhatha last year — there are an awful lot of Zulus in Natal. Dr Smith is especially good on the dilemma Campbell faced on his return:

* In London his 'Zulu' mannerisms had stamped him as a colourful individual in an intellectual group which stressed individualism. In South Africa, Africanness was not only out of place, but also perilously close to the narrow chauvinism which so irritated him.

Voorslag was nothing like a 'little' magazine. It was a business. Besides providing its editors with a platform for their ideas Campbell looked to it for a living. What's more, the magazine had serious pretensions towards art and literature. White South Africa was seen as a provincial, boring creature and Campbell took a whip to its hide.
It is difficult to imagine a more infallible programme for failure. The editors of Voorslag got in three good blows before the Durban business man who had sponsored the venture, Lewis Reynolds, moved in to protect his investment and seizing the magazine by its throat helped it to its feet. Though it lingered on, Voorslag never recovered from the cure. Perhaps all one can say is that the business man got to it before the lynch mob.

Some of the things that Campbell has to say about white racism would be ‘unacceptable’ today:

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Almost half a century has gone by since Campbell wrote this and it is still marvellous, stinging stuff. Unfortunately, it has proved to be quite wrong, as Campbell so often was when he put forward ideas. Sheer boredom and the colour bar remain our traditional way of life. The howls of rage which Voorslag provoked were predictable but at least it was left to ‘those who saw themselves attacked to respond. If anything the situation today is worse, as witnessed by the attitude of the Wits authorities towards their own student newspaper. For the meekest boy in the class to challenge the school bully is to risk being beaten up by his friends.

But however sympathetic we may be to Campbell’s attack on white South Africa, we should be clear about what we are approving. Dr Smith makes the point that Campbell’s impulse was not...
liberal revulsion but a wish to assail the unthinking herd. It was an elitist concern which he shared with other writers such as Wyndham Lewis, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound, and it was to develop in a nasty way later on. I think we can detect in Campbell’s assaults on the provincialism and racism of Natal not so much anger but a splendid irritation. He told Plomer (as Plomer later reported in an essay entitled ‘Voorslag Days’, which appeared in the London Magazine)

The whole of this country has an acid smell and all the people have khaki faces.

Voorslag probably drew more flack than The Wayzgoose for all that poem’s assassinations. The rhyming is unimaginative and the metre galumphing except when he turns on the poetasters, the hymners of veld and vlei and other mysteries:

I mean that there is something grander, yes,  
About the veld, that I can well express;  
Something more vast – perhaps I don’t mean that –  
Something more round, and square, and steep, and flat –  
No, well perhaps it’s not quite that I mean  
But something, rather, half-way in between,  
Something more ‘nameless’ – That’s the very word!  
Something that can’t be felt, or seen, or heard,  
Or even thought – a kind of mental mist  
That doesn’t either matter or exist  
But without which it would go very hard  
With many a local novelist and bard –  
Being the only trick they’ve ever done,  
To bring in local colour where there’s none

‘A Veld Eclogue : The Pioneers’

Alas, Campbell is gone but the mystics are still singing in the vlei. Writing in Contrast recently Jack Cope declared himself firmly against well-observed, descriptive and (horrors!) political poems while showing his enthusiasm for sappy poems possessed by ‘initial juice and life’, and other nameless somethings.

Dr Smith is right to single out from Adamastor ‘The Serf’ and ‘The Zulu Girl’, much anthologised though they have been. For these are poems of an altogether different order. Rimbaud is in the first and Baudelaire in the second, but they are foremost Campbell. He achieves a menacing beauty without straining after effect and perfectly renders the tension between black and white.

Campbell left South Africa in 1927, after spending three years here. He returned once again, in 1954, then briefly, to accept an honorary degree of Doctor of Literature from the University
of Natal. But the spread of liberalism in England offended him as much as the provincialism of South Africa. This is hardly surprising for he saw them as aspects of the same disease which he described in *Voorslag* as 'the sordid drifting of industrialised herds, the obscenity of sham ideals of the crowd, the mental non-existence of the man in the street'. He removed to Provence and played the English literary coteries in *The Georghiad* (1931). At its best *The Georghiad* hits hard, the wit is savage, cutting like a rowel:

> Remember how King David spent his leisure,  
> Between his deep devotion and his pleasure,  
> Leaving at times both muse and concubines  
> To hack the foreskins off the phillistines.

Dr Smith points to the vitality of this poetry, and he is surely right to do so. But he does not deal with the technical failure of much of the verse — its thumping rhythm; its lines mangled to make, very often, uninspiring rhymes. While the force of the attack never varies, it grows bombastic; irritation blown up becomes hysteria.

Settling in Spain Campbell took the side of the Falangist Blue Shirts against the Republicans. His authoritarian streak became more pronounced; his verse shriller. Dr Smith has defined his position clearly:

> Campbell continually asserts the superiority of the Catholic and authoritarian mystique of the rebels over what he interprets as the wholly materialistic, communistic ethic of his opponents, or the decadent democratic spirit of their allies.

He is informative and generous in his discussion of Campbell's attachment to Spanish fascism, and scrupulously fair in his scrutiny of the poetry of this period — much of it appearing in *Flowering Rifle* (1939). But it is surprising to find him noting that the fascism of this period was distinguished by its 'chivalric' and Catholic overtones, as if he was offering this in mitigation. It is clear that Campbell felt about Franco in much the same way that Pound felt about Mussolini; and for much the same reasons. In the 'thirties many intellectuals nourished similar phobias; like Campbell they feared what they saw as burgeoning communism, financed by usurous Jews, dope pushers and perverts, and looked for a strong man to stop the rot. Firm government, the argument ran, and it is one with which South Africans will be familiar, far from curtailing individual liberties, actually safeguards them against
A tyranny far worse than blamed on Hitler
Whose chief oppression is of the belittler
The intellectual invert and the Jew

— Flowering Rifle

The satire written at this time is no better, with an hysterical edge always threatening to break through the strained lines. From a feeling of alienation Campbell moved to an open detestation of the English:

These Pickoid buffoons will smell you roses
Where even dunghill rats would hold their noses,
And though divorce was their first end and source
Though onanism's now their next resource . . .

— Flowering Rifle

The lines are forceful and carry much the same conviction as the gesture of those Nationalist Chinese soldiers who, when faced by opposing Red Chinese soldiers carrying portraits of Mao, retaliated by dropping their trousers and presenting their bottoms to the esteemed features. Forceful, even funny — but then orang-utangs are as witty.

In 1941, Campbell had a change of heart. The old British Empire was under attack. He returned to England and enlisted in the British Army. He served in East Africa as a coast watcher in Intelligence until invalided out in 1944 with the rank of sergeant. He thoroughly enjoyed the war in his role of the cheerily cynical sergeant, Talking Bronco (1946). On this aspect of Campbell, as elsewhere, Dr Smith is fascinating. His comments on Campbell's prose works of the 'fifties go for much of the polemical verse as well:

Their charm, panache and lyrical moments provide an interest which still holds readers. The total effect of the books is, however, marred by recurrent tall stories, obsessive personal boasts, and an often scornful insistence on the absurdity of any attitudes which do not conform to Campbell's world view. He is seldom a good theorist, and usually less convincing when communicating ideas rather than emotions.

Campbell shot first and asked questions later, if at all. And yet, despite it all, his poetry remains marvellously subversive. I think that Mike Kirkwood has taken his measure best in a tribute to his range and accuracy:
That big mouth of his has blown up more
Than the echo of his own bullied fame
Taken the legs off any trick shooter
Lowering his sights on the vicinity.

— Old Big Mouth

Dr Smith sees polemic finally prevailing over lyric. But by his
own account of Campbell's poetic development it is difficult to
see how there could have been any other conclusion. Dr Smith
has written a good, useful book. Up until now there has been
nothing like it. No one who is interested in poetry in South
Africa can ignore it. To do so would be to ignore Campbell and
thus leave oneself merely White English Speaking South African
verse to contemplate — which is something else again.
SUFFERING AS POETIC VIRTUE

Ever since Chaucer’s weepy bore, Troilus, English poetry has been glutted with sufferers. Some kept it to themselves, like Pope with his hunchback, but others, like Byron with his ‘premonitions’, made a fairly amusing cult of it. “Out of the quarrel with ourselves we make poetry”, wrote Yeats, but my quarrel with Eva Royston* is that she is not sufficiently outside of herself to quarrel, and is too immersed in her suffering to write poetry. This self-immersed suffering seems to be a characteristic of women poets, but not an exclusive one, for the cult of spontaneity has encouraged male poets and many critics to see suffering as a poetic virtue. The more you suffer, the better your poetry is likely to be; the more you are seen to suffer, the better your poetry is, runs the myth.

Every Portnoy has his complaint; what the poetic self makes of the complaint is the test which Eva Royston fails.

Her 103 poems, as poems, are short and soggy. Her writings are the reflection of a person’s psychological terrors, how she escapes from them, fails and, eventually, can overcome them by engaging with the objective world. The poems are a reflection of a mind; that mind is a poet’s, but they are not reflection of a poet’s mind. Their coherence and force derive from a framework so subjective that one can only guess at it. Because of this personal psychological framework, any writing, however bad, might have done as well as ‘One Hundred and Three poems’ in reflecting the processes of her mind. Certainly of the earlier poems in the book, one can quote that choleric critic of the ‘Waste Land’ who said “A grunt would have served as well”. Not that the poems are incoherent, but they are acts, rather than poems, which serve, consciously or unconsciously, a specific psychological purpose.

* One Hundred and Three Poems by Eva Royston, published by Renoster Books. Price: R1,75
Like anything else, poetry has a therapeutic function for the poet. The extent and type of this therapy is debatable. But the psychological, subjective function of poems, for the poet, is a secondary purpose of poetry. If it were otherwise, criticism would have to rely on the third opinion of independent case-histories.

But Eva Royston did not choose a grunt or trampolining or modern dance for her therapy: she chose words. But by comparing two of her poems, one can see why her choice was relatively arbitrary, for poetry at least. Her poems are easily and coherently schematized in terms of concern, imagery and, to a lesser extent, in terms of tone, for her tone is uniform. One can distil this schema into a scenario, justifying this because the pressure of what her editor calls “her sense of inner emergency” dominates the imagery of an interior landscape, whose relationship with an exterior world is through the imagination. Again, writing poetry is secondary to the expression of the inner world: this emerges in the imperfection of that world's expression. Royston says little about the world “outside”: one is therefore bound to construct the logic of the world “inside” to understand the basis of the poems. In this respect, she differs from Sylvia Plath whose poems are a two-way mirror reflecting both worlds.

Royston's poems are like dreams, linked by verbal puns and symbols. In the first group of five poems, she is burning in fire, then she is “stirring like an embryo” and, on emerging, is a skeleton facing “the pain of light”. The skeleton becomes a fossil of stone (the embryo again), crying “hard little pebbles”, surrounded by other stones, “my sisters and aunts” and by Fates, also stones. From this “house of plaster” she breaks free — “the fiery head broke free” — and the same process of captivity and escape follows in two more cycles, dealing with water and snow.

At the end of the water cycle, she is “a head of purified bones”, called by a woman-figure from the “other side” of a river-bank. The woman develops into a mother and the outer world, from which the poet must suffer birth. Again, the cycle of captivity and painful re-birth. In the cycle dealing with the psychiatrist, who has “made me his ear”, there is a more detached tone. There's desperation, but also detachment in the description of killing a lily that becomes a swan:

“The knife isn't strong enough
For the cords in its throat
Still the blood gushes out
And psychiatrist, watch, see how things die.”
The next group represents a psychological regression. Again, there's the imagery of stone, fire and water, but it's only a partial regression: "I become my head without my body". Then, the quest for wholeness, where the husband can offer holy communion, the "wafer of your words". But she asks, "Are you only the wafer bread, / Or indeed the holy ghost?"

Now the terrors are in looking back, and sorting a way through relationships. Escape gives way to alternatives, of considering man and woman with the detached compassion and knowledge of 'Lady Macbeth sleepwalking' (Poem 81):

"Do you know
That we all conceal wounded men
Behind the arras of conscience".

From this, the concern broadens to a consideration of mankind's plight — a rock with a million lives in it — and to the necessity of "cutting the old moon open for a newborn moon inside". In Royston's words, this is "starting feebly to walk, to totter", after flying. The tottering may be another captivity, but at least the final poems, on Africa and South Africa, can stand on their own: "The red squirming child" of Africa, and of Royston's poetic self is born.

Only these final poems have interest or significance outside of the scenario I've traced. Take poem 15, for example:

"The Alps snow me in.
This is Switzerland, and I am
Slightly tubercular. My ears are muffled
with snowflakes.
I am in a white icing or wedding country
Where bells ring through my head.
The earth has gone. How black and coarse
It was. Instead, we have
This steely ring of snow-elves.
Now sound is also tip-toeing away.
Something on a distant peak
Heaves like a quagmire, is unloosening itself,
Is gathering,
I think a hushed white landslide comes."

It would be a natural mistake, I think, to see the menace in the poem as having anything to do with Nature; and this points to the poem's failure. The powerlessness is for effect, and the effect doesn't come off. Something is going to happen, and the lack of integration of imagery, the pedestrian lines ("e.g. "It was. Instead, we have") and the whimsicality do not help define that 'something'. The words do not work for a response. A scream for help would have been better.
Compare the flatness of that poem with the richness of Poem 99:

“There is blood on the street.
A man fell from a window.
We shake red hands.
At the end of a thought
Comes a little fullstop of blood
A simple alphabet,
Red dot, question marks, a name.
We exchange looks
With eyes that have a red streak
In the corner.”

Here the slackness is functional, for the most part, in emphasizing the horror of this common situation. And the poem is evidence of an aware intelligence absent in the earlier ones. The difference between the two stages, of course, is that the second poem is related to a world which includes the poet; the first poem has only to do with a person’s sense of menace, where poet and world are simplified and thereby distorted into that one-dimensional final image. That allows for partial understanding, but hardly for response to the poet’s feelings.

Finally, the Renoster publishing venture is a good one, which has resulted in some excellent poems seeing the light of day. But in all three productions — Oswald Mtshali’s Sounds of a Cowhide Drum; Wally Mongane Serote’s Yakhali'inkomo and this — there should have been rigorous pruning out of poems and rewriting of others. And certainly, the eleven or so poems in One hundred and three poems which work do not justify this volume.

At most, they are a preparation for a volume.
SATIRE APLENTY

Cannibals and Missionaries — by John Fuller. Secker & Warburg, £1.50.

John Fuller’s impressive new collection Cannibals and Missionaries (with James Fenton’s Terminal Moraine) spearheads Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd’s outstanding new poetry list. There is surrealism there, true, but satire aplenty and the wit is wide-ranging and civilised. The nine-page, ‘The Art of Love’ is perhaps this collection’s tour de force:

. . . It’s surely wrong to say embraces
Made in the forbidden places
Induce in girls unusual fervour:
They’re simply primed by The Observer,
By Lost Boys chasing frequent thimbles,
By sears with beards and finger-cymbals,
By bottom-filmers and adverts,
By queer designers of short skirts . . .

Fuller, born in 1937, attracted favourable attention with his Fairground Music (1961) and The Tree that Walked (1967). He runs the Sycamore Press publishing pamphlets of poetry and music, has lectured in English in America and the U.K. and is a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford.

— DOUGLAS LIVINGSTONE
DAVE TULLY

NO IDEAS BUT IN THINGS

(The Horizon Forty Miles Away — by Patrick Cullinan. A limited edition of 200 copies privately printed, and numbered. Polygraph, Johannesburg)

Yet another slim volume added to the pile usually brings out the Savonarola in me. But on closer inspection this one turns out to be one of the most impressive first books of poetry to be published in South Africa. Patrick Cullinan’s poems have appeared in various literary magazines and in the Penguin Book of S.A. Verse.

But his output has been sparse and it is only in a collection like this that his remarkable originality emerges. He has a deceptively easy, colloquial style which those in search of the merely poetic will call banal and uninspiring.

Mr Cullinan can write a plain, unadorned line which never seems threadbare and accumulates assurance and authority. It is tempting to speculate that William Carlos Williams is behind poems such as Johannesburg 1902 which have Williams’s directness.

A Kind of Grass and Nunc Dimittis carry Mr Cullinan’s hallmarks — simplicity and irony. Of a father dying, he writes:

At times he hated
Misery so much
He could not face it
For a son or brother,
But smiled then
At servants or called
A large black dog
To jump on the grass
Outside his window.

— Nunc Dimittis

In Devils, which carries an appropriately stinging tail, we come to Belmotto

... believing he could walk
On water
He drowned one morning
With his usual fuss,
Gurgling Aramaic
In a short, last prayer.

Devils

He is capable of creating in a few lines very complicated images:

The bird moves from the rock
And over twisting seas
Uses the wind, the water,
The waste and edge of storms
To find new distance.

– For G

What emerges from these poems, astonishingly, considering their economy of means, is real emotion. In what is perhaps the finest poem in the collection Mr Cullinan understands perfectly the dilemma of the exile who cannot quieten the past:

... when we had the power
And used it; when we had
It like a handkerchief
In the corner of our sleeves

and who cannot decide whether his future lies before or behind him:

The worst lie was our hope:
Perpetual teatime and the colour green
Fantasies always suffice.
But we returned to the lie,
The dirty towns, the insensitive people,
Endless teatime and the colour green.

– Exiles

If I have a criticism it is that when Mr Cullinan descends into bathos – and he has a weakness for it – he does so too abruptly:

The heirs of Senzangakhona
Must have a daily crap.

– The Horizon Forty Miles Away

He is least happy when he is using ideas. He might reflect on Williams's dictum: 'No ideas but in things'. There is no need for him to offer comments or strain for effect. The quiet authority of his best work proves this. One closes the book hoping for more. Mr Cullinan is a poet.
Mr Jensma invites us to sing for our execution. For ours I think a stiff upper lip would be more in order. But for Mr Jensma’s I'll sing.

DAVE TULLY

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Barend Van Niekerk is a Professor Law at the University of Natal, Durban. He is a friend of President Senghor’s and has visited Senegal on several occasions.

Christopher Mann is a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford where he has just won the Newdigate Prize for Poetry.

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