

BOLT

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BOLT

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No. 9

EDITOR : CHRISTOPHER HOPE

Editorial	2
A Look at the Line Mongane Wally Serote	4
TRANSLATION:	
Fernando Pessoa: The Man with Four Faces John Torres	9
Pretoria 1956/1960: A White Boy Remembers	
Christopher Hope	17
CRITICISM:	
The Sestigers: A Post-Mortem P.P. Louw	19
NEW POETRY	
Patrick Cullinan ..	36
Chris Russell	
Robert Greig	
FICTION:	
The Problem with Staff Christopher Hope	39
NEW POETRY	
Peter Strauss	52
Chris Mann	
Colin Style	
REVIEWS:	
Colonist or Uitlander? Christopher Hope	57
Batouala Mike Kirkwood ..	60
New Poetry of Mexico John Torres	61

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Editorial

- *This is the last number of **Bolt** for 1973 and the last which I will edit as I shall be leaving Natal soon and moving to Johannesburg. In the New Year, Mike Kirkwood and Tony Morphet will resume their editorship of the magazine. Moreover, after this issue, **Bolt** will no longer see its existence in straight literary terms but will aim for a commitment which while it will not exclude the literary will seek to reflect the political, historical and sociological features of the South African situation.*

*My heartfelt thanks to contributors, subscribers and book-sellers. It is due entirely to them that we have been able to appear at all. **Bolt** will continue to look for their support in the future.*

- *The most eventful news of late for those who for one reason or another write English in South Africa is the announcement by its Editor, Lionel Abrahams, that with the issue of its 12th number, the Johannesburg literary magazine, **The Purple Renoster**, will cease publication.*

*The first number of **The Purple Renoster** appeared in mimeograph in 1957. It was the only literary magazine available. It ran to 34 pages and sold for 3/6. In his first editorial Abrahams concerned himself with defining what the **Renoster** was not going to be. "The point about purple," he wrote, "is its pointlessness. (It) is not going to adopt any particular brand of polish or stand or polemic to which contributors will have to be pertinent in style and content. We want to provide a means of publication for some of the writings of South Africans in the shorter forms in English. We mean some of the writing done in response to the need for self-expression – as distinct from that produced primarily to the requirements of journalism, academism and crusaderism."*

*In retrospect, I think that we can see that this admirable intention was too sanguine. Before long the **Renoster** discovered that the need for self-expression had to give way before the implacable policy of preserving white South Africa at all costs and in particular at the expense of writing in English. Issue number 5 of **The Purple Renoster** was*

*banned and on one occasion, at least, the magazine found it necessary to censor material already set up. Nonetheless, it was in **The Purple Renoster** that the work of writers such as Herman Charles Bosman, Oswald Mtshali, Wally Serote and Jillian Becker, to name only a few people, appeared and, more importantly, appeared regularly. And it was **The Purple Renoster** that suffered most grievously when, having been the first to see the value of their work, it was unable to continue publishing the writing of people such as Alex la Guma, Brutus, Mphahlele and Modisane.*

*In his valedictory editorial, now, some seventeen years on, Lionel Abrahams confesses that he has given up the unequal struggle to keep the **Renoster** going. It cannot pay for itself. "Also," he says, "I have lost my youthful willingness to carry out some of the less self-flattering tasks involved in the running (lacking the organisational nous to marshal a staff).*

***The Renoster** has been a rare beast. Wide ranging, playful, dainty and clumsy together, unusually clear sighted and powerful enough to carry a whole raft of writers further than they could have managed themselves. Seldom there when looked for. Never quite what one expected when it appeared, sudden and thunderous on the horizon, bearing down on the unsuspecting at a speed astonishing in one so weighty. Its each appearance has been something of an event and its purple a genuine splash of colour in what is otherwise a rather drab landscape. It is sad to see it go. Its existence was an inspiration. Its demise is a warning.*

CHRISTOPHER HOPE

A Look At The Line

Through the black rims of her spectacles, her eyes pierced with a clear white and a clear black. Her legs were short, proportioned neatly with her body, they had hairs the colour of mirage, and her finger-nails were clean, lay peacefully on the flesh of her fingers; her hands, arms looked healthy, strong as she put plates, forks, saucers, cups and dishes on the table. Her voice flew above like a bird in casual flight. She sat down and sighed tiredly, wiped her wet nose, chin and face. She dug her fingers hastily and with experience into the plate and her hand went from plate to mouth so fast, yet so gentle. Her smile was as pleasant as it was constant, and her voice, with its sharp and chopping accent, flew on and on. Now and then our eyes met, and she smiled, the thick black rims with their thick glass gave way as I looked through them and saw her eyes. I thought I saw a sleepy look, no, tired, no not, they were sad eyes that now and then flickered a bright glow. She smiled; her teeth shone like a light strip from between her black lips which parted so quickly and her thick voice came out. But there was one tooth on the left corner of her mouth that climbed on others awkwardly. I looked away; and I thought, I felt her strength. Her voice still flew, as the men's bubbled and the crockery rattled. When I heard her say, "Island", I knew I had been absent-minded. She was smiling and she said her husband was sentenced to fifteen years and that that day he had finished seven years; eight more I thought and silently I reached 1980 I looked at her, I felt content, she would reach it.

My mind went to Cape Town, while we sat there in Durban. Cape Town. I lay tiredly on the seat of the car. Before us were long buildings, huge, and the others were thin, made so by their distance from us, and behind them, lay the sea, blue and shining like a wide mirror reflecting the sky. It was peaceful. On it, lay a tip of green and brown. Cape Town; on that highway, cars weaving in and out and dodging beneath and above the highways, our car slowed down, the driver was talking and pointing to the sea. I looked and I listened, we became silent, and I felt, as though it was a cold hand holding me, a blanket of sadness spread in me. The buildings, like curtains, carefully concealed the sea and the tip of green and brown land as they grew bigger and became real. That was the "Island" tip, that green and brown, I thought of Sobukwe, Mandela, Sisulu and others, it was the depths of despair that clutched me at that moment. She, as we ate and bore the burden of the gluey feel between the clothes and the flesh, made

by that wet hot weather of Durban, yes, she said it, she said she had been on the “Island” to see her husband. Winnie. Veronica. And how many others whom we have not heard of? Women, who went to see their husbands, on that “Island”!

I could not help but smile when I thought that the many men who are there, who will still go there will leave behind them their wives who will spread like these small boards all over South Africa, on toilet doors, escalator doors, building doors, everywhere, in small towns in all the Provinces, all over South Africa – “Non-whites“, “Nie-blankes”, “Whites Only.” Miraculously, those doors have taken a human form – what a disaster!

Cape Town. My friend and I were heading for Sea Point. I had not recovered from the feel of seeing the “Island” tip; the breeze blew, the sea was calm, the ships on it, far, looked like toy things; and cars made their rolling sounds and the lights changed orange, red and green and I looked at the peace of the sea with human envy, not knowing how I could spread the hands of my heart, and with that ancient, humble voice of my old people, beseech the sea – give me your peace.

I heard my driver friend talk. I looked at him; I did not hear, but I kept nodding, I looked at his hair, long, blonde, and his green eyes dashed about like a reflection on a shining silver thing, and they looked silly, I would have said beautiful, if I did not know about the green leaves that he wrapped in paper and fumes of which I smelt while I waited for him to take me for a drive. I asked him: “Sorry, what did you say? I was not listening.” He gave this smile that is like his eyes and he said, “I said, dad, like did you see where I pointed there at the sea?” He indicated with his thumb over his shoulder and his hand quickly went back to the steering wheel as he took the curve. “You know that cat, Ingrid Jonker? That’s where she drowned herself.” I said nothing. “Did you know that dead cat?” I shook my head, “I heard of her,” I said, and looked back at the rear window. I thought of Ingrid and her poems. I thought of Nat Nakasa’s “Native of no Land” and my friend the smoker was singing “Hey Jude”, while I thought how really one can be strong and be able to look at this human tragedy.

It was then that a terrible pain crept into my mind. The signs of these things we wish to forget, for we cannot bear them, will come like a tide from the shores of this pain-riddled land; Cape Town told me and Durban confirmed it.

My friend, the smoker, parked the car; we went up the stairs, into the lift, "Whites only". Out of that lift into a door. I saw his mother. She reddened and quickly went into the other room. My friend went to the refrigerator. He gave me a nice and cool glass of orange juice. His mother called him. I heard whispers, which grew and became shouts. She did not want her long-haired son to bring black-skinned friends like me to her house. I was silent as that rage went on and on, I was thinking, sipping the cool drink, sitting on her sofa in her house. I was tired, I needed to sit. I did not want to talk, leave alone to fight. Now and then his mother came and peeped at me and she was red in the face.

When we went into the car, I smiled, out of a deep, deep misery and despair, my friend asked me why I smiled. I could not answer him.

We drove to the harbour. I saw real ships right next to my nose, for the first time. I went into it, I walked through it, looking at the sea and at times forgetting that I was on the sea. We tried to get a drink; they refused; some of the eyes in that ship burnt me like a cruel torture. We laughed about it and went our way.

We went to Groote Schuur hospital. I thought I would see Professor Chris Barnard, maybe walking out or into a door, maybe in his long dresses and masks. I would tell my younger brother, who now and then cuts pictures of the Professor from newspapers that I met the Professor and that for him, to Groote Schuur, is a long way, a bloody rocky way. I told my friend this and I asked him how his mother would feel if, because of her rage, one day she went to Groote Schuur and found my brother who was prepared to transplant her white heart and give her a black heart. He laughed and said the old lady would faint first and then welcome the idea. I suppose death has no colour.

We passed the parliament buildings. I laughed, no, I smiled in me, as I thought of a joke, which I did not tell my friend. We were weaving like hell in and on the highways. I lost my sense of direction. I just got confused. The car was flying; now and then I wondered whether the fumes in my friend's head had cleared – but he was a brilliant driver.

And the mountains and the sea and the sky just lay there like a miracle.

And the highways and the cars and the people made a neat fascination. The dark black faces, long hair, black and shining, the beautiful girls; the between black and brown faces some with between kinky and curly and straight hair. Some faces, near white, with straight hair, we passed them at bus stops, walking or talking or working. The young white faces, long-haired, mini-skirted bodies or trousered in bell bottoms, carefree boys and girls with round gold rimmed spectacles – you cannot help but wonder, what’s happening; the paradised children of nearly heavened parents – those white faces. I talked to them, in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, often, so often I despaired, I hoped that I did not deceive myself when I thought that these girls and boys of placards and protests were thinking about looking for that candle of hope. I knew it for a fact that their children would not even light it – will it be too wet with blood?

And there was District Six; Good God! some of the houses stood roofless, the tops of the walls ridged; that is the “Whites Only” boards that are all over the country; in small towns; big cities; all over all the provinces; all over South Africa; the “Europeans Only” notices. Tired of hanging, they have taken action. There is Limehill. Stinkwater. There was Sophiatown. Newclare. There is Fordsburg. And there was District Six; Good God! there was something heart beating about it, heart breaking about it; but I tell you, people of the slums stand on common ground with their deep, deep love for their slums. I hated those ridged walls, those roofless houses, for, I know, yes I know, what pain it is to lose the only world, only meaningful world of the slum people.

Yakhal 'inkomo . . . that is the story I heard from Dumile, the sculptor. He s gone now, to London! He told me that once in the country he saw people kill a cow near a kraal and in the kraal there were cattle looking on at their kin being killed and he heard them cry, they were crying for their like who were dying at the hands of human beings . . . Yakhal 'inkomo . . . Dumile held his left breast and said that’s where the cry of the cattle hit him . . . Yakhal 'inkomo! He said they cried, they raged, they stabbed each other with their horns, they cried and he thought they would bring their shelter to the ground, and they cried, just mooood their pain into his heart, they dug the ground with their hoofs, they saw their kind die at the hands of human beings. they saw the blood, and they saw it fall . . . Yakhal 'inkomo . . .

I heard Mankunku blow his tenor saxophone, his face was swollen as he blew, his face was wet with sweat as he blew, he grew tall, he grew short, he shrunk as he blew . . . Yakhal 'inkomo . . . he became one with his horn, he squeezed it and the cry came out and went to the heart . . . Yakhal 'inkomo . . . the bastard! He was crying, fearing, raging, he was merciless with us, he wounded us with his horn. He just went deep, right down to the floor of despair, and reached the rim of fear and hatred. He just spread and spread and spread out and out and out in meditation, with his horn, Mankunku, Ngozi, that guy from the shores of South Africa, and he said: "That was it." For that was what he was doing with his horn, Yakhal 'inkomo . . .

I saw that woman in Durban, my mind went to Cape Town, I thought of Nakasa, Ingrid Jonker, my friend's mother, that green and brown tip of land . . . Limehill, that police van where the men suffocated behind its locked doors, they suffocated, they sweated, and their sweat did what they could not do, it slipped out beneath the door and ran out while some of them ran out of life . . . they were there because some day or other they did not have passes and because the police van broke down and the police could not open the back and let them out, for they would run away, Yakhal 'inkomo . . .

I have a deep bloody fear, Good God, who hasn't? How helpless this typewriter seems at times; we do not know what has been done, even the people who did it don't know what they have done and they to whom things are being done, Good God, they do not know what has been done to them, Good God
Yakhal 'inkomo . . .

I see the woman's eye-glimmer is focused on the "Island"

FERNANDO PESSOA-

THE MAN WITH FOUR FACES

Born in Lisbon on the 13th of June 1888, Fernando Antonio Noqueira Pessoa accompanied his mother to Durban in 1896 where her second husband had been appointed to the post of acting Portuguese Consul. In Durban, Fernando Pessoa first attended the Convent School in West Street and went on to complete his secondary education at Durban Boy's High School and Durban's Commercial School. In 1903 he wrote the entrance examination to the University of Good Hope and his English essay in that examination won for him the Queen Victoria Prize for English. In December 1904 he wrote the Intermediate Bachelor of Arts Examination of the University of Good Hope and in August 1905 he returned to Lisbon where he was enrolled as a student in the Faculty of Arts at Lisbon University. He never returned to South Africa, and died in Lisbon on November the 30th, 1935, of alcoholic poisoning.

Antonio Quadros who has written one of the numerous critical studies of Pessoa that are now appearing, suggested that while Pessoa's personal life appears to have run its course evenly with no dramatic ups and downs (he seems to have had a happy childhood, and a dull routine job as an English commercial correspondent for several firms) his literary and intellectual life, for which he had ample time, was a veritable volcano of contradictory ideas, feelings and beliefs. More than of any other writer, suggests Quadros "we can say of Fernando Pessoa that his work is his biography."

The other three faces of Fernando Pessoa or heteronyms under which he published a considerable volume of poetry were Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis and Alvaro de Campos. His own explanation for creating these three mythical poets is quoted by Quadros as follows:

"Since my childhood I have tended to create around me a fictitious world of friends and acquaintances who never existed (I do not know if they really did not exist, or if it is I who do not exist. In these matters, as in all others we must not be too dogmatic). Ever since I have known myself to be what I am, I remember mentally needing figures having movement, history and character, unreal persons who were as visible to me as those to be found in what we like to call the real world. I even remember my first imaginary being,

or rather my first non-existent acquaintance – a certain Chevalier de Pas whom I created when I was six years old, and who exchanged letters with me which I wrote, and who forms part of my fondest memories. I remember less clearly another figure, whose name escapes me now, who also had a foreign name and who was in some way I cannot remember a rival of the Chevalier de Pas . . . Something that all children indulge in? Undoubtedly – or perhaps. For me these personages were so real and I remember them so well that I still have to make a conscious effort to understand that they did not exist.”

Whatever the real motives may have been that led Pessoa to create three distinct poetic personalities besides his own, the result has been the most complex body of metaphysical poetry in Portuguese.

In 1956, having come across a copy of *Mensagem*, the only volume of poetry published under Pessoa's own name during his life-time, I attempted to translate the 44 poems that make up this work. I was urged by several friends (amongst others Wilhelm Hiener, Sydney Clouts and Uys Krige) who read the manuscript of these translations, to try and obtain other poems by Pessoa since it might be possible to discover whether the years he had spent at school in Durban were reflected in his other work. It was only in 1966 that I was able to buy a complete collection of Pessoa's poetry. So far I have not been able to discover any specifically South African influences either in his English or his Portuguese poems. It seems to me that Pessoa is essentially a European poet – with a deep knowledge of and familiarity with English poetry. In this he is not unique, because most literate Portuguese have a reading knowledge of English, even if they cannot speak it, besides French, Spanish and Italian. What is unique about Pessoa, is the fact that he had all his formal education through the medium of English and yet he remained profoundly Portuguese in his outlook, in his ideas and in his language. But Pessoa is far too complex a literary and intellectual phenomenon to be dealt with summarily in a few pages of introduction. Roy Campbell, who was the first to translate some of Pessoa's work into English, is said to have remarked, Pessoa may one day come to be recognized as one of the most original poets of the 20th century.

The following three poems taken from *Mensagem* are good examples of his concentrated cryptic style. The last poem published under the heteronym of Alberto Caeiro is so different in mood and style that it is hard to believe that it was written by the same person.

THE PRINCE

God wills, man dreams, the work is born.
God willed the world to be one,
the sea united and undivided.
He consecrated you, and you
went forth unveiling the foam . . .

And the white horizon went from island
to continent;
dawn came, spreading to the uttermost
ends of the earth,
and suddenly, the whole globe appeared,
rounded, out of the deep blue . . .

He who anointed you, made you a Portuguese,
in you he gave us the signal of the sea.
The sea fulfilled itself, the Empire fell apart.
Lord! Portugal remains still unfulfilled . . .

THE STANDARD

Great is the effort, small the man,
I Diego Cam, navigator, left
this standard planted beside
yonder brown beach and sailed on —

Divine the soul, imperfect the work,
this pillar signals to the wind and skies
that of the work attempted
I have accomplished this part —
what still remains undone, is with God.

These Crests you see here teach the vast
possible ocean that seas with an end
may be Greek or Roman,
but the endless sea is Portuguese.

The Cross above tells what is in my soul
and heats the fever I have to navigate.
Only in God's eternal calm will I find
The haven I shall never reach . . .

EPITAPH FOR BARTHOLOMEW DIAS

Here on the small distant beach,
lies the Captain of the End —
The marvel crossed, the sea remains
the same; now no one fears it!
Atlas lifts high the world on his shoulder . . .

This last poem is number VIII of the first series of forty-nine poems published under the name of Alberto Caeiro, who was supposed to be essentially a pagan and bucolic poet. Pessoa claimed that he wrote these poems when he was possessed by the spirit of Caeiro. All these were published under the general title of *O Guardador de Rebanhos* which could be translated as *The keeper of flocks* . . .

VIII

One midday at the end of Spring
I had a dream like a photograph.
I saw Jesus Christ come back to earth.
He came down the side of a hill
changed once more into a little boy,
running and rolling in the grass,
picking flowers only to throw them down again
and laughing so you could hear him far away.

He had run away from Heaven.
He was too much ours to pretend
to be the second figure in the Trinity.
In Heaven everything was false,
everything at sixes and sevens
with flowers, trees and stones.
In Heaven he always had to be serious
and from time to time to become man again,
to get up on the cross and be always dying
with a crown encircled by thorns
and his feet stuck with a nail with a head,
with a rag around his middle
like negroes in pictures.
They did not even allow him a father and mother
like other children.

His father was two people —
An old man called Joseph who was a carpenter
and was not his father;
and the other father was a stupid dove,
the only ugly dove in the world
because it did not belong to the world
nor was it a dove.
and his mother had not loved before she had him.

She was not a woman : she was a trunk
In which he had come from Heaven.
And they wanted him, who had only been born
from his mother,
and who had never had a father to love with respect
to preach goodness and justice!

One day when God was sleeping
and the Holy Ghost was flying about,
He went to the box of miracles and stole three.
With the first no one could know he had run away.
With the second he made himself eternally a child and human.
With the third he created a Christ eternally on the cross
and left him nailed on the cross that is in Heaven
to serve as a model for the others.
Then he fled to the sun
and descended by the first beam he caught.

Today he lives in my village with me.
He is a beautiful laughing child and natural.
He wipes his nose on his right arm,
jumps into puddles, picks flowers
and likes them, forgets about them,
throws stones at the donkeys
steals fruit from the orchards
and runs away crying and shouting
from the dogs.
And because he knows they don't like it
and that everyone thinks it is funny,
he runs behind the girls walking along the road
in groups with water jars on their heads
and lifts up their skirts.
He taught me everything,
Taught me to look at things,
pointed out all that can be seen in flowers.
Showed me how interesting stones are
when one holds them in one's hand
and looks slowly at them.

He says many nasty things about God.
Says he is a sick and stupid old man,
always spitting on the floor
and saying rude things.
The Virgin Mary spends the afternoons
of Eternity knitting socks.
And the Holy Ghost scratches himself with his beak
perches on the chairs and soils them.
Everything in Heaven is stupid like the Catholic Church.
He tells me that God does not understand anything
about the things he created —
“If he created them which I doubt” —
“He says for example that human beings sing his glory,
but humans don’t sing anything,
if they did they would be singers.
Humans exist and that is all,
that is why they are called human beings.”
And then, tired of saying nasty things about God,
the little boy Jesus falls asleep in my arms
and I take him home.

He lives in my house half way down the hill.
He is the Eternal Child, the God who was lacking.
He is human, which is natural,
He is the divine one who smiles and plays.
That is why I know with full certainty,
he is the true little boy Jesus.

And the child so human that it is divine
is this my daily life of a poet,
and because he always goes with me I am a poet always,
and my slightest glance fills me with feeling,
and the slightest sound, whence ever it may come,
seems to speak to me.

The New Child, who lives where I do
gives one hand to me
and the other to all that exists
and so we three go along what path there may be,
jumping, singing and laughing,
and enjoying our common secret,
which is to know everywhere,
that there is no mystery in the world
and that everything is worthwhile.

The Eternal Child accompanies me always.
The direction of my glance is his pointing finger.
My hearing, gaily attentive to every sound,
is his playful tickling of my ears.

We get on so well together
in the company of everything
that we never think of each other,
but live together and both
with an intimate unity
like the left and the right hand.

At nightfall we play five jacks
on the steps at the door of the house,
gravely as is seemly for a God and a poet,
and as if each stone were a whole universe
and a great danger to it,
should we let it fall on the ground.

Then I tell him stories only of men's doings
and he smiles because it is all so incredible,
He laughs at kings and those who are not kings,
and is sorry to hear about wars,
and of trade and ships that bellow out
smoke on the high seas,
Because he knows that all this
lacks that truth a flower has, when it blossoms,
that goes with the light of the sun
to vary the hills and valleys and makes
eyes hurt when they look on white-washed walls.

Then he falls asleep and I lay him down.
I take him in my arms into the house
and lay him down, undressing him slowly,
as if following a very clean ritual;
I am all maternal until he is naked.

He sleeps inside my soul
and sometimes wakes up at night
and plays with my dreams.
He turns some upsidedown,
puts some on top of others
and claps his hands alone
smiling at my sleep.

.....

When I die, my little son,
let me be the smallest child.
Pick me up in your arms
and take me into your house.
Undress my tired human self
and lay me down in your bed.
Tell me stories lest I awake
so that I may fall asleep again.
And give me dreams to play with

until some day dawns
and you will know which one.

This is the story of my little boy Jesus.
For what possible reason
should it not be more true
than everything that philosophers have thought
or religion has taught us?

.....

I conclude this brief introduction to Fernando Pessoa's poetry by quoting what he had to say about these three fictitious poets:

"I keep to my intention of publishing under their pseudonyms the works of Caeiro-Reis-Campos. This is a whole literature that I created and lived, and it is sincere, because it was felt, and may possibly be of some influence . . . on the ideas of others. What I call insincere literature is not that of Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis and Alvaro de Campos . . . It has been felt in the person of another; it has been written dramatically, but it is sincere in my own serious sense of the word, just as what King Lear says is sincere, although it is not Shakespeare speaking but someone he has created. Insincere I call things written to astonish people – and things – note this because it is important – that do not contain a deep metaphysical idea . . . of the gravity and the mystery of life. That is why everything I have written under the names of Caeiro, Reis and Alvaro de Campos is serious. In each there is a deep sense of life, diverse in all three but in all fully conscious of the mysterious importance of existence."

PRETORIA 1956 – 1960

A White Boy Remembers

12-inch charcoal rammies cut to hug the calves, big-shouldered floats in creams and checks brushing the bum, feet slick in steel-tipped Jarmans kicking at crotch and kneecap, fingernails reaching for eyes. Kenny, who crashed parties with his wife on the back of his bike, she pushing a three-month boop. When dagga was dagga and waited in the craphouse of the Hamburger Hut for the rookers, still waits, for all I know, next to the cistern, curled and dry as pubic hair, for the sad ghosts of the Tampico Gang who haunt Church Square, the yard of the Central Prison, and the old Opera House, grey-sprayed hair streaking their foreheads, dreaming of string ties; of thrills caught with easy babes deep among the trees at Fountains; of the ore who sweated and scowled in their khaki uniforms, patted their dogs and fondled their handcuffs in the foyer of the Capitol in the interval of *King Creole*. Times when the blood roared in the veins like exhausts, baffles gone. The excitements of insolence, one-and-tuppence worth, pulling on a Texan, squinting up through the smoke at the heavenly screen, pleasure rising like steam above the stalls, compounded of the pick-up, the grip, the cheapie, the feel of fingers exercising like trapeze artists in the black tent pitched between the sweetest thighs that ever spread a pillion. Black was the colour of a BMW, white was everything from Hercules to Waterkloof. And the manager's torch probed the glutinous couples like an abortionist's finger. The Aapies River, tight in its concrete collar, piddled through town floating a used FL, a waterish clerk with one lascivious thought on his mind. Amid such heats the sun's was too much for the superintendent of the swimming bath who'd spent twenty years teaching little girls the crawl and one day took matters a little further and left town in huge disgrace and settled in Benoni, and all the girls he'd trained over the years to Olympic prowess sat with their legs crossed between dances and more often refused to come outside or cased themselves to steady boyfriends. Later, all our heroes turned fitters or played first-class cricket. Kenny went straight into real estate when he came out of chookie. Johnny Murchison went interestingly enough, stabbed to death in a telephone booth by persons unknown. As did Paddy Guard, kindest of jollers, who once made the papers for the part he took in the gigantic barneys fought on the lawns outside Jaaps, the student tea-room, and at Church Square, under the calcifying eye of Oom Paul, between hairy duckies with chains and knuckles and close-cropped hairies all muscle and righteousness, Calvin versus Presley; smashed

to bits when his drunken jammie hopped the Swartkops Bridge and dived into the river not much deeper than the Aapies. And Donnie went to Jo'burg where he raised six kids and still battles a bit of start off old chommies he happens to meet outside the Jeppe Street Post Office, bulging a bit at the waist, his once curling and lusciously greased bonny gone to hell and only the size of him under his coat a hint of the power that once moved the biggest brekers in town to obsequiousness. Others merely died. Some married. And all that time the panga man was whittling away at our edges.

The Sestigers:

A POST-MORTEM

As part of the programme of its February 1973 Summer School, the University of Cape Town Department of Extra-mural Studies organised a series of lectures and discussions on the Sestigers, that tribalistically controversial group of novelists, poets, playwrights and essayists that emerged in and dominated the Afrikaans literary scene during the 1960's. The leading Sestigers themselves, people like André Brink, Etienne Leroux, Breyten Breytenbach, Adam Small, Jan Rabie, gave the lectures, led and dominated the discussions.

The series provoked great, even unprecedented, public interest, and it is convenient to attempt a review and assessment of the Sestigers, moving in and around this series. But before we proceed to reviewing some of the more important lectures presented we must draw attention to the interest that the series provoked in Afrikaner circles.

Afrikaner Interest

Members of the Afrikaner tribe came from every Province and even from as far afield as Windhoek, and in numbers that an academic occasion has never known. Indeed, the attendance even in sheer numbers (and the composition of the audience is of more significance than the numbers) exceeded that for Volkfeeste in this region. For the days of the Summer School the Sestigers enjoyed greater popularity than in all the years of their decade.

What lay at the root of this exceptional interest? Some are suggesting that there has been a sudden, dramatic and popular cultural awakening among the Afrikaners; but, unfortunately perhaps, there are no facts to support such a view.

Curious Devils

Naturally, some people came out of curiosity. Many young Afrikaners, one is sure, wanted to see these legendary figures: Brink, Leroux and, especially, the exile Breyten Breytenbach; and, possibly more especially, the beautiful and exotic cause of his exile, suddenly granted a visa after earlier refusals to grant her one. Indeed, all the alleged devils were on display, complete with horns, hooves and forked tails. Then, of course, the curiosity factor would operate strongly in a tribe that has never had but always felt the need for a royalty and an aristo-

cracy; and, maybe, has always lived in a love-hate attitude to the Immorality Act? After all, they are even starved of pop idols to slobber over. A senior journalist of *Rapport* mentioned that a young man from a good Afrikaner Nationalist home had told him that seeing the Sestigers in the flesh had given him the same sort of thrill as he had got from watching a team of Rugby Springboks in action.

Serious Factor

I do want to suggest, though, that there was a more serious factor at work that brought to the series the large and largely seriously interested audience. I think that a section of the Afrikaner tribe, a significant layer drawn from its university and literary élite, was listening to its writers with special care and interest because these writers had been, for at least a decade, the nearest thing to an opposition that the Afrikaners had known. For at least twenty-five years the official, parliamentary, U.P. opposition has been completely irrelevant to their lives. No political grouping or movement that could claim their allegiance is permitted to exist outside the fold of the Party, the three Afrikaans churches, the F.A.K. and, of course, the Afrikaner Broederbond.

Internal Opposition

Insofar as there was any divergence within the ranks of the Afrikaners about the nature, identity, destiny and values of Afrikanerdom, it was the divergent views articulated in, through and around the works of some of the Sestigers. It will be remembered that the Sestigers were the harbingers of the "New Deal" politics that had its brief moment shortly after Langa-Sharpville. This opposition articulated by the writers was permitted partly because it was, and was seen to be, within the tribe; and partly because, even where the opposition was resented, it had to be endured: Afrikaans language and culture is so much part of the cement of Afrikaner Nationalism, so much part of what is called the Afrikaner identity, that the political front of Afrikanerdom was scarcely ever in a position to ex-communicate a whole generation of writers constituting an essential part of the Afrikaner cultural existence. This does not mean that the opposition had power. What it does mean is that it had a substantial freedom of speech, something corresponding to the parliamentary privilege accorded to the "official opposition".

For the official political leaders of Afrikanerdom the decade of the sixties was one of granite and *kragdadigheid*, of vast powers abundantly used. The Afrikaners had put their faith in their political leaders and given them complete freedom of action. And they acted.

Uncertain World

And now, in the seventies, after the power and the glory of the sixties and despite these, the Afrikaners' world has become a very uncertain and frightening place: "terrorists" lurk on the border and disaffection increases inside of it; popular strikes break out from South West Africa to Durban; quislings and collaborators indulge in cheeky talk; the economy that sometimes provides so bounteously suddenly threatens to impoverish and, moreover, is seen to respond more profoundly to foreign crises than to domestic prods; there is the visible and dramatic decline of the West expressed not so much in the shocking morals of the permissive society as in American initiatives for *detente* and peaceful co-existence with China and Russia and, worse, reflected in defeat in Vietnam; and the chronic weakness of the dollar (not to mention that of sterling) against the mark and the yen. These are but a few of the nightmares that trouble their world. This world has become for them uncertain and strange and fearsome despite the unfettered reign of their politicians. These days they find little for their comfort in the proceedings of their parliament and the sermons of their anointed.

In this situation there is, I think, a turning towards Afrikanerdom's own internal opposition, in the hope of finding from them (after all they seem to know more about the strange world beyond the borders and they seem to be familiar with Blacks) some guidance and solace for Afrikanerdom in these troubled times.

In brief, their rôle as Afrikanerdom's internal opposition is giving the writers brought together under the label *Sestig* a special interest at a time when confidence in the official *volksleiers* is beginning to ebb, especially among the younger layers and the literary and university élite. Of course, this interest is not to be confused with support, being more in the nature of the kind of revival quite common in the film world – often after the death of the films' stars.

Hunting for Oubaas Godot?

André Brink, widely regarded as the theoretician and moving spirit of the *Sestigers*, gave the opening lecture, one of the main ones. It was entitled "The Context of *Sestig* : Origins and Situation".

In fact the *Sestigers* were a small group of Afrikaans writers who came to prominence in *Afrikaans* literature in the early 1960's – a minor movement within the writings of a minority tongue in South Africa, therefore. Or, as Breytenbach later in the series referred to them, a small group of whitish or off-

white, youngish writers writing in the language of the tribe in power.

Brink took a loftier view of himself and his fellow-Sestigers. He referred to "one of the central aspects of the whole so-called movement" as being "its international nature, its cosmopolitan character". For him, *Sestig* was essentially a movement of and in Western European literature although it had what he called a "South African dimension". Since for him it was not a peculiarly South African movement subjected to certain European influences, but European with South African dimensions, he ranged far and wide to find the origins of *Sestig*. He travelled from the fall of Adam, via the flood waters and Noah, ancient fertility rites, Egyptian mythology, Greek mythology, Christian mythology, Siva, Buddha and even, as he calls them, the "primordial contrasts", like woman and beast, life and death, yesterday and today, virgin and whore; and after all this travelling still did not arrive at the origins of *Sestig*, except to conclude "that the moments of its origins lie widely scattered in time and space". He traversed two world wars, Korea, the Congo, took in atom bombs, gas-chambers and genocide – the whole range of the social violence of our time and still did not find Afrikaans literature's Golden Grail. He searched among the philosophical, intellectual and emotional ruins of Western Europe (and they *are* ruins and remnants of a once proud culture), going to Kierkegaard, Heidegger and every cult of the obscure and the absurd for the origins of the styles, the techniques, the themes and approaches of the Sestigers, in an attempt to place *Sestig* in a line with Dostoevsky, Kafka, Proust, Joyce, Henry Miller, Malraux, Hemingway, Thomas Mann, Faulkner and others.

How ridiculous Brink's attempt is – the absurdity compounded by his encyclopaedic catalogue of currents and movements in Western European literature – is underlined by the fact that only *two* Afrikaans writers outside of *Sestig*, Van Wyk Louw and Eugene Marais, earn a passing mention in a lengthy lecture tracing the origins and situations of *Sestig*. And this mention is *not* in the context of formative influences.

In passing, Brink unwittingly gives the lie to his "European" approach to *Sestig*. He makes the point that there has been no real development since 1965 and asks why. His answer: the Publications and Entertainments Act. "And not only the law and the Board as such, but the consuming brooding evil climate created around them . . ." So, after all, not Paris, as he claims in his lecture, but the South African reality is the spiritual capital of *Sestig*; the "consuming brooding evil climate" restricts its growth.

Whatever his intentions might be, Brink's lengthy academic

treatise which seeks to establish a Western European citizenship for *Sestig* serves a political end: it reflects the myth-making of those who seek to pass off the real divisions in South Africa – the divisions into haves and have-nots, masters and servants, rulers and ruled – as a division between a small European community and the barbarous black majority surrounding it. Brink's treatise amounts to pimping to the European pretensions of the rulers.

Brink would have served his craft better and would have come nearer the taproots of *Sestig* if he had examined the real relationship between writer and *volk* in the Afrikaner community, the rôle of the Afrikaner in the South African order, the effect of urbanisation on the Afrikaner, the "cultural" and economic results for the Afrikaner tribe of the conquest of power in the State. Then Brink might have been able to account for *Sestig* (as well as for the Afrikaners' *urban élite*, that kindred phenomenon of *Sestig*, so dramatically typified by the Anton Ruperts, Jan Marais', Tom Mullers).

The Mirror of the Sixties

The nineteen-sixties and *Sestig* began with Langa-Sharpeville, deepened to the State of Emergency that before long was written into the ordinary laws and permanent practices of the land, and that saw the outlawing and virtual destruction of most of the broad liberatory Movement and the imprisonment, banning, gagging, pegging, banishment and exile of members and supporters of this movement. The sixties was a period of brutal repression, of imprisonment without trial, of death in detention. It was a time of grim-lipped silence; but it was also a time of rumours, persistent rumours, dark rumours of torture, persecution and victimisation. It was a time of political trials. Young and old, political and innocents, doctors, lawyers and architects highly regarded in their professions, labourers unknown and unsung, brilliant university graduates, peasants whose only learning was the alphabet of toil, fathers and sons, hard-headed working men with heads full of sense, young students with heads full of dreams, all stood trial, all over this land. The sixties was a time of heavy sentences and so it was a time of cowardice, treachery and betrayal, a time of desolation; but also, through it all, a time of heroism.

The Gulf

Of all this, which was contemporary with *Sestig* and created the "consuming brooding evil climate" of its period, there is nothing in Brink's wide-ranging review. And, of course, no explanation for the fact that, for all their contemporaneity, there is a vast emotional gulf between these events and the literature of *Sestig*.

The best comment on Brink's learned treatise is a remark made by Breyten Breytenbach in the course of his talk:

"We are stark naked and we do not even realise it. We try to knit for ourselves blankets out of big words and bigger conceptions that have grown out of other cultures and of which, in any case, we don't understand a damn. What do we know about the rest of South Africa? Have we any knowledge other than the fearful knowledge of the baas? Does it sometimes dawn upon us that our country is irrevocably attached to Africa? Is it not embarrassing that the period when Sestig blossomed, that time when we harvested those nice fat Hertzog prizes, and when we wanted to fight to the death over who ought to get the Hertzog prize, that that time coincided with the period when an ever-increasing number of books by fellow South African writers were prohibited and thus became unread, and therefore, non-existent books? Is the bitter taste of shame in your mouth, too? And then we come here and fancy ourselves and look back with a slightly superior air on the f - - - all that we have done. And we are proud of it."

And this brings us to Breytenbach, who is, of course, a special voice.

Breyten Breytenbach's address to the Sestiger Saamtrek at the U.C.T. summer school was a memorable event. Not merely because he formally pronounced Afrikaans literature dead and dismissed the Sestigers as an afterbirth and was hysterically cheered for doing this. Not merely because some of the most exciting and moving poetry ever to be written in the Afrikaans language was read. Not that these were not enough to make it so. It was a particularly memorable occasion for it was the only time in that whole week that the true voice of South Africa, the voice of all our people, the voice of the single, undivided nation struggling to come into its own, was heard. And it was heard from the mouth of an exile.

Reply to "Rapport"

Breytenbach's address was really three linked but separate addresses. There was the first address, the parable of Hans Moller; the second address, his prepared talk; and the third address — a series of poems recording part of his South African odyssey. This triptych has another dimension too.

On his arrival here Breytenbach was, publicly, invited to return to the fold. The editorial in "Rapport" which contained the invitation hinted broadly that it had the support of his Sestiger colleagues, and one can accept that the public invitation was but the tip of the iceberg of pressure brought to bear on Breytenbach. His triple address, his first public appearance in South Africa, must also be taken, I think, as Breytenbach's reply to the invitation to betray his integrity as a person and his vision as a poet.

Parable of the corpse

Hans Moller lived in the Cedarberge, worked in the buchu fields high up in the mountains and had quite a reputation as a fiddler. On a sad day, towards evening, his wife died. Fearing the wild animals of this leopard-infested area, he could not, during the night, carry the corpse down to the valley for burial.

And even up there on the mountain the corpse was not safe from the animals. So, with a small fire and with the music of his violin, he mounted a vigil over her dead body throughout the long night. In the light of the new day he carried the corpse, still intact, down into the valley for burial.

Breytenbach said that while he was against invoking symbols, he did feel that Afrikaans writers were so many Mollers, mounting vigil over the dead body of Afrikaans literature. Fiddling all the while.

The only question was whether there was still time for decent burial!

Inevitably political

Introducing his prepared talk Breytenbach said that it was in the nature of a funeral oration for the still warm Sestiger corpse.

Before Breytenbach there had been a lot of pussyfooting and evasion on the political character and rôle of Afrikaans literature.

The tendency was for writers to deny the political meaning of their pretended non-political stance. Etienne Leroux, who for years has been on a futile quest for a mythology that can make sense of the senseless South African society, was chief spokesman for the non-political position:

“My theme is not restricted(!) in terms of socio-political problems. I attempt to see man outside of this definitive context; in a certain sense I attempt to free the novel of politics (sic) – politics in the narrower as well as in the broader sense; even, where possible, also free it from the politics of literature. The political tendency is always to the left . . .”

Breyten was refreshingly clear and direct. “My talk here tonight will be considered political. And so it is, inevitably. Just as a work of art is political when it refers to the reality in which the public finds itself. All talk in this tragic, bitter, multi-coloured, funeral land is political – whether it is whispering, talking bull, spitting against the wind or just giving chorus. It is not a choice which the writer has, it is not the use or abuse of poetic licence (and why should the clown have more freedom than the factory worker?); no, it is the very nature of communication.”

Breytenbach spelt it out for the Sestigers. Their position was essentially a politically-created and politically-conditioned one:

Tribal privilege

“I see this symposium for the introductory lecture on as concerned with the acts and, especially, the omissions of a group of youngish writers who write in the language of the tribe in power and who, therefore, bear a particular responsibility; who like all Afrikaans writers enjoy a privileged though unenviable position in the tribe, even though it might only be a position enabling them to create a fuss, because so many of the aspirations of that tribe pass for cultural aspirations since the so-called Afrikaner identity was originally a language identity.

Tribal taboos

“It is, in the same breath, too, in my opinion, about the work of a few writers who began to call into question some of the assumptions on which the vested interests of the Afrikaner tribe rest. This questioning raised such a storm because any fiddling with the institution and taboos of the tribe inevitably carries the danger that it might gnaw at the existing order of things. Touch the Afrikaner and you touch the state, so it is said. No matter what our high priests say, nobody can exist in isolation. The continued existence of the ‘Afrikaner’ as he is defined by those in power and those who guard the taboos of the tribe, can only be ensured on condition that we do not accept, neither in word nor deed, our being South Africans.

“Naturally, within limits, a measure of rebelliousness by the long-haired and/or egg-heads will be tolerated; this even contributes to the suppleness that can ensure a lively bloom of health. And we went and confused this toleration with freedom!”

“Language of dirt”

Illustrating his argument that the kind of ideas a language is called upon to express influences its development, Breytenbach has some trenchant things to say:

“One would like to believe in a miracle. One would like to believe that it could be possible in this country to write about and for people. But the poison of racialism flows deeply through our veins. Even in our language, our beautiful language, our wonderful vehicle. We speak of man and woman, of son and daughter. And when they are not pale enough? *Kaffer, Hotnot, Koelie, Houtkop, Outa, Aia, Jong, Meid, Klong, Skepsel* – yes, one of our leading Sestigers, in his latest work, speaks of *skepsels*;

to his credit I must say that he draws the line at *Skepselwyfies* or *Skepselooie*. Some of these terms we have, under the impact of an increasing awareness, abandoned, but will we ever accept naturally the obvious humanity of the 'other'? At present, we have arrived at a smug *Bantu* and *Kleurling*. With this dirty reference to other people, we pollute ourselves and make our language a language of dirt. Is it really so difficult to address a person in the way he would refer to himself? Do we want history to find that in this sunny land there were two kinds of *homo sapiens* – man, and the white man? ”

Rack and ruin

After reviewing the political position of the rulers Breytenbach comes to the conclusion that the end is near. “We are going to rack and ruin, and it appears that in going to rack and ruin we are prepared to drag down with us the whole of Southern Africa with all its people.” He warns against the hysteria and tribal drumbeating that this must bring. “And in this night in which we are now the fires of nationalism will be fanned to burn more brightly and more destructively. It will be said that it is either “us” or “them” – without our knowing who “us” are, without our knowing “them” . . . It will be expected that something will be defended. What? A Western civilisation and whose? The white man’s monopoly of power? The white skin? Only the skin of death is an unblemished white. Afrikaans? Whose Afrikaans? . . . ”

The waking dead

Against the background of the process of going to ruin, Breytenbach asks: “And our writers, what of them? What has meanwhile happened inside them? ” Breytenbach’s answer to this question is the sharpest rebuke yet delivered to the Sestigers.

“Our jaws still move, and in the near future we are once more going to protest against new and grander censorship laws, we will become sour and after a while we will again flatter each other; we remain moving . . . with spasmodic noise such as of this week, here, the noise of the walking dead. We helped to build the (apartheid – Ed.) walls, we maintain them; now they have become the walls of our prison. Now and again we climb onto the walls to see if the night does not yet want to end. The one moment we think that our literature can compare with ‘the best in the world’. The next moment we skulk around with both tails between the legs, torn in our breasts, because we are rejected and booed everywhere. We sit in Africa and we are not Africans. We go to Holland, to France and suddenly realise that they lied to us. We are not Europeans. We go to England and we discover that we are Boers who are trying here, under the Southern Cross, to live like the English.

Against whom can we measure ourselves? For whom do we write our deformed, pretentious, *nouveau riche* works except for a few friends at university who, by prescribing them, give these works some justification for existence? We are stark naked and we do not even realise it . . . ”

Man : The first “dimension”

Breytenbach also, however, did attempt to indicate to his audience the position as it should and could be. “To write is to communicate, to eat together, to have community, a communion, the blood of all of us, the flesh of all of us. We are people, we write for people about people, and, therefore, about the relationship between people. Our first dimension is man – in his unity and in his diversity, in his humanity. When there is something looking for expression the necessary growth in the language to give expression to it will come . . .

“I think that if we were to take note of the nature of the struggle in which we are involved and in which we have a part by clarifying that struggle – and, more importantly, by taking a stand on the basis of such clarification, we would enrich our humanity and our language.”

Breytenbach did not seem very optimistic about making many converts to his point of view, but was nevertheless at great pains to make his position quite clear.

To him, the most talented poet writing in Afrikaans, making verses is not an artistic activity (“when they made poetry an art, they pulled its teeth”), to him it is a tool, a weapon, a threat to the existing order. His writing is intended to serve a cause, and, as he made clear, this cause is the building of a South African nation founded on equality.

“I am partisan. I choose sides. Because, for me, it is about the creation of liveable conditions in our community. Because, for me, it concerns the search for, an opening towards, a society where each one of us and *all* of us can have his rightful share, within which we can accept, *on a basis of equality*, responsibility for each other. Because, for me, it concerns fighting those institutions and structures and myths and lies and crudities and selfishness and urges to self-destruction and common stupidities that make such a society impossible. *This* is my loyalty. *This* is the content of my South Africanism.”

At the Sestiger “saamtrek” there was never any serious attempt to dispute Breyten Breytenbach’s brilliant autopsy on the “still warm Sestiger corpse”. There was only Adam Small to venture where the others chose rather not to tread. He, apparently attempting a Breyten, prefaced his talk with allegedly random readings from his verses. Though we may accept that there was no carefully premeditated selection, the verses read certainly did illustrate certain aspects of Small’s literary-politico character.

His first "poem" was from the new edition of *Kitaar My Kruis* and illustrates Small the writer, who revels in depicting that special animal *Die Bruinman*. He read *Die Here het Gaskommel*, with its lines like:

"Laat die wêreld maar praat pellie los en vas
'n sigaretjie en 'n kannetjie Oom Tas
en dis allright pellie dis allright
ons kannie worrie nie
'n sigaretjie en 'n kannetjie Oom Tas
en 'n lekker meid en lekker anner dinge . . ."

Small also read from his English translations of the verse of N.P. van Wyk Louw. This tribute to the very totem of the Afrikaner literary tribe was, of course, Small trying for Bruin *Afrikaner*. Van Wyk Louw, a senior theoretician of Afrikaner Nationalism, was one who tried to make this obnoxious doctrine acceptable by playing down its racial character and emphasising the alleged "cultural" factors of its composition: language, religion, homogeneity of tradition, and so on. This made him the patron saint of the Smalls who, their colour notwithstanding, could quote Louw in support of their pleas to be admitted through the sacred portals of Afrikanerdom on the basis of their Afrikaans, their reformed religion, their education, in brief, their so-called "Western culture".

Small's public worship of this educated Afrikaners' Afrikaner is interesting only insofar as it indicates how little his immersion in the murky waters of "black consciousness" (our *Bruin Sestiger* is now a *Black Sestiger*) has changed anything. He still prays in the same chapel and Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor have merely joined Dirk Opperman and N.P. van Wyk Louw on the altar of the chief gods. And however much this might embarrass his comrades of the Black cult, one must admit a certain consistency beyond their conflicting colours: they are nationalists to a man.

Small finally also read a poem about his wife, the point of which seemed to be that she was not as acceptable to "White South Africa" as Yolande Breytenbach seemed to be – and one got the impression that this was felt by him to be almost Breytenbach's fault.

One does not want to be unkind, but one did get the uncomfortable feeling, watching Small perform, that his verse-reading stint was very much a I-can-do-everything-Breyten-can sort of gesture.

Small versus Breytenbach

Indeed, Small went on to claim that "my contribution, if any, to this course is, in a truer sense even than Breytenbach's, a *blik van buite* (view from the outside)". In the course of his "truer *blik van buite*" he dismissed Breytenbach:

“Breyten’s lamentation was one in which I thought I detected the voice of a dying Europe, of a dying ‘West’, in which there is little joy, if any, anymore. It is a voice related to the voice of a White South Africa eaten by fear, eaten by dread, haunted – despite its many feast-days – by insecurity. Breyten’s voice – by which I was moved to the extent to which I still also heard in it part of myself (I cannot fool myself that I am as yet wholly free of this funereal attitude) – is basically, and in its innermost heart, the voice of a White South Africa bewailing itself, lamenting its sins, and – to be quite blunt – thus salving its conscience, perhaps even ‘getting a kick out of it all’. As for myself, there is something pathetic about this sadness; there is something pathetic about it since, in more than one sense, it was and is so unnecessary.”

Falsification

It is difficult to accept that this falsification of Breytenbach’s views and position is the result of a misreading – a genuine misreading. Particularly since Small was quite prepared to swallow Brink and Leroux and all the others. It is not they, says Small, but Breytenbach who is “the voice of White South Africa”! Why does Small so palpably run away from the truth? Why is his venom reserved for Breytenbach? Is it, perhaps, because Breytenbach chose not to make an exception of Adam Small when he dismissed the whole of the *Sestig* output as tribal, pretentious and reactionary?

Bruinman No More!

In the introductory sections of his formal address Small attempts to explain why he refused to speak under the title *Die Krisis van 'n Bruin Sestiger* and wished instead to speak under the title *Die Krisis van 'n Swart Sestiger*. He was prepared, he said, to compromise on the term *Sestiger*, although he had never tagged himself with this label. “But,” he said, “as far as the label ‘Bruin’ was concerned, I could not compromise. Talk of ‘Bruin Afrikaners’ was in the air for too long, and too persistently, in *Sestiger* circles, and I take exception to this : literary exception, artistic exception. Moral exception, too” This, bearing the record in mind, is a surprising claim.

What is on record, literary-artistic record, is that Small has always regarded himself as “Bruin”. A mass of evidence springs to mind but we shall take just one of Small’s verses as example, *Kitaar My Kruis*, which begins:

“Bruinman
 hoekom kommer?
 Bruinman
 hoekom kwaai word?
 Bruinman
 hoekom bitter?

bruinman

bruinman

bruinman . . . ?

Small and His People

Small also denied that he had ever claimed Afrikanerskap; indeed, he even claimed not to know “what exactly an Afrikaner is, what being an Afrikaner involves”. This surprising claim lies awkwardly in the mouth of a man who wrote a whole book appealing to the Afrikaner to recognise that his “brown brother” was part of the same Afrikaner nation, a man who said:

“And I say it as one of those against whom I am saying it, from whom I cannot and dare not separate myself in life, death and loyalty: I say, yes brothers, listen now – I say it as Afrikaner and South African.” (Die Eerste Steen? page 55. Italicised in the original. My translation.) Indeed, the very man who dedicated this book to “My People, the Afrikaners”.

Small can deny his past, but it is too late to change it.

Yesterday and Today

The point is that Small makes all these denials *today*, that is, after his alleged conversion to Black consciousness. “But I do know that *today* it would be culturally mistaken for me to identify with, or to identify myself as sharing in *Afrikanerskap*. In short, I cannot see how *today* I can truthfully be called an Afrikaner . . .” (My italics.) The Afrikaner ship seems to be sinking and Small is not remaining aboard!

Small’s posture, is briefly this: Yesterday (the 1960’s, the days of *Sestig*) we wanted to be Afrikaners, and we warned you that if you ignored our plea we would consider linking up with the Blacks. Well, you have ignored us (“Talk of ‘Bruin Afrikaners’ was in the air *too long*, and too persistently, in Afrikaner circles . . .”) and now we have joined up with the Blacks. We are no longer *Bruin Sestigers*, but *Swart Sestigers*. And you have only yourselves to blame.

But in case you are still open for business let me add . . . “But I am Afrikaans. I am many other things besides. But being Afrikaans and being Afrikaner are not at all one and the same thing. The identification of *Afrikaans* literature as *Afrikaner* is a fallacy, and unfortunate.”

Afrikaans and Afrikaner

As an academic point we are quite prepared to accept that merely speaking and writing Afrikaans does not make Small an Afrikaner.

We do not claim that a man's language (whether by birth or by adoption) determines the nation to which he belongs. Far from it. Our objection has always been that the attitudes and values that prevail in Small's work, whether it be *Die Eerste Steen?* or the allegedly more literary *Kitaar My Kruis*, *Sê Sjobbolet* or *Kanna Hy Kō Hystoe*, are the ideas, attitudes and values of, in the main, that section of the *Herrenvolk* called the Afrikaner Nationalists.

It is true that literature in Afrikaans is not Afrikaner literature; but literature in Afrikaans by Adam Small that serves the political (or cultural) ideas of Afrikaner nationalism *is* Afrikaner literature. We know of very little writing in Afrikaans that is not so tainted. And we know of no writing by Adam Small that is not so tainted.

The cultural claim that Small makes for himself; that he is Afrikaans but not Afrikaner (no matter how convenient this might be for his "Black Awareness" pose), is false. He has always regarded himself as a Bruin Afrikaner and this shows in all his work.

Small Discovers Afrikaans

However, to bolster his argument that he is Afrikaans but not Afrikaner, Small makes some peculiar claims about Afrikaans. He says that "the Afrikaner has not at all yet discovered or even tried to discover himself as a man of this continent, as a man of Africa", and because of this, says Small, "the Afrikaner has never yet discovered the very language he speaks. This I must repeat: the Afrikaner has never yet discovered Afrikaans. This is the basic paradox of his existence . . ."

As anyone might have predicted, not the Afrikaner but Small has discovered Afrikaans. "I have discovered more of Afrikaans than the Afrikaner because I have grown up into loving this language through and despite the suffering of being insulted in it all day long, every since I was a child. I learnt its rudeness, indeed its evil, while still very young, in fact while still a child, so that it was possible for me to eliminate this 'lack of being' Afrikaans. To the intelligent man who is oppressed in his own language there will always belong this blessing: that he is rendered capable of possessing his language more fully than the oppressor and even the family of the oppressor.

African Afrikaans

"Then also I have discovered more of Afrikaans in so far as Afrikaans is a language of Africa . . . I think that my drama *Kanna Hy kō Hystoe* gives one, or should give one, some idea of this fact that I have indeed come across Africa in my Afrikaans, for what is it that happens in *Kanna*? Or, rather, what is it that happens in the drama the way I myself interpret it, and the way I have already presented it with young people, students at my university, of my own mould and mind? Those of you who

have seen my production will, I hope, recall how, despite the sadness of the drama, despite the seeming helplessness, utterly, of the life depicted, despite the apparent despair of 'it all' part of our interpretation was the singing of that beautifully rhythmic and greatly emotional 'Jesus kom weer, halleluja!' " The rhythm and the emotion is, despite the sadness (and some consider this incongruous, though I don't) a rhythm and emotion of hopeful joy. This is the rhythm and emotion of which that reasonable and profound man, Leopold Senghor, speaks. This is the rhythm and emotion of Africa."

We have quoted Small at this length to avoid possible distortion and misrepresentation by selection and comprehension; to show, in fact, that the absurd vanity and unreality is all his own work.

Black Hysteria

We quote his conclusion at some length, too. Not that it has any great importance, but because it faithfully reflects a particular "mould of mind", the hysteria, the sickness and hallucinations of "Black consciousness":

"I want to make the boast that I and my sort (for there are others, perhaps even many) have already discovered Africa to an extent that the White man who uses Afrikaans has not, and we are continuing thus to discover Africa. It is a matter of a certain spirit which is no spirit of despair. I choose black as the colour of the future in so far as it is the colour most radically different from white. The symbolism ought to be clear. I choose this symbolic black at this time as the colour of joy, a joy which has been completely, or almost completely, drained from 'white'. And as Black in this sense, in this symbolic sense, but also in this very real sense, I and my sort, we, are inviting you to dance with us. We are inviting you, Whites, to dance with us on the soil of Africa, dances of Africa, with minds completely moulded, even when making use of European or any other values of the world, to Africa.

"As far as dancing, joy, laughter, despite all sadness, are concerned, it is we who will be taking the initiative from now on in Africa.

The spiritual hegemony is ours. But unlike as you have done and are doing with your power, we want to share with you this spirituality.

"Such, at least, is my message; such, at least, the way my mind runs. 'Jesus kom weer, halleluja!'" ended Small.

This "spirituality" is really hysteria and the mystical rhythm, "rhythm of Africa" is a delirium tremens induced by an overdose of negritude and halleluja.

Kanna

However, Small is not the only one who makes grandiose claims for *Kanna Hy kō Hystoe*. Indeed, he was merely echoing André Brink: "*Kanna Hy kō Hystoe*, certainly the most important play of *Sestig*, certainly the play with the greatest virtuosity in Afrikaans, where Africa speaks through every moment without having to be called by name." It also got high praise from Leroux, who observed that "it compelled a Bloemfontein audience, 'a polite society', intensely verkrampt, to silence because it could convey a spark of the universal".

Of course, this miserable, caricature-ridden, shallow, over-dramatised presentation of a slice of "Coloured" ghetto life is nothing of the kind, in no way universal. It is the "story" of Kanna, an orphan, reared by Makiet on a welfare grant as her own son, sent to Cape Town to board with Auntie Roeslyn while he is studying, who goes abroad to complete his studies and to get a decent job and who returns only once, briefly, after Makiet's death, for her funeral.

Old Story

Kanna is lost to his family and is of no use to them because his education has created a social and later also a geographical distance between him and them. A familiar theme. What is needed is not the kind of education that will make them aspire to "the green pastures of White civilisation" (in Dr. Verwoerd's words) but a system of schooling that will "mould their minds", will orientate them towards working for the socio-economic upliftment of "their" community; of course, according to the C.A.D.'s plan!

Lingo

The story of Kanna is populated not by people but by stereotyped figures speaking their "own" special lingo:

- Dolla: Dis goodbye moet ou Pang, Djemie.
Jemie: Dja Dolla.
(Stilte.)
- Dolla: Ou Hare loep oek annerwiek daai paadjie, nè.
Jemie: Ou Hare?
- Dolla: Kassiem, man, Kassiem van Rasoe!
Jemie: O dja! Maar hy't 'n lieflike ding gadoen.
Dolla: Die krant sé hulle swaai hom Maandag
(Pouse).
Ons was altyd pëllies saam gewies, wiet djy,
vanlaat ons sukke laities was. (Hy wys met
sy hand.)
(Daar is geluide van motor wat stilhou. 'n
Motordeur slaan toe. Voetstappe.)

Is sieker die dokter.
(Boela wat die motor gehoor het kom weer
aangestap.)

Boela: (Aan die kitaarspelers): Is dit die dokter?

The story of Kittie (Kanna's sister by adoption), one of the main themes of the play, gives some idea of the melodramatic treatment of the material. At the age of seven she is raped just off-stage and immediately after comes stumbling onto the stage. Her little brother Dickie is an eye-witness. A few years later, when she is a young woman and on her way to meet Jakop, whom she is to marry, she is again raped. As a result she becomes pregnant and an attempted abortion is unsuccessful. Jakop finds her pregnancy unbearable and commits suicide. The baby is born and dumped. She marries Poena, who forces her into prostitution for his profit. Late in her pregnancy she refuses to sleep with more customers because of her condition. Poena kills her (after sleeping with her) and is, in revenge, killed by Dickie, who is sentenced to death for the murder. All this gives Makiet a near-fatal heart attack.

Such is the "most important play of *Sestig*"! A slice of "coloured" slum life such as would have done that pioneer-caricaturist Mikro proud. And as for the mumbo-jumbo of rhythm and emotion of hopeful joy that is supposed to be the rhythm and emotion of Africa, well, we can find no trace of it at all.

Small says it is to be found in the singing of "Jesus kom weer, halleluja!" It is difficult to see how this hymn can give an Africa dimension to anything, but, even assuming the validity of the claim, we arrive at the strange position that something that forms no part at all of the 1965 published version of the play becomes its central and distinguishing feature when it is produced. So, at best, the hopeful joy and rhythm and emotion of Africa is something external to the play, added on during production and rehearsal.

We find no special significance in the play. It is the Mikro type of creation and is clearly intended to be an appeal to the heart of the masters for, truly, the cross that the Bruinman is called upon to bear is too, too heavy. Poor Moeder Makiet, deserted by the son for whom she sacrificed so that he could be educated, her daughter the victim of rapes, prostitution and finally murder, her son sentenced to death, her health destroyed, her vision lost. Was there ever a cross like her cross? But note, in this allegedly realistic play, Makiet never raises her voice, not once, against the White man, authority, apartheid, injustice. Instead, she announces firmly at her end that God is merciful.

And this is hailed as the best *Sestig* had to offer!

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Good Friday. 1973.

We have been around the house.
We have put the animals out,
And the doors are locked.

We have listened to the Epilogue.
We have listened to Die Stem.
Truly the night is God's own country,

A territory where all our ghosts
Can roost, or flutter in old cerements
Above our sleeping heads.
We think on these things.

And safe in the arms of the Father
We rest at last:
This night of consecration,
The death of Christ.

CHRIS RUSSELL

NEW YORK 1971

Buildings, motorcars
and waving bulbs on signs
slender criss-cross stockings
swinging strides
Listen

the tide turns
whisper passersby.

Bags fasten' by Black
hands
and clip a compact shines
nimble pointed finger
Gold cylinder unwinds

peeping Red pencil
a hollow mouth outlines.

Pasty Plaster angel
pounding hollow heels
pouts to light a cigarette
drifting clouds heave
stopping by the Underground
out of the twilight steals
large and shining Black sedan
with clean round White trimmed wheels.

Litup face reflects
taut and pearly smile
she holds her Auburn hair
her speedy date's arrived.

ROBERT GREIG

Jo'burg Frontier

He took off his glasses,
pocketed the Parker and
without a backward glance at them, strode
past the gawping typists,
scythed through the junior executives
round the coffee machine.
Caught a light to 'Ground',
pausing only to unhitch his Homburg,
he launched himself into
the panting eight-horse Merc.

Up in his glassy eyrie, three calls,
sharp as coronaries,
wipe them out.

**POEM
FOR
TRISH**

Three summer days that washed I remember.
There was no wind nor cloud on the sea
and the sun was blank as three nights.
It melted malicious eyes of bluebottles,
for nothing, only breakers plucked my skin
and the company of selves the sun minted
lay roundly on my salty sight.

A silver clash of water was world for
those days, and I was the mould of each wave
that raked the grainy shore
where my love waited. Till the last day.
Waves congealed, expelled me down to sand,
fins pared the sea neatly away, though
I fought for the pure horizons.

There was only the sand, and hauling
in air for my life, a hollow apple.
Now I sleep and sleep among black groves
whose stems sway and hiss like waves
on the shore. I dream, too, of a love
whose kisses will tide with the moon.
The sea is a dry promise of paradise.

The Problem With Staff

Mrs Whitney had a soft, oval body, full, yet light as a balloon. Her plump cheeks were flushed from the hotel kitchen in which she worked unceasingly. Her protuberant eyes suggested an overactive thyroid.

Mr Whitney suffered from a cleft palate. He was seldom seen. Though occasionally, the gentle hrumph, hrumph, of his conversation issued from some distant part of the hotel. He had ambitions which outstripped his capital. Generations of guests heard from Mrs Whitney of his plans to rebuild the hotel extensively. It would reach thirteen storeys and include a swimming pool, hairdressing salon, restaurant and underground parking garage; the Hotel Board would award it five stars. Drinkers in the hotel's cramped little pub overheard Mr Whitney and Mr Stubb, the chemist, endlessly negotiating the inclusion of a select pharmacy,

“... only sunglasses, suntan oil, the Pill – that sort of thing.”

A feature of the hotel was its waiters: Little David, a mulatto; Big David, a huge, apoplectic Indian; and Patrick, an African. As the hotel was small and rarely accommodated more than four guests at a time, the staff, and particularly the waiters, lived lives very close to those of the guests. In the time it took to breakfast, you could learn a lot. Little David's wife had just had a son. Big David drank a good deal, probably out of boredom, and had a bad heart. His wife had left him. Patrick was a bachelor, and this obviously enhanced his status in the eyes of his colleagues since they discussed his pursuits and conquests in loud voices and with much laughter in the dining room between servings.

So far as anyone knew, the waiters had been with the hotel for years. The respectful attitude of the rest of the staff (an elderly Malay woman, named Anne, and three part-time maids) towards them, testified to their authority. Notwithstanding, Mrs Whitney unceasingly complained that they drank, they were dirty, unpunctual, irresponsible and they smelled. Breathlessly, she reviewed the problem of staff for anyone who would listen to her and conclude, inevitably, that they would be the end of her.

The Whitneys had a family of two sons who sometimes appeared at breakfast, presumably arriving late at night from the Capital where they lived. They never stayed for long. One was training as an anthropologist with the Department of Bantu Affairs; the other was a biologist who specialised in artificial insemination.

On these occasions, Patrick was always assigned to serve the main table, and he did so conscientiously, anticipating every need like a well-trained theatre nurse. Mr Whitney usually joined his sons on these occasions and would preside at the head of the table. Mrs Whitney spent mealtimes in the kitchen.

"They are funny people," said Little David's wife, whose name was Maria, as they were sitting together at home one evening.

"That is because they are different," he explained.

Little David's house had one bedroom, a living room and a tiny hallway which they used as a kitchen. The lavatory, a pit latrine, was in the back garden. He had thought once of letting the bedroom to one of the many old men who stumbled about the hotel off-sales and earned their money for wine by doing the odd bit of gardening, dishwashing, poaching and petty thievery, and whose very existence in the area was thus a criminal offence, while his presence there was merely illegal. One of them, not too dirty or drunken, would have made a safe tenant. He'd had several offers, and no good reason to turn any of them down. Maria had been pregnant and they had needed the money. Perhaps working in a hotel with ten rooms, four bathrooms and two lounges, had gone to Little David's head. Maria thought so. It was illegal to sublet council property. But Little David did not think much of this argument. He and his family were officially classified as Coloureds, and the house stood in that area of Steun Bay reserved exclusively for the use of Indian fishermen who worked for the canning factory. Simply living there was against the law. Little David knew that they would be evicted one day. However, Indian labour was hard to come by, and the canning factory had found it necessary to employ Coloured fishermen, and to house them in the Indian township. Until he'd got the job at the Whitney's hotel, Little David had been a fisherman. He was ambitious. Also, he was reassured by the complexities of the legal situation. When the baby came, he was glad he had kept the room. The Whitneys had given him a rise. Big David had presented him with half a bottle of brandy. One of the guests, a tall German tourist, who heard about it, shook his hand. Patrick had laughed aloud, clapped him on the back, and asked him if he had got his seed back.

Little David smiled. He was glad of the extra pay. Big David earned twice as much as he did, but then the hotel could not run without Big David. Maria could not get over the resemblance between father and son, in every feature but one: Little David's skin was dusky, the colour of golden syrup, but the baby's skin was almost unnaturally white.

At the hotel, Big David was on duty in the dining room. Although the season was well advanced, there were few guests. Mr Whitney had dined alone. It was eight o'clock and David moved from table to table, replacing serviettes, straightening a spoon, and seeing to it that the clusters of plastic flowers stood firmly in their vases on the centre of each table cloth, and that the water had not evaporated. His movements were sure and deliberate, but his attitude was abstracted. In the warm evening he perspired freely and he was conscious of the sweat collecting in his eyebrows. Midges darted around the tables, and Big David would occasionally pause to flick a dirty serviette into areas of light where they appeared to congregate too thickly. These sudden movements would cause the sweat to run into his eyes. Big David pushed his fist into his eye and rubbed clumsily until the smarting stopped. He felt tired and his feet hurt. Recently, they had become swollen. The doctor had warned him to expect this. The swelling grew worse at night and so Big David, who seldom took much thought for his comfort, bought himself a pair of expensive black leather slippers and wore them around the hotel from six o'clock onward each evening.

His wife, Jayalakshmi, would have laughed at the slippers. Laughed in the way she did at all his fears and aspirations.

"The new slippers," she would have said, in much the same tone she had used when he told her of the Whitney's plans for the new hotel, "... of English leather, no doubt?" A tall woman, in an electric blue sari, laughing.

When Jayalakshmi left him and went to live with the silk merchant, Naidoo, the Whitneys said nothing, but Big David knew that they were relieved. His wife held positive social and political convictions and liked to express them, often in strong, even strident, terms. Her unexpected outbursts alarmed the guests and infuriated the locals in the public bar. Although Big David nearly always agreed with his wife's views in these inflammatory matters, he nevertheless sympathised with the Whitneys, who had their position to maintain. And the more brandy he drank, the more sympathetic he became.

When it was clear that Jayalakshmi would not be returning to him, Mr Whitney drew Big David aside and explained to him his duties in the new hotel.

"You will take charge of the wine stewards in the expanded establishment," he confided in a solemn susurrus. "There will be fifteen wine stewards and they will wear bottle-green tunics bearing the hotel's crest emblazoned above the breast pocket, with gold chevrons on the sleeve, striped trousers, bow ties and white fezzes. They will all be Indians. Naturally you will be paid more."

A few days later, the hotel's chambermaid, Anne, met Jayalakshmi in the Capital and in the excitement of their meeting, and perhaps in a belated attempt to effect a reconciliation, told her of Big David's future prospects.

"The chief wine steward!" Jayalakshmi laughed aloud and several people had stared at them. Anne was embarrassed and had wanted to leave, but Jayalakshmi insisted on driving her to the station. Anne submitted, although the size and opulence of the big, black car scandalised her.

On her return, Anne whispered to Big David the details of her meeting with all the ferocity she could muster. The next day he collapsed at the head of the second flight of stairs while on his way to answer a call from an upstairs room.

Big David sighed. After switching off the dining room light he paused by the door just long enough to view the room by moonlight. It usually soothed him, this sight of crisp white tablecloths each precisely surmounted by a vase of flowers, rigorously squared and stapled into position by shining knives and forks. But the scene was without its usual calming effect of glinting metal so neatly related to gleaming white cloth. The dining room had a savage aspect tonight, showing its tables as if it were baring its teeth, and they were not neat white teeth held back by impeccably positioned braces, but yellowed stumps, rotting in dark places where the moonlight did not reach, haphazardly stopped with stainless steel.

When Patrick arrived at Beauty's room in the backyard of Mr Stubb's chemist shop, he found about half-a-dozen men and women already assembled waiting for the party to begin. Four gallon-jars of white wine stood on a rickety table beside the door. On the floor beside it were two old paraffin tins filled with home-brewed beer. All the women were sitting on the bed. The men leaned against the wall, smoking. There was no sign of Beauty. Patrick took an enamel mug from the table and scooped a measure of beer out of one of the big tins. The place was growing crowded. Two blackened paraffin lamps swung from the ceiling sending shadows climbing up the rough, whitewashed walls. The smell of tobacco, beer and paraffin, mingled with the smell of the skin-bleaching cream the women wore on their faces, and filled the room. He moved over to the gramophone which was on the floor beneath the window. Idly he riffled through the tall pile of records beside it. He decided that Beauty must have gone for more beer.

"Atta boy!" someone called encouragingly.

A woman began to tap her feet. Patrick wound the gramophone and dropped a record on the turntable.

"That's *Mister Monk*," the same voice approved as the first few piano bars slid into the room.

A woman left the bed and began dancing to the music, alone, twitching her bottom, a buttock at a time, to the rhythm. Patrick caught her eye. She waved invitingly. Patrick glanced

about the room. Still no Beauty. Grinning, he rose to his feet and joined the woman.

An hour later, Patrick surveyed the scene again, and told himself that the joint was jumping. Nearly two dozen people had crowded themselves into the small room. The bed had been pushed into a corner to make more space. A couple, hopelessly entwined, lay on it. The dancers were sweating freely and every so often the paraffin lamp lighting on a face made it glimmer briefly. Patrick released his partner, who continued to dance alone, and went in search of more beer. The level in the remaining paraffin tin was low, and Beauty had still not appeared. He opened the top half of the door and leaned into the evening breeze. In the darkness somebody was urinating noisily against a wall. A dog barked in the next door yard.

The sound of cheering disturbed him and he turned back into the room to see Beauty standing near the window through which she had apparently just entered. She carried a large tin of beer. Patrick grinned. The evening was wonderful. Beauty was wonderful. Smiling happily, he pushed his way towards her. "Beauty, baby," he said delightedly.

Beauty stared solemnly up at him.

"Beauty . . ." he tried again, taking the tin of beer from her and raising it in an expository gesture, "Mr Booze," he offered hopefully.

"I have some news for you," said Beauty grimly.

Mr Whitney was sitting in the hotel's office, beside the desk. He would have sat behind the desk, had he not felt that to do so would have offended his wife, who, since she did the books and paid the accounts, regarded it as her property. In any event, she was going to be badly disturbed by his news. No sense in adding to the confusion, he told himself. Mr Whitney's nose was sleek and sensitive. He rubbed it gently. Then he stood up. He knew what he had to do.

He found his wife in the kitchen, ladle in hand, supervising simmering pots. She eyed her husband cautiously. Mr Whitney came straight to the point.

"I have told Big David that he is to move into the hotel."

His snuffling voice accorded agreeably with the hissing of the pots.

"For good?" Mrs Whitney asked quietly.

"At least until these attacks of his have stopped. He's had two now, and as you know, the second almost killed him. He can't go on living alone in a miserable room in the native location. He hasn't seen his wife since she ran away with that draper."

"Why don't you let him go?"

"Be reasonable, Myra!" Mr Whitney decided to be irritable. "I can't do that. He's a damn good wine steward. How would I replace him? Answer me that. You should know as well as anyone the problems we have finding decent staff for the hotel. Better, in fact. *You're* the one who's always complaining about it. Besides," his pace slowed, and he articulated more clearly, "we have a responsibility to our staff. I mean, surely you admit that, hey?"

Mrs Whitney turned her shoulder on this last question, and, taking the lid off one of the pots, peered into it, intently. Then abruptly she dropped the lid and faced him, her face pinkened by the steam.

"Sick! You say he's sick. I know his sickness."

"All right, so he drinks," Mr Whitney was forcing himself to speak clearly, "loves his brandy. That's true. The doctor's warned him. Everybody's warned him. In his condition it's tantamount to committing suicide." Gingerly, he touched his wife's shoulder. "And that's why I want him here at the hotel. I'll keep an eye on him. I'll put a stop to it."

Mrs Whitney's eyes bulged a little more than they usually did, but she said nothing.

Encouraged by her silence, he stopped for breath. He had put his foot down and he had won. When he began speaking again he fell into his usual manner, half sibilant, half gurgle, the echo of water in an underground cavern; the sound of a scrubbing brush on bare floorboards.

"He can take one of the rooms in the back yard. That way, he won't actually be in the hotel, but I'll still be able to keep a pretty close watch on him."

"Let him go," said Mrs Whitney grimly.

"Then he will die," Mr Whitney retorted with great force, "it's not Christian."

"Let him go."

"No!"

The pots on the stove reverberated. Mrs Whitney returned her attention to them. Her husband addressed her back:

"There are our plans for the new hotel to consider, Myra."

Big David found his room behind the hotel very comfortable when Mr Whitney installed him in it the following day. The doctor had prescribed a month's rest after the last attack, and Big David, grateful to Mr Whitney for a place in which to spend the time was even prepared to tolerate, for as long as he could bear it, Mr Whitney's coming between him and his brandy bottle.

Patrick and Little David did not welcome the extra shifts which in Big David's absence devolved on them, but they did not complain. Mr Whitney was pleased with the results of his plan. Mrs Whitney had not spoken to him, or anybody else, since their interview.

Big David had been resting for five days when, quite suddenly, Jayalakshmi returned. To her husband, she seemed not to have altered in the slightest. Her electric blue sari billowed generously at her ankles as she strode into his room. His heart gave the tiniest flip when he saw who his visitor was. Instinctively his hand went to his chest. Jayalakshmi's face clouded.

"The invalid!" she cried.

It transpired that Jayalakshmi had left Naidoo. It was an affair she regretted deeply, but, she wished him to know, it was behind her now, dead and forgotten, never to be resurrected. She knew that she could rely on him to respect her wishes. His capacity for respecting the wishes of others was his most endearing quality. To think she had been unaware of his serious illness. But he should understand that she had been out of the country at the time of his first attack. Naidoo went overseas regularly on buying missions. He was still there. She had left him in Bombay. On arriving back she had had news of his condition and come to him immediately. He needed her to look after him. She, Jayalakshmi herself, would nurse him.

Big David lay staring up at her solemn face. She made a concession to his bewilderment. He was wondering about Naidoo, she insisted. He was to do no such thing. It was past foolishness. If he liked he could beat her for it, when he was well again. She paused and looked about Big David's quarters in obvious distaste.

"This is a *mean* little room they have put you in. They have a whole big hotel but they stuff you away here. You, the invalid."

She seemed not to recall their previous accommodation in the native location some ten miles from the hotel and Big David made no attempt to remind her, but smiled gently.

"They are different from us," he waved a deprecatory hand.

Jayalakshmi's lip curled and she turned and walked furiously out of the room.

Mr Whitney withstood Jayalakshmi's unexpected return as bravely as he could, but his replies to her questions and accusations were hesitant as if the words would not come out of his mouth and hid behind his damaged palate. He agreed that the little room in the back yard would be too small for both her husband and herself. But at the time he had suggested to Big David that he stay there, he had not anticipated her sudden return. Now he would have to look for something roomier, for the two of them.

Always providing, of course, that she intended staying on? But his sarcasm was lost on Jayalakshmi who had begun to shout. Trying desperately to mollify her, he explained that, in the changed circumstances, he would make other plans for accommodating her husband and herself. However he could not agree with her suggestion that the room in the back yard had been too cramped in the first place. It was better than the old room in the location. He reminded her that Big David was gravely ill. Here, help was close at hand. He denied her charge of discrimination, and he informed her that he had effected the move as a kindness, yes, a Christian kindness. He did not hate Indians. He implored her not to shout.

In her office, Mrs Whitney covered her ears as Jayalakshmi's voice cut through the hotel. It was clearly audible in the dining room where Patrick and Little David were laying places for dinner, and they stopped to listen. Little David's admiration for Jayalakshmi swelled inside him.

"Are my husband and I to eat, sleep and excrete in that little pondok," Jayalakshmi hissed, "like cattle? "

Grim-faced, Mr Whitney insisted, for the third time, that he realised circumstances had changed and that the room would be too small for both of them. He stressed, however, that until Jayalakshmi's sudden and wholly unexpected return, the arrangements which he had made for her husband's eating and sleeping had satisfied both his doctor and Big David himself. As for the *other* matter which she had seen fit to raise, well, he would point out that separately housed toilet facilities adjoined the room in question. He had no idea where Big David would stay now. He had not thought about it.

"There are plenty of empty rooms on the third floor."

"But those are guest rooms," Mr Whitney was shocked.

"And they are always empty," Jayalakshmi replied placidly.

"For God's sake, woman, I can't let you people stay in the hotel! "

"Why not? "

"It's illegal! "

"It's illegal to have my husband staying in your back yard. I know the law. You have to have a permit from the peri-urban authority if your servants sleep in. I also know; who should know better than I who slept ten years in a filthy, stinking .

shack in the native location because there was no legal accommodation for my husband within nine miles of his work; I also know that they don't issue living-in permits around here."

The ground was loosening beneath Mr Whitney's feet. "I appreciate your concern, and I sympathise, of course. But what can I do about that? You say you know the law. Well then, you will know that Indians must stay in the Indian area. Please see my predicament."

"The predicament is ours," Jayalakshmi said coldly.

He stared at her impassive face. From the centre of her forehead, her crimson caste-mark glowered angrily at him. Briefly, he wondered how she kept it in place. He sighed.

An hour later, with the help of his colleagues, Big David was settled comfortably in the largest of the guest rooms on the third floor. Below, kennelled in her office, Mrs Whitney listened to the heavy breathing of the waiters as they struggled up the stairs carrying Big David's bed, scrabbling their way along the landing, urged on by Jayalakshmi's sharp, strident directions towards the patient's triumphant installation. The clang of a chamber pot, a muffled laugh, a series of soft bumps and scrapes as furniture was rearranged and, finally, the deep creak of bed-springs. These sounds of Big David's entry into the hotel reached her clearly, and scratched themselves on her heart. She trembled with anger.

In the bar, Mr Whitney was having a quiet drink with Mr Stubb.

"Perhaps," said Mr Stubb, "the new pharmacy might include a massage parlour. A good hotel needs a massage parlour. And, come to think of it, the masseuse might double up as a counter assistant. No staff problem that way." So excitedly did he lean forward at the thought of this that the tip of his nose touched Mr Whitney's. "And such fun, too. Just think of it, our own little masseuse! "

"And no staff problems," Mr Whitney agreed, "important that – staff can break you in this game."

He said nothing to Stubb about Big David's move upstairs. But he was beginning to feel less concerned about it.

He slept well. Mrs Whitney was up and gone before he awoke. She went to market in the Capital on Saturdays. She'd don her one good hat, a faded wreath, and often returned in a better temper.

Patrick waited on him at breakfast. He wasn't his usual smooth, efficient self. Beauty's news had unsettled him. But Mr Whitney did not notice. A fresh problem faced him. Little David had

been called home urgently. He had left shortly before serving breakfast, without an explanation.

He knocked at the door of Big David's room. There was no response. He paused briefly, and then opened the door. Big David was lying propped up in bed with his eyes closed and his hands folded over his fat stomach. Jayalakshmi sat beside him and did not turn when the door opened. To his surprise, he saw Little David in an armchair beside the window. No one acknowledged his presence.

"Well, well, David, I thought that you had been called home?" he remarked in what he hoped was a voice of cheerful enquiry.

Little David opened his mouth but did not seem capable of speech.

"Early this morning the Coloured Affairs Commissioner served an eviction order on him and his family. He must be out of the Indian township within twenty-four hours." Jayalakshmi's manner was brisk.

Mr Whitney had not left the doorway. "But where is he to go?"

For a long moment it seemed as if his question would go unanswered.

"In the meantime he will stay here."

He thought his voice was going to desert him. He struggled with it behind his palate.

"Here," he managed at last, "with his family?"

"With his family," Jayalakshmi answered decisively.

"It's either here or in the Coloured township, nearly twenty miles away," Big David said softly from his bed, without opening his eyes. "He's a good waiter. We can't afford to lose him."

"But not here," Mr Whitney protested, "not in the hotel."

"In the back yard room. The one Big David had," Little David implored. "Please, Mr Whitney. There is just my wife, the baby and myself. There'll be no trouble."

"Surely you don't object to that, Mr Whitney?" Jayalakshmi asked, turning to face him for the first time since he had entered the room. "As my husband and I are no longer occupying the room why shouldn't Little David have it?"

Mr Whitney struggled to control his welling emotions, none of which, he discovered with surprise, resembled anything approaching anger.

"But it's . . ."

"Illegal!" Jayalakshmi stamped her foot.

It was hopeless. He found that he could not identify his feelings,

control his thoughts or even summon up his convictions. Yet, strangely, this somehow seemed not to matter. Jayalakshmi's icy logic cooled his flushed consciousness. The woman was right. The legality of the move was so far removed from the reality of the situation as to make any discussion of it not merely academic, for matters had gone far beyond that, but absurd.

"Of course, you will have to make your own cooking arrangements," he said.

It was the strong smell of cooking that drew Mrs Whitney to the room in the back yard. A glance through the window was enough. She wheeled and walked furiously back into the hotel, her eyes huge and shining strangely. She found her husband in the damp little lounge, poring over the blueprints of the new hotel.

"I must talk to you," she said, walking past him and into her office under the stairs.

Mr Whitney took a deep breath, folded up the plans, and followed her. He would show her what dignity was. She slammed the door closed and turned to face him.

"There are Coloured people in the back yard," she said.

"Why, yes, there are. I had been going to tell you. Since Little David and his family have been summarily evicted from their home, I reflected on the duty of the hotelier towards his staff, and towards his hotel, and I decided to give them permission . . ."

His wife ignored him. "There are Indians in the hotel itself, in the bedroom above ours."

Mr Whitney nodded.

"Are you out of your mind?" she shouted suddenly. "There are now more of them than us on these premises."

"I fail, absolutely, to see the cause of your alarm."

His wife was obviously becoming hysterical and he found the sight distasteful. "After all, they do work here," he retorted coldly.

"But would you tell me then why they are living here? This is a decent hotel, not a blabby native location!"

"Myra!" Mr Whitney was shocked.

"What are we going to tell the guests? You must know that it won't be long before they start noticing that we have Indians and Coloureds living next door to them, using the bathrooms. You don't know these people, Theo, I'm telling you, they're not like us. Give them your finger and they'll take your whole hand. And I can't stand to have them living all around me. I'll

tell you again, this hotel's getting just like a bladdy shebeen. Take it from me."

She had never spoken to him like this before. She'd be sullen, or show dumb insolence; but never such language, such shrieks. Her words must have carried to every corner of the hotel. But he's come into her office determined to take a firm line and now he had no choice but to stick to it.

"It won't be for long," he said evenly, "and there won't be any trouble. If you refuse to believe that, and prefer to indulge in this silly, hysterical rage of yours, then I had better leave you to it." Without waiting for her spluttering reply, he turned and left the office.

A burst of laughter from the third floor guest room cut short Mrs Whitney's keening soliloquy. She blanched and was silent.

Thus it was more than she could bear when she learnt the following day that Patrick had arranged with Mr Whitney to move into one of the small rooms on the third floor with his new wife, Beauty, who showed early, but unmistakable, signs of pregnancy. Mr Whitney, now more than ever, was aware of a fitness in things. As Jayalakshmi had explained to him: Beauty had hidden the signs of her condition from her employers for as long as she possibly could. But it would have been only a matter of weeks before they recognised the obvious and, Beauty's sudden marriage to the ever amenable Patrick notwithstanding, sent her packing. As the hostel where Patrick boarded offered accommodation only to single men, the hotel was his last hope.

Two days later, Mrs Whitney fell ill. The doctor was called, but he was unable to diagnose the nature of her complaint, and ordered her to bed. That same night, very suddenly, the air went out of her, and she died in her sleep.

Deeply shocked at the swiftness of her passing, but completely lacking in what he believed to be the natural sense of loss which he had always expected should accompany such a bereavement, indeed, feeling guilty about his inability to grieve, Mr Whitney appeared to take the death of his wife rather well. However, a week later, he suffered a second shocking loss which grieved him bitterly. His elder son, the anthropologist, was tragically killed by a leopard while doing fieldwork among a primitive tribe in Barotseland.

During Mr Whitney's period of double mourning, the hotel continued to run smoothly, although a sudden influx of guests strained its facilities to the limit. If some of the guests thought it strange that none of the waiters ever seemed to go home, they put it down to staff loyalty to Mr Whitney in his time of grief, or found equally noble explanations for the courteous, efficient service they received, day and night: where there should have been chaos, they received five star attention, comparable with the best of the quality hotels in the Capital.

Of course, the guests were correct when they gave the staff the credit for the smooth, professional service provided by the hotel over this unsettled period. Big David, although still confined to bed, discovered that he had some talent for figures, and he devoted his time to putting the hotel's books in order. Jayalakshmi supervised the kitchen, and, with the help of Anne and the part-time maids, saw to the housekeeping and to the comfort of the guests. Patrick assigned himself to general bar duties, and his reputation for amiability and aptness spread throughout the province. Soon after Mrs Whitney's death, Little David and his family, under Jayalakshmi's direction, moved to a room on the third floor. At once the most reserved and the most ambitious of the trio of waiters, Little David worked closely with Mr Whitney in deciding matters of hotel policy, coming to assume more and more of the responsibility for these decisions. He dreamt of one day taking a hotel management course in Switzerland. His happiness was extended, if that were possible, when Maria discovered that she was pregnant.

Mr Whitney spent more and more time in the hotel bar. He was often joined by Mr Stubb, and there, over glasses of brandy and water, replenished with skilful anticipation by a beaming Patrick, they would discuss, in whispers, their plans for the new hotel.

Satyr on Hind Legs

He goes on unseen crutches
of his effort to remain
reared, and haunched back in balance:
His goated legs so thin . . .

It appears he must hold his chest together
deviously by tension of spread arms —
These activate the muscles on his ribs.
He stalks, laughing

With all the tension no trace of shame:
(Prerogative of man God taught
to be protection of his parts —
newly-arrived hind-legger . . .

Not this character)
Knowing no shame his phallus rises
against the roof of his stomach
and licks its golden hairs

In the small of his back
At the foot of his spine
is, bunched, his tail

There is some embarrassment for us in this strain and achievement
and life pauses while he shows his pale belly underside

Let life pause, till he drop
the erect balance of unpropped shoulders
go to haunches — and vanish into
the sprightly fluency now of a beast again.

HE COMPARES HER TO A STATUETTE

Your metabolism is so strenuous
you can only be one of those dancers
whose clay was broken for the bronze to start

She cannot stand but takes her instep
into her hand, stretched arm stretched foot:
A wicked whirling demon on a point.

And you: you are a saint: irony
exalts you: Turn this figurine:
the flashing ceases at no point.

You manufacture a bow of your body
and there out there you spindle, and are
somehow at peace

Yogis have sped the arrow from a point above their head:
Veddas hold the shaft along their legs:
It is the total-spirit only spans the arc

The archer's two buttocks make triangles to a point,
her breasts are muscles and along the line
of those tense legs there runs a subtle arch

The cord's invisible.
Only the gods will make it speak.
Don't ask approval of me: all

I sense in this is your own confounded perfection
and what it spans in me — that incomprehensible
desired distance of the shoot.

CHRIS MANN

To My English-Speaking Countrymen

Whether we're plump,
And stretch the leather of the Rand Club
Waiting for a chauffeur

To take us from the wine,
Or, skinnier, queue for the bus
That brings us to suburban meat,

Respectability rules the day. Some
Like Peter Brown, Ballinger and Paton,
Saw the prejudice of one tribe

Turning to a sjambok
In the law, and threw that
To the wind. Couldn't there come a year

When we cannot be both
Honest and respectable? They knew
That to indaba their beliefs

At home, inside their heads,
Was as good as sitting down
To pick a bone with death.

COLIN STYLE

Closing of the Sanitary Lanes

The lanes have been fenced up and given over.
In the early years the night-carts creaked through them.
The rubbish trucks came down in the mornings,
yelling and clanging about breakfast time
and the dogs barked everyday with rage.

After Poems in Chinese

My adventures are over:
No-one remembers them more than the exact point
Where we saw that perch one day under the duckweed.
My clerkly eye,
Veiled like a coif,
Sees hearses pass and girls grow up.
Sometimes I think I saw someone
I knew long ago
Walk in the distance.
I accumulate events and poems that add
No difference to the items accumulating after Li Po and before.
We guard our children:
Ask that strangers do not come by night with guns.
Sometimes the brass window handle
Reminds me
Of the bell on steamers
Pulling away from shore and its wharfs of cedar.
Leaves are severed from the poplars
Whose branches are arrayed masts.

Colonist or Uiflander?

The thing about John Stone's scholarly study of British immigrants in South Africa* is that it does not, in the end, tell us very much about their racial and social attitudes that we did not already know. But then, what we know, is bad enough. We have only to compare his findings about tolerance and the lack of it, prejudice and the surfeit of it, among these new English-speaking South Africans towards other groups in this country to feel distinctly uncomfortable. Writ large, feelings towards the Afrikaner are mixed; more hostility was shown towards Blacks; there is a certain amount of sympathy for the Coloured; while the Indians would appear to be almost uniformly despised by English (and Afrikaans) Whites, and always have been as this study, following on Brice's in 1900 and Pettigrew's in 1960, clearly shows.

The notorious racism of the 'new' English who emigrate from Britain to South Africa is a perplexing question. John Stone has set himself to probe in depth the attitudes of these immigrants who, coming as they do from the class-ridden society of Britain, encounter here, with bewilderment, the African, Coloured, Indian and Afrikaans peoples. He looks at their motives for coming, records their responses to their environment and from his findings he constructs a sociological model. He makes it clear that what has brought over 100 000 British immigrants to South Africa during the past decade is not at all a conscious or unwitting racist streak but a desire, in the first place, to leave Britain and to live more easily in some other part of the world.

Britain is of course divided into great camps to which the old fashioned term classes still applies. Indeed, the visitor to the U.K. cannot but be struck by the parallel between the predicament of the lower or labouring classes and that of the Blacks in South Africa. In Britain the kaffirs are white. The difference between the two societies, on this level, is that in Britain class and not colour is paramount. There it is class, here, in Stone's terms, it is 'caste'.

Thus "British immigrants will be favourably received by the 'white community' as a whole . . . in so far as they are an addition to the 'white laager' and thereby help to strengthen the power of the white minority against the black majority."

* *Colonist Or Uitlander: A study of the British Immigrant in South Africa*. John Stone, Clarendon Press, 1973, R11,50.

Once in South Africa the immigrant finds himself welcomed as "a potential ally in an insecure environment," where the money is good, the sun shines and nobody bothers half as much as they did back home about the old school tie. And although Stone shows that the British who emigrate to South Africa are not drawn by the easy living assured for Whites by Apartheid, but rather that once here they very easily learn to live in comfort and ignore the cruelty, he nonetheless makes the point that the society from which they come exhibits a widespread prejudice against what are known in the U.K. as 'coloured' people. And, indeed, he should draw attention to this because as any one will know who has spent time in the Midlands, or anywhere else in Britain where there are concentrations of non-whites, the quality of the racial prejudice is so strikingly familiar that continued exposure to it is enough to make any red blooded South African positively homesick.

In examining contemporary attitudes of English immigrants to South Africa, Stone explores the historical background in a brilliantly informative chapter. What emerges is the realisation of the similarity between the situation of the British settler of the 1820's (who came to South Africa without really knowing what it was or what to expect) and that obtaining among the new English today. Both instances involved the recruitment of skilled labour in an economically depressed Britain (in the case of the 1820 settlers, during the period following the Napoleonic Wars) and its transplantation into an under-developed colony which rated very highly the skills the emigres brought with them and accorded the new settlers an instant status which sometimes went to their heads. Relations with the Boers was fairly good, if clouded by ignorance, and the settlers in the Cape, like those who settled in Natal later and who were drawn in the latter case from all classes of British society, quickly conformed to existing prejudices against the Africans. As regards Natal, Stone clearly shows how little things have changed here. A contemporary visitor to Pietermaritzburg found the colonists there 'intolerably cliquey'; house ownership was a sign of status depending on its size and, Stone observes, quoting Brookes and Webb, "preference for the Voortrekker rather than the official British 'native policy' has remained a continuing tradition."

The other main grouping of immigrants to South Africa during the last century were the Uitlanders on the Rand. It was primarily the money that drew them and although they were not all British, most were English-speaking. The stream flowed unabated until the outbreak of Boer War. Johannesburg, the Uitlander capital, acquired a reputation for liveliness which incensed some to whom it was 'Monte Carlo superimposed on Sodom and Gomorrah' (General Butler, British Commander in the Cape Colony) and 'a sink of iniquity' (John X Merriman). But if you were there for anything but the money, such protestations, Stone observes, 'must be set against the experience of Cornelius Van Gogh, a brother of the painter Vincent, who found that there was 'nothing to do on Saturdays and Sundays, but stay in bed and read.'

Overall, the picture that Stone sketches for us shows that most British immigrants are quite ignorant of conditions in S.A. or of its history, its geography and the constitution of its peoples. 78% of English immigrants had no intention of learning Afrikaans. Three quarters of his sample had no intention of taking up South African citizenship. Their feeling about politics and apartheid in particular may be described as ignorant, uncomprehending and tight-lipped. He found that the immigrants that he interviewed accepted Apartheid and that the policy was opposed only by a 'deviant' minority. Uitlanders then, are very soon colonists, Stone answers the question he has set himself – 'perhaps with the shadow of an Uitlander walking closely in step with the body of a Colonist.'

This is an illuminating study. In examining the sociological, historical and comparative attitudes of recent British immigrants, Stone faces us with an image (if we are English-speaking South Africans of however many years standing) of what we once used to be, and drives us to contemplate what we have become.

BATOUALA

*Batouala**, 'the first great novel about Africa by a black writer', took the *Prix Goncourt* in 1922. For Hemingway (in his *Toronto Star* period) it was 'being' *Batouala*, 'smelling the smells of the village, eating its food', etc. For Senghor it was with *Batouala* that black writers 'freed themselves from the docile imitation of the Metropole and fear of their negritude.'

In different ways both these recommendations lead one to expect the exotic masquerading as the primitive, and this prejudice may be strengthened by the knowledge that René Maran was an 'Afro-Caribbean', a term not yet current when he wrote.

(Yet it is Fanon, another Afro-Caribbean, who has illuminated the psychology of such an exoticism, and created the perspective of the colonized soul which permits the fashionable distrust of negritude.)

Submitted to the test of a reading (in translation) half a century on, the novel is just good enough to make one wary of facile prediction from the right side of history.

Exoticism there is:

'She shivered suddenly and stretched, prey to a desire which bathed her with languor and softness. In spite of her age she still felt young and rich in unused passion. The fire which devoured her could not be quenched by the one sexual experience her husband provided her each day.'

Can bad translation explain all the banality away? Dung is dungier in *Batouala*. Also the reader — and he is a reader who inhabits the Metropole — is quite often looking over the writer's shoulder. Thus the characters 'explain' their thoughts in a way that would be unnecessary if the writer did not have in mind, very clearly, the counter-patterns of the metropolitan culture:

'They felt no awkwardness in this (nakedness). What good would that have done? Man and woman are made for each other. Not being able to ignore their differences, why should they feel strained in each other's presence . . . etc.'

As against these symptoms of cultural dependence, symptoms which might lead us to define *Batouala* as 'colonized' and not 'African' literature, there are positive elements with which these symptoms are intertwined but don't entirely inhibit. The

Batouala by René Maran (first published Paris 1921)
(Heinemann African Writers Series, 1973)

exoticism of *Batouala* is not of the 'noble savage' variety. There is a real, and partially successful, attempt to express *Batouala's* tribal consciousness in its own terms. And while the white colonizer (here a French colonial administration) is enough in evidence to have made the book a political counter in the reformist agitation of the twenties, we are forced to register him from within a life on which he merely – if brutally – impinges: value here, of a kind, for the white South African reader.

JOHN TORRES

New Poetry of Mexico

Selected with notes by Octavio Paz
Bilingual editions edited by Mark Strand

Mark Strand, the editor of the American edition of this anthology,* points out that the number of poets represented in the original Mexican edition had to be reduced from forty-two to twenty-four. He also explained that "the final shape of this book was determined by the quality of the translations. If there were any doubts about the success of the English versions, then the poem was scrapped . . . A translation must have the authority of a good poem written in English; this is important because most readers will be reading only the translation and, consciously or unconsciously, they will be using other poems written in English as a standard for judgement."

It was refreshing for me, almost a compulsive translator, to find some one who believes, as I do, that poetry can be translated and that this is something worth doing. I am also inclined to agree with Mario Praz when he says in his Preface: "The existence of a French or a German or an English poetry is debatable; but the reality of Baroque, Romantic or Symbolist poetry is not. While I do not deny national traditions or the temperament of peoples, I believe that styles are universal or, rather, international. What we call national traditions are, almost always, versions and adaptations of universal styles. Finally, a work is something more than a tradition and a style: it is a unique creation, a singular vision. The more perfect a work is, the less visible its traditions and style. Art aspires to clarity . . ." To this I would add that the greatest challenge to the translator and the greatest difficulty

NEW POETRY OF MEXICO – Selected with notes by Octavio Paz. Bilingual editions edited by Mark Strand. Secker and Warburg, 1972 – R5,00

he has to overcome is precisely to try and capture that singular vision of another's unique creation and bring it to life again in another language.

As we all know, poems are a mixture of sound, sense, rhythm and, since the invention of printing, visible form, because many poets try to add this fourth dimension to their poetry by employing various typographical devices. The translator of foreign poetry into English starts off with a great handicap because the sounds of spoken English are so very different from those of any other Western European language, he has to abandon at the outset any attempt to reproduce the sounds of the original. A striking example of this problem can be seen if one compares Uys Krige's Afrikaans translation of Lorca's "*Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*" with any English version. To any one familiar with the sounds of spoken Spanish the Afrikaans version will appear to be a much more successful translation when read aloud than any possible English version. On the other hand, Roy Campbell's successful adaptation of Leconte de Lisle's "*Le Coeur de Hjalmar*" from his "*Poèmes Barbares*" shows how the central idea or 'original vision' of the original can be recreated in another language.

Some of the best poems and translations can be found in part four of this anthology, that is, among the works of poets born in the 1880's or the early 1900's. Among the younger poets I found the originals as well as the translations of Homero Aridjis, Francesco Cervants, Jaime Augusto Shelley, Marco Antonio Montes de Oca and Gabriel Zaïd particularly interesting. Even though not necessarily agreeing with the choice of particular English words in the translations, they all reach a uniformly high level. I would like to single out in particular, the translations of Mark Strand and W.S. Merwin.

The following two stanzas of a poem by Aridjis are a good example of the younger generation of Mexican poets:

*Sometimes we touch a body and wake it
and it is a way through the night which opens
to our senses like the pulsing of its arms like the Sea's
and we love it like the sea
like a naked song
like the only summer*

Among the older poets Salvador Novo and Velarde are outstanding. The whole history of Mexico is compressed into a medium length poem by Novo in a style that is reminiscent of Mayakowsky in parts, and of the earlier T.S. Eliot:

*"From the remote past
over the great pyramids of Teotihuacan,
over the teocallis and volcanoes,
over the bones and crosses of the golden conquerors
time quietly grows.*

*Leaves of grass
in the dust, in the cold tombs;
Whitman loved their innocent and wild perfume
and Sandburg has seen them cover the tombs
of Napoleon and of Lincoln ”*

In the next few lines the similarity becomes evident:

*“And Juarez, Meritorious of the Americas,
proof of what an Indian can do,
in his gold-framed lithograph
over all the grey desks, decorated by flies,
over the moldy blackboards,
the Mount of the Crosses, the Hill of the Bells,
the Peak of Guadalupe
and Don Porfirio and the celebrations of the Centennial
to which came Polavieja, among others,
and the ‘extras’ of the newspapers
and the earthquake which brought Madear
and Mrs Sara P de Madero ”*

Today, Penguin Books are doing a great deal to make foreign poets accessible to English readers, but this anthology published by Secker and Warburg, because of the high quality of the translations and the two prefaces by Octavio Paz and Mark Strand, make it a book which all who are interested in modern poetry, even if they do not know a word of Spanish or ever intend trying to read it, should have on their shelves.

In conclusion, I have not mentioned Octavio Paz because his work is already fairly well known to English readers through Samuel Beckett’s translations of his poems, and in this anthology he has given more space to other, lesser known, poets.

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