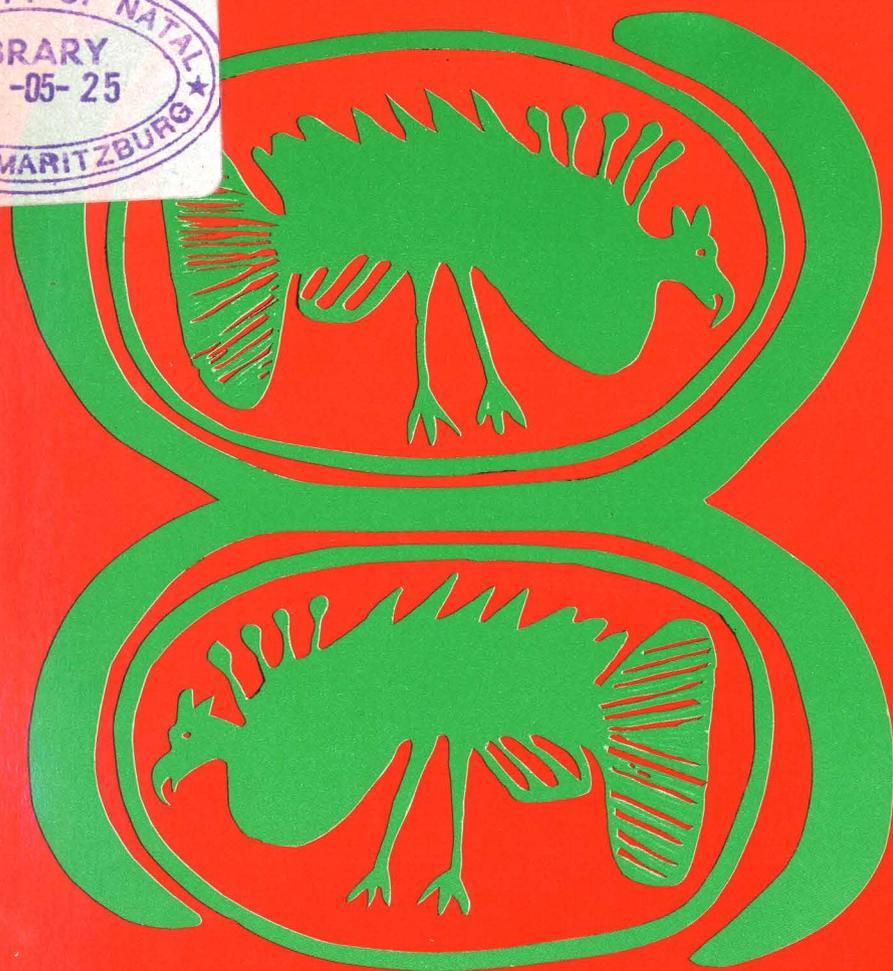
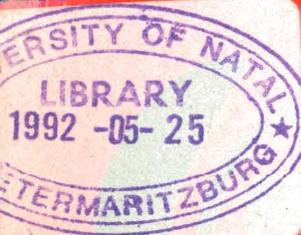


Staffrider

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Volume 10 Number 1, 1992

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Stories

Poetry

Essays

Reviews

- Jabulani Mkhize : Sexual Politics and Free Women
Bruno van Dyk : A Case for Motsisi
Junaid Ahmed : Funding Grassroots Organisations
Anna Zieminski : Women's Hostels



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Comment

Innovation and creative renewal are at the heart of literary and artistic work. In times of rapid social change these aspects acquire an added impetus. Thus, as the process of social change unfolds in South Africa writers and artists as well as critics are ceaselessly confronted with new challenges. Those who in the past have been in the fore-front of the struggle for cultural change are now responding with renewed vigour in a context which requires contributions towards reconstructing South African society and culture.

On the other hand, conservative forces, fearful of change, cling to redundant ideas with the tenacity and aggression of threatened creatures. While there is little to fear and everything to gain in the establishment of equal rights and democracy in South Africa, these reactionary forces are fast becoming their own worst enemies. Likewise, those who live in the complacency of self-deluding notions of cultural superiority are soon to awaken to the irrelevance of self-proclaimed cultural exclusivity.

As the old social structures are discarded, even in the face of fierce minority opposition, the persistence of out-moded forms of thinking, increasingly appear farcical. So too does the compulsive reiteration of obsolete positions and values. Writers who have worked towards establishing a just and free society know that these values can never be taken for granted nor can they be proclaimed from ivory towers or in parochial publications intended for cliques lost in mutual admiration. Freedom and justice have to be fought for and maintained through a vigilance which steadfastly remains critical of all abuses of power.

During his visit to South Africa last year as guest of the Congress of South African Writers, the exiled Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o offered a number of crucial insights into the problems which have arisen in post-colonial Africa. When asked how he saw the role of the writer after national independence he responded by pointing out that in a situation of oppression and injustice he saw his role as one of engaging in cultural work

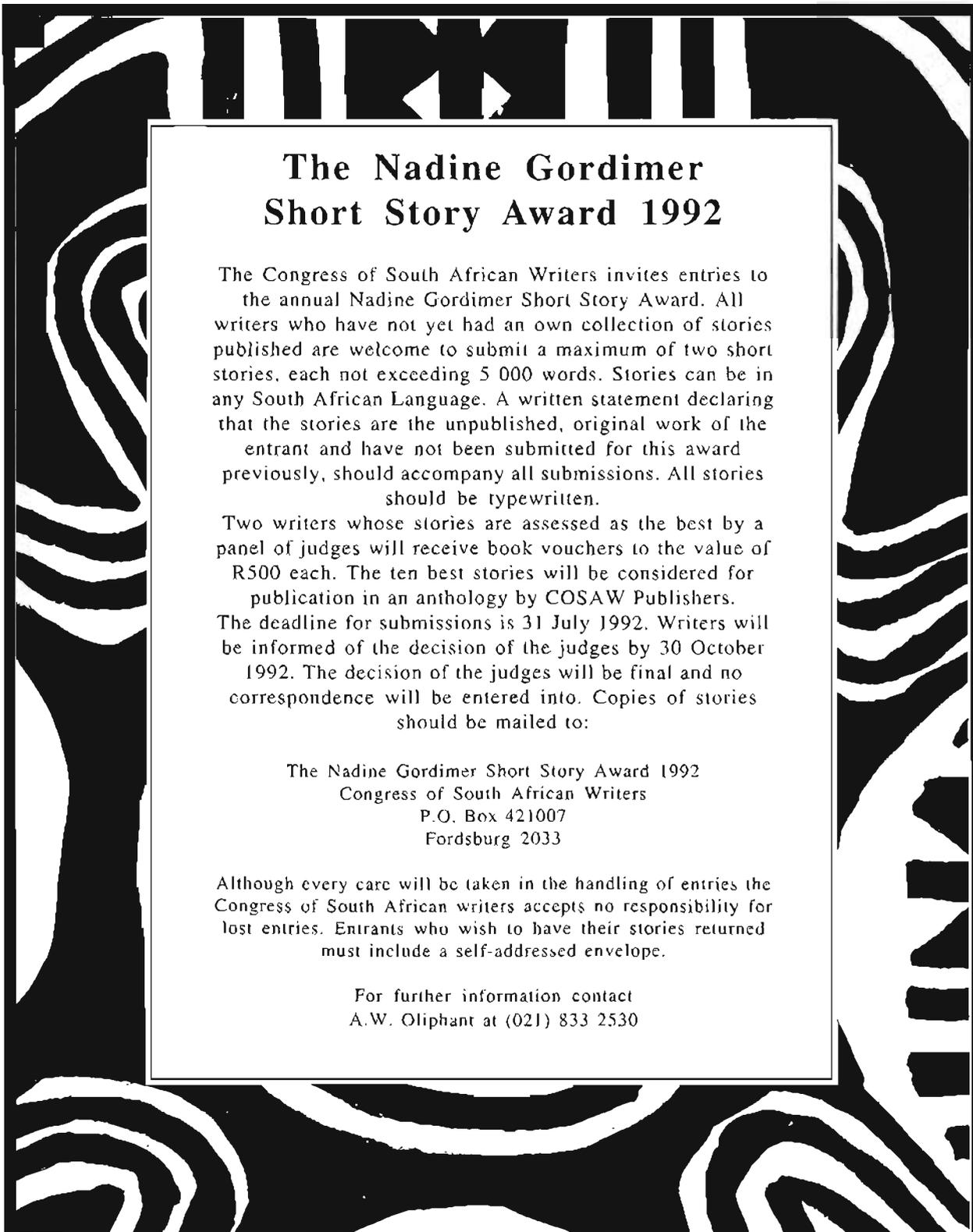
with peasants and workers and every other sector of society interested in freedom. In a post colonial context the pertinent question to pose, he pointed out, is whether the oppressive conditions which existed before independence have been, or are in the process of being removed. If the answer is negative, then as far as he is concerned, his commitment to change cannot be abandoned simply because one set of rulers has been replaced by another.

This question was raised from another angle in a recent radio interview I conducted with Breyten Breytenbach. He touched on the role of writers in a future democratic South Africa. In his typical paradoxical manner, he remarked that 'the power of the writer is non-power'. The implication is that by resisting being drawn into the political power associated with the State, writers are able to retain the freedom to criticise without favour or compromise.

Last year also saw the highly successful New Nation Writers' Conference which took place in December at Wits University and a number of other venues all over South Africa. It gave an indication of the range of cultural issues and problems facing a changing South Africa. While there were visitors from all over the world, the contributions by Njabulo Ndebele and Lewis Nkosi, among others, emphasised the fact that there cannot be meaningful change without justice and the complete emancipation of the majority of South Africans in all spheres of life. *Staffrider*, of course, upholds the view that literature and art are human activities realised in a social context. As such the various forms of art make up the fabric of free interpersonal and aesthetic exchange in which the society as a whole can participate.

This edition of *Staffrider* contains some provocative essays, stories, poetry and artwork. It is an exciting text in which the full ensemble of literature and art is presented. Also announced in this issue are three important literary awards for new fiction. 

Andries Walter Oliphant



The Nadine Gordimer Short Story Award 1992

The Congress of South African Writers invites entries to the annual Nadine Gordimer Short Story Award. All writers who have not yet had an own collection of stories published are welcome to submit a maximum of two short stories, each not exceeding 5 000 words. Stories can be in any South African Language. A written statement declaring that the stories are the unpublished, original work of the entrant and have not been submitted for this award previously, should accompany all submissions. All stories should be typewritten.

Two writers whose stories are assessed as the best by a panel of judges will receive book vouchers to the value of R500 each. The ten best stories will be considered for publication in an anthology by COSAW Publishers. The deadline for submissions is 31 July 1992. Writers will be informed of the decision of the judges by 30 October 1992. The decision of the judges will be final and no correspondence will be entered into. Copies of stories should be mailed to:

The Nadine Gordimer Short Story Award 1992
Congress of South African Writers
P.O. Box 421007
Fordsburg 2033

Although every care will be taken in the handling of entries the Congress of South African writers accepts no responsibility for lost entries. Entrants who wish to have their stories returned must include a self-addressed envelope.

For further information contact
A.W. Oliphant at (021) 833 2530



Fragments of a Dream

Zachariah Rapola

Cyprian was a sickly boy. He grew up to become an extremely lonely young man.

Subdued and at times listless.

Forever encased in eternal quietness like a monk. Underneath that facade there lurked an aura of silent grace found only in statues. When I first met him he was twenty-three. Even then he was still in the habit of wetting his bed. You shouldn't mistake him for an abnormality though. He was sane, strangely sane. He was both sane and insane. At times he even appeared old. Like the old young man of Biafra. There were times when my eyes perceived something like a phosphorescent halo around him. Maybe it was my imagination. Then there were times also when he'd appear embalmed in a haunting paleness during the day... maybe it was my imagination, again. It was a relief though, that I could imagine things, yet never see or hallucinate embarrassingly. It was on that level that I came to know Cyprian closer. Then we came friends. Even our friendship was strange. By then, I myself was twenty.

'You are a funny girl,' my mother used to say. And of course she was right. Then girls were not supposed to be funny. It all started with my being a tomboy. That mood dampened itself when I failed to outgrow it.

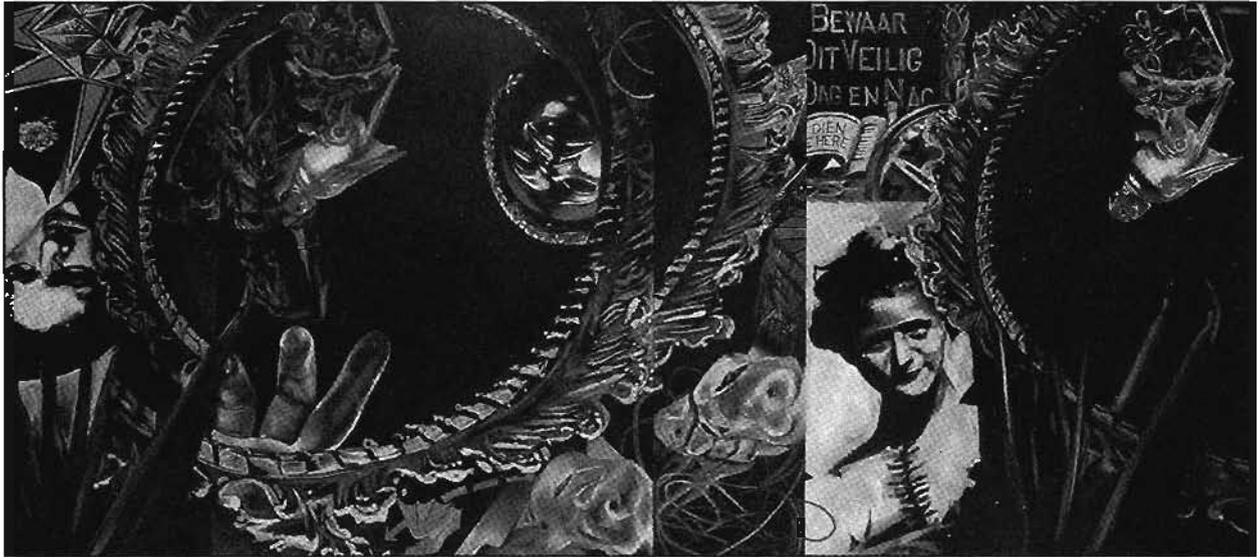
I was the average insignificant girl. That resulted in gripping urges of my first longings and finally, desperation to find some impressive attachments. And Cyprian was there, always there. Cyprian was sick, but he was significant. So my insignificance found solace under his shadow. Time was later to make the Cyprian role model of my fantasies about men. While to many people his passage on this earth was light, feathery and absolutely insignificant, unnotable and shadowy, to me he was the extreme opposite. There were times when in my sleep I could hear tremors of the earth caused by his vibrant footsteps. Yet his malehood couldn't make a tremor. Because Cyprian couldn't kiss. Neither could he make love.

'Do you masturbate then?' I remember asking him one evening, as we stood under a fig tree.

'No I don't...' was his response. I looked deep in his eyes, there was reflected only calm and innocence.

'Do you fuck other men then?' I jabbed again, evenly restraining the urge to slap him to consciousness. To this he again responded that he didn't know how.

'You are certainly sick... you must see some doctor, or psychiatrist,' I



Still Life with Mirrors • Carel-Brink Steenkamp • Oil on canvas

added. My eyes took a scanning sweep from his legs upwards.

There and then I knew I was in love. At the same time tingles of a strange shiver crept all over me.

'I am in love...in love with a sick man,' the words kept on lurching from deep within my consciousness. My attempts to stifle them were futile. It was only afterwards and years later that the same creepy feeling would sweep over me whenever I thought of him. Then my husband would warn I have been bewitched. There were times when I was inclined to believe him.

'You are sick!' my mother yelled at me once. 'It is because of that sick boy of yours,' This was after I'd confided in her strange feelings which were becoming familiar in my life....

Every time I had an orgasm, which was rare, when making love to my husband, Cyprian would appear, would always be there, sometimes he'd just watch me accusingly. But then there were times when he would become violent. He would grab Dikapeso (that is my husband) and shove him aside. He then would mount and take me to some unimaginable ecstasy. Maybe my mother was right. How

else could one explain it. For Cyprian was long dead then, approximately eight years.

I remember the day he died....

He told me that on that particular night he was awoken by this strange noise outside his room. He said he then heard blaring police sirens. He tiptoed to his window to look. He flipped his curtains slightly, but then a strong storm-like breeze tossed them wide open, flinging his window open at the same time. There was this giant search light trained on his room. Then he noticed a troop of counter-insurgents...all with sniffer dogs and marksmen ready to storm his room.

A blaring loudhailer commanded him and his accomplices to come out with their hands raised. Weighed by both terror and confusion he wobbled, dragging himself to the door.

The scene outside was more dramatic than he thought. For apart from the troop unit, a squadron composed of about six SuperCobra attack helicopters was hovering above. Further on surrounding his yard was a division of tanks; their hungry turrets zeroed in on his one roomed-house.

Thereafter, when he landed on the ground, after

Zachariah Rapola

having laboriously descended the four steps, a pack of sniffer dogs hurled themselves at him.

Not exactly. for that wasn't the day he died, but the exact date he died was six years later.

My affair with Cyprian was passionate but non-erotic. We were lovers before all except ourselves. I could not reach him. I could not arouse him — because there was this image he adored. It was only on his death-bed that he opened his heart's secret to me. Throughout that ordeal I had to remain with him. Oh! my God. Cyprian's death was an ordeal. He pleaded and implored me not to leave him. It was a turn now for my murky shadow to pave way for his traumatised soul. That was also to be the first and last time he'd kiss me. I well remembered it, because that kiss left a halo imprinted on my lips.

For a full twenty-four hours he told me about their relationship. Through that narration I came face to face with my rival.

Throughout his story I kept quiet. There were times when I thought he'd fall silent from sheer exhaustion. But he went on and on. She was thirty-three...she stayed alone...she was still a virgin...they were really in love, and were planning to get married some day...she stayed at Nineteenth Avenue, near the Jukskei river. like himself...she was the perfect, prettiest innocent woman — I gathered from his ramblings. But later on he contradicted himself. He explained his bed wettings and erotic couplings he indulged in with her. I was all of a sudden jerked to fuller alertness when he told me she was there in the room. He introduced us, even made some teasing comments about eloping with me should she yet again request postponement of their wedding. His face glowed, a waxy radiance of contentment covered him. His eyes would now and then fix on me, then stare back at her. I knew then something was wrong. Either I was dreaming, imagining things or plainly mad...or either he was mad, imagining things or dreaming. For there was nobody except the two of us in the room. After his lengthy monologue, a lapse of silence followed. It was only after he had ceased breathing that I saw, or thought I saw two shadowy figures clinging to

each other leave the room. Through that misty apparition I could well define his tall and bony profile, and the silhouette of some Evita-like woman.

It dawned on me that he had finally died....

I jumped from his bedside, uttered some hollow prolonged ugly shriek. Even to date I can't associate that hideous scream with my refined self.

'She's mad! she's mad.'

'Get her, man...get her and strap her on the bed.'

A stampede of running nurses and orderlies came after me. My mother later confirmed I brayed like a donkey. She said that the same sort of sound was to repeat itself when I gave birth to my quadruplets.

Not exactly, for that scenario was enacted on the exact hour of the day he'd die three years later.

One day in the middle of nowhere, though it wasn't really. For I was longing and pining for some romantic sweet talk from him, instead he said:

'From tomorrow I start with my hunger strike.'

'Why?' I asked.

'I want to know my origins,' he responded.

'But that's ridiculous — how can a hunger strike or fast, or whatever you call it help you in that...?'

Even before I could finish my sentence or hear his response my mind was already far away. It was trekking through a quagmire of thoughts, sparked by that philosophical debate I once heard between a decorated Koevoet veteran and a conscientious objector.

The two were debating the moral supremacy or denigration of deliberate hunger striking for political convictions, and free-will fasting for spiritual redemption. After hours of exhaustive arguing the two ended in some tense silence, then chuckled, then laughed and finally embraced in fraternal solidarity. Because to them subconscious logic and rationality were still supreme. The war veteran was still a passionate humanist at heart, while the pacifist was at heart still a maniac, only temporarily inhabiting in peace laurels to placate his troubled conscience after having butchered his fiance during one of his previous lives.

'Just wait and see....,' Cyprian's voice kept on echoing in my mind.

'Damn fool!' I sighed silently. And I'd wait and see. This boy was certainly sick. Now I believed my mother. Then, as if reading my thoughts he said:

'I don't have either a father or mother, still I'm no fool. The only source left to reveal that secrecy is nature.'

'Look Cyprian, I do understand your situation....'

'No...no — you don't,' he interjected.

'Okay, maybe I don't. I was merely trying to understand.'

'No no! you certainly are not, and never will....'

'But Cyprian! I am your friend-your lover.'

'No-no, you certainly are not. And stop pretending you are.' His responses were now fermenting into a verbal brawl, which I could not at that moment find cause for.

I stood there, humiliated, defeated and stunned by that explicit rejection. Yet there was no malice in his eyes. I struggled to remain calm, but finally gave in. I felt the veins down in my soul bleed, finally that fibre of composure burst. It swelled itself over until finally it vomited the stream down my eyes. A violent and hostile welcome of the outside world turned that fragile inner river into tears: sour, salty and bitter they were. Trickle that neither my palms nor handkerchief could restrain, save maybe his shaky gentle touch or hesitant comforting whispers.

Then I did wait and see. And that which I saw wasn't pleasing. From that time I was to know. I was to understand. That no matter what sympathy I offered him, none would be sufficient enough to cushion him against the knowledge of his violent origins. Nor the renewed violence it was to awaken. After that I could never ever again face him without feeling ashamed. And he could not tell me, yet I knew, and out of that, neither could he too face me without shame anymore. At times I even did think it was contempt.

For some prolonged time thereafter we tried to down play the shameful disgrace and inhumanity we represented to each other.

In damned silence, I knew the revelation was done, and I was confirmed witness. For Cyprian was male, and I was female. Two beings who were now bared to our nakedness. We were transformed from natural and social beings to executioners, wild heartless beasts marauding and feeding on each other. Our passion was the executioner's song, perpetual elegies disguised as serenades. At times our hearts, minds, bodies and souls were lent to others; at times swapped over and over, interchangeably between and among different races, yet deep down we were all similar. Eternally estranged twins. Love songs we all silently hummed and tuned while with lustful glee we were busy sharpening axes to terminate other lives.

Nostalgically, I still remember my Cyprian. I agree, I am a happily married woman, with four children. But what could I tell my boys and girls. They are still babies. I wish and would prefer it that way. I wish and hope they will grow up to adulthood and die still being babies at heart. Knowing nothing. Immune from life's realities. I am also happy that Cyprian never lived to see them. Even better, happier that he isn't their father.

Cyprian could never have been a father, because on his death bed I discovered why he couldn't kiss or even consummate love. I could see his large wondering and depressed eyes, trying and struggling to understand his life, his existence. But there was no one to give hints or provide him with answers...until, until his haunted soul stumbled upon the truth. And that made him swallow his heart. For Cyprian was conceived after rape on his girl-mother by the child-boyfriend's friend. And to erase and escape the shame she went for an abortion. All that is still mirrored in his eyes, the dingy, filthy, smelly and inhospitable 'operation theatre'.

Doesn't it make sense now...? When he insisted I could and would never understand him. Of course I could never have understood that his dreams would forever be blemished with endless harrowing screams and pools of blood. A nightmarish penance which he miraculously survived, and yet finally succumbed to its persistent wooing and nagging.



Still Life with Mirrors (Detail) • Carel-Brink Steenkamp • Oil on canvas

Could he always then, even in me, his beloved, have been seeing those haunting phantoms: two scavenging monster-reptiles masquerading as human beings.

Without him to explain it, I now knew of that scenario — when soldiers came for him. It was yet again another episode of an epic nightmare. Those were then toys or gnomes, merely manipulated to perform another scene in a millionth act set play. The play was a self-propelling spiral. Starting with the Chief of counter-insurgency dreaming of a camped band of operatives at 324-19th Avenue. It climaxed with the storming of Cyprian's room, and flop-ended with the apprehension of unharrassed mice being part tenants in that little cramped room. But because its appetite could not be satisfied, it choose to start its sojourn with the birth of Cyprian.

Tingles of veiled relief smothered my brows.

'Oh! there is some relief,' I sighed in self-satisfied comfort. Because it was a self-defeated nightmare, a death long dead before its birth. To some the apparition has appeared as love, a national

catastrophe or plaque that is crushed and reduced to a mild social irritation or even a tragedy that wobbles and merely crumbles before it could haunt or terrorise its defenseless victims. For Cyprian, as I know him, or as I would have liked to know him, was long dead. He quietly died on that fateful night in a darkened alley when he was conceived. He was yet again to die, on that rainy day in a darkened mkhukhu when he was hastily ripped from his mother's womb. Though he survived, the darkness of the alley and the mkhukhu were forever stamped on his forehead. In the end he fizzled into one in them, a giant sea of darkness that feeds remnants of frightened life in what is called Alexandra.

The parable, in its unravelling became complex. For how was Cyprian to be normal? How was he to be normal when all elements that shaped his existence were abnormal? His veins, his whole being was contaminated with spiteful semen. That two foot organ, swelled with greed and rage, and vengeance. With those pictures and thoughts crystallising themselves I started choking and throwing up....

Threnody of the South Easter

I

The sea prolapsed into the land
swooned at the foot of Table Mountain.
A ripple of South Easter
creased the calm surface of the sea,
riffled through discarded newspapers
and thoughts of the past
stole into the mind
like subliminal advertising.

The past broke its seal of silence....

II

A screeded seascape tranquilly gleamed
and life wheeled in sleepy
circles of familiarity.
Restful need found satiety
in the protean basket of Nature.
People tethered to their gods
grazed contentedly in summer's salubrious riot.
A thrifty sea gave frugally
yet, willingly, and smoky
curlicues wafted through
contented, half-opened lips.

And the harsh of winter
culled the old and infirm....
And senescence still claimed
the sappy years; yet, life
larger than greed, tickled laughter.

On luminous nights, makeshift huts,
as in systole, pumped out people
into open clearings, joined the stars
in salute of the heavens.

And time nodded off in a drowsy haze....

III

The sea, restless and fidgety,
spat out spittle of ships on the horizon
and the untamed met with those
bringing their curses and maladies
from beyond distant waters.

And they infested the land
with their thrift, gaoled their
gods in temples and raped the land.
And they plaited San and Khoi
into slavery; buried their dreams
in the silence of defeat; crowned themselves
king over Nature.

Then the plight of the plagues....

IV

Mowing down the defenceless....
Corpses, bloated and grotesque,
celebrated the coming of civilisation.
And the flight inland a
free ride for the cursed plagues
and a trail for the intruders
and those clutching their dreams
swallowed into the belly of the interior,
leaving their heritage etched
onto rock and the threnody of the South Easter,
and their moultings covered in the wake of time.

The rape continued....

V

And Life's scamy face lured those left behind
and the sheen of civilisation a magnet;
and an age redolent of herby calm
lost in the frenzy of profiteering.
Leisure-drunken wives deserted kitchens
(and beds) for apathetic, shiny-faced maids;
and the poets of yesteryears muzzled
by an inner poverty; a mousy quiet
crept into conversations; and
myopic eyes viewed the distant tomorrow.
And the intruders marked
with paunches of self-indulgence
whilst penury plagued the locals.
Couples at candle-lit dinners
drooled over lengthy courses
and nipples of desire arose
satiated in bought loins of heat.

The importation of slaves from the East....

VI

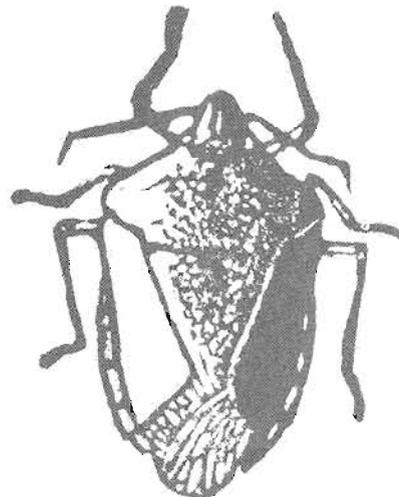
And occident merged with the orient
as autumn's decor draped vineyards in rust.
Paganism fled before Islam and Christianity
and exploration tentacled into the interior
and the conquest of Mediterranean Cape.
A tipsy breeze fanned
the frenzied plunder.
Trendy times prevailed
as Cape Town blossomed
and trams trundled up stone-cobbled roads.

The curtain closes on yesteryears' stage....

VII

And the plunder continues
and anger smoulders behind blank faces
and hate snips knots of composure
and hands idle in pockets
thwart and madden moneyed moguls
and bouncy life leaps over
slippery rims of safety;
spiny tempers foil detente
and people, skewered kebabs,
roast over coals of hate
and a strait-jacket of fear
restrains those seeking peace.
Black menacingly looms
in star-dead nights
and the South Easter reigns still;
wanders in a shadowy haunt.

Gavin Kruger





Michael Titlestad

Two Poems

The Passing of Immortality

This is just a simple notion:
Sex is subversive,
A simple anarchy of flesh
Constrained by rhythm.
Like jazz — semen splashed
Across staved paper.
We improvised; we had to,
To keep up the tempo,
To finish before a
Flashlight constrained
Creativity.
Now we can fuck
Like Beethoven but
Live in different suburbs.

From the Assured

Souls thrust into the breach of the commonplace
Are depths you sound with infinite affinity.
Your empire of tea and time and conciliation,
Steeped in humanity and adequate indecision,
Is a world in which touching a child's cheek
Or erasing splashes of mortality from the road
Outside a mother's house grow out of the same
Impulse of soul.

The House of Raydon

Patrick Sekhula

Long, long ago there lived a man by the name of Raydon. He had been living in the village of Karima. His life was so full of mystery, because he was not known

to talk to people, except Stephen, his animal keeper, and to Donald, with whom he occasionally had some conversations.

All the people of Karima did not like to get near his house. It was big and built from huge stones which he dug by himself from the mountains ten miles away. Those who had been there say that it was impossible for one man to do that kind of job. It took him two years to dig the rocks. It took him another year to bring them to his yard. During that time he was living in a single hut, packed with tools, cutting utensils, axes and his sleeping bag. He build the house by himself, and it is said that after six months he had already finished that intimidating massive structure. The fact that he lived alone there, perpetuated the myth that it was a ghost house. At night, the inside appeared to be very dimly-lit, and no one dared to go near that place. Stephen's mother, who lived about two miles from the Raydon compound, had always warned her son about his errands at the Raydon house.

'Stephen, would you listen to me and stop going to that spooky house.'

'Mother, I am just helping old Raydon.'

'Whatever you are doing there, I don't like it anymore. Stop arguing with me. I am giving you just two days and you must quit.'

'But I am only helping him feed his animals.'

His animals were the kind that no other boy in Karima would bother to feed. Raydon kept snakes, cats, dogs, a crocodile, two jackals, rabbits and scores of an unlikely combination of other wild animals.

One cool afternoon just after he had finished feeding his congregation Raydon went to see his old friend. He was feeling lonelier since Stephen was no longer coming to help him. Pam, whose husband Donald died after being haunted by one of Raydon's snakes, was living with Stephen. She quickly broke into bitter tears and ran to her room where she locked herself, away from the 'old monster of a man'.

'Pamela, what's the matter? I demand that you open that door before I smash it open,' Raydon threatened.

'Go away you wizard. You killed my husband.' Her voice was barely audible, as she was sobbing at the same time.

'What? I killed your husband? That is not true,' Raydon said.



'He died of a heart attack, and was buried two days ago. I did not tell you. He said since you had those animals of yours....'

'But they are mine. How could they have caused him a heart attack?'

'One of your snakes frightened him and he could not sleep the whole night. In the morning he was lying dead next to me, my dear Donald. Go away I don't want to see you again.'

'I will leave. Karima doesn't want me any more.' As he said this, he slowly closed the door. He looked quizzically at his friend's house and left for the quiet of his rock house. He was never to be seen alive again.

Three weeks had gone by since he was chased away by Pamela. His animals were making a discordant noise so regularly that made his house more intimidating. People were wondering what was going on. They were beginning to ask if this was Raydon's ultimate plan. Stephen, more out of concern than out of curiosity, secretly went to the house one night. It was so dark that he couldn't even see further than his nose. As soon as he had struggled into one of the rooms, he saw the skeleton remains of Raydon. He tried to scream but his voice couldn't make a sound. He tried to run but his feet remained glued to the rocky floor. The skeleton spoke with a voice reminiscent of Raydon's:

'Stephen why have you left me? Why are you not feeding my animals anymore? Come and stay with me, my friend. I'll give you everything that you want in this world.'

At that point all the animals made a simultaneous and frightening sound. The poor boy was so paralysed with fear that he just collapsed. When he came to, he was under a tree next to Raydon's yard. A passer-by ran to his home and told his mother. A doctor was quickly called and he suggested hospitalisation and a rest of six days at least.

On the sixth day Stephen was well but he still did not remember what had happened on that night.

He walked for the whole day in a westerly direction. When the sun set he had paced well over fifty miles with no rest at all. It was at that point that

he made a small fire under a huge morula tree. He warmed himself and ate a small piece of meat he had in his bag. At that point, not even a single thought of Raydon's nightmares surfaced in his mind. Instead, he was trying to think about what experiences he would have for the next few weeks away from his mother whose order he so openly defied.

No sooner had he drank water from his bottle then he quickly took out his blanket and rolled it around himself under that Morula tree. If wishes were horses, beggars would ride. Steve wished he wouldn't have another nightmare that night. He had convinced himself that he would ward off any of Raydon's 'threats' as he called them.

That was not to be. A dream soon took hold of his thoughts.

He was in Raydon's compound. A rabbit sat next to him and Raydon appeared from behind him.

'It is so pleasing to see you again after this period of uncertainty,' he said cheerfully.

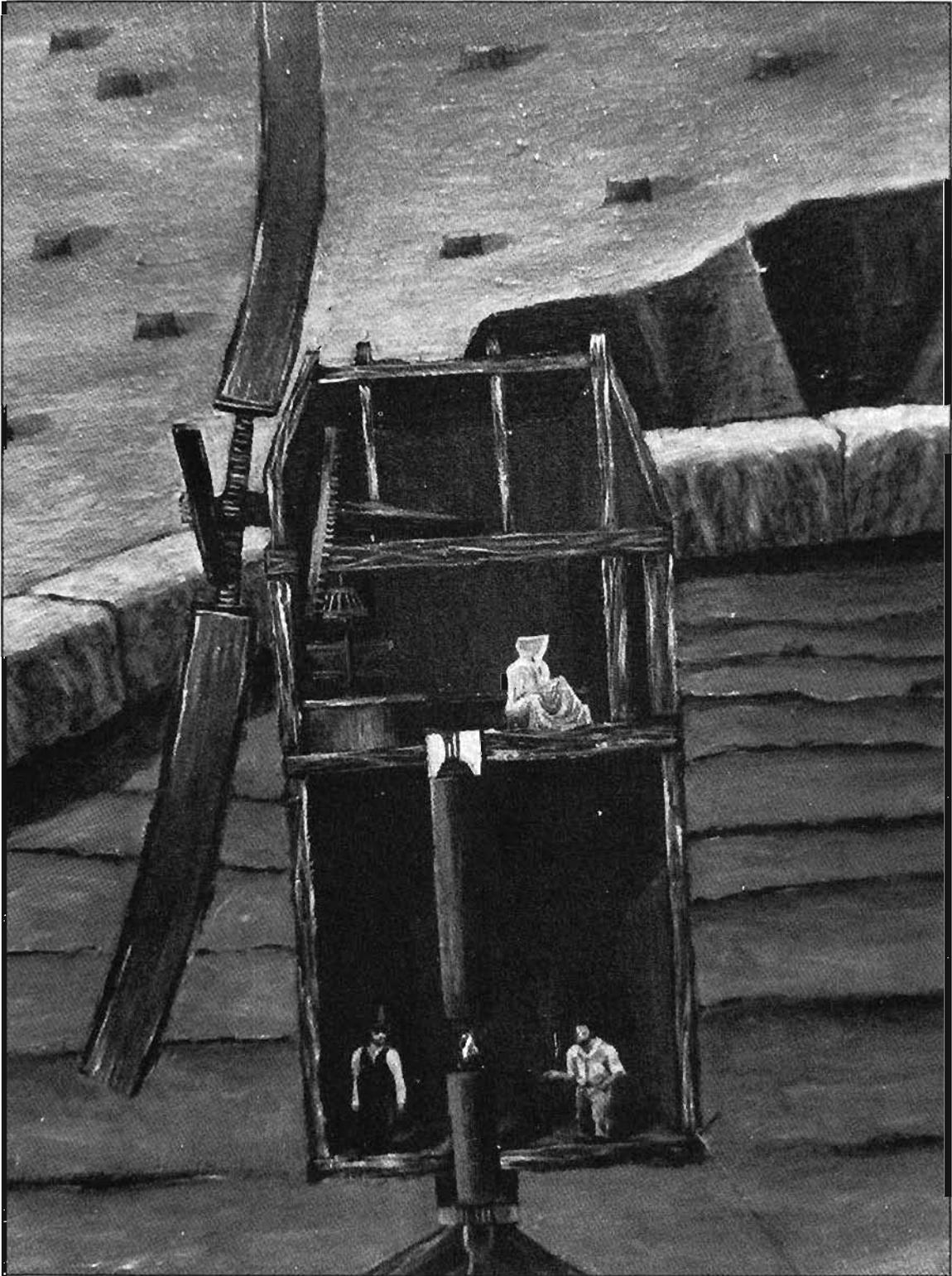
Steve did not move, or say anything. He was not sure of what he was seeing. Just behind Raydon he thought he saw a huge python with its poisonous tongue forked toward Raydon's head. He was trying to shout a warning to Raydon, but his voice would not come out of his throat. Ironically, he saw Raydon just smiling and beckoning him not to worry.

'The snake is a friend,' he said to Steve.

While this incredible scene was still happening, the rabbit suddenly left Steve's side and jumped on the python's back. Steve realized that the snake was not making any threatening movements. Old Raydon was bemused.

'Isn't this a wonderful Kingdom, son? Come and join us and live happily forever,' he said to Steve.

Steve tried to mumble something, but no word came out of his mouth. He was sweating so profusely and his body started to shake violently. The old man moved towards him. The snake, with the rabbit still on its back, crawled closer to Steve. Raydon tried to touch Steve's shoulder. At that moment Steve was so panic-stricken that he shouted a screeching 'No!'



Promised Land (Detail) • Martin Steyn • Oil on canvas

When he came to his senses, it was about six in the morning. His mother was seated next to him. His blanket was in tatters. Lo and behold! He was in Raydon's old yard. He had never set foot there since his mother scolded him. He felt so cold.

'But this is Raydon's house,' he said.

'Yes, it is,' answered his mother tearfully.

'How did I...,' he stammered.

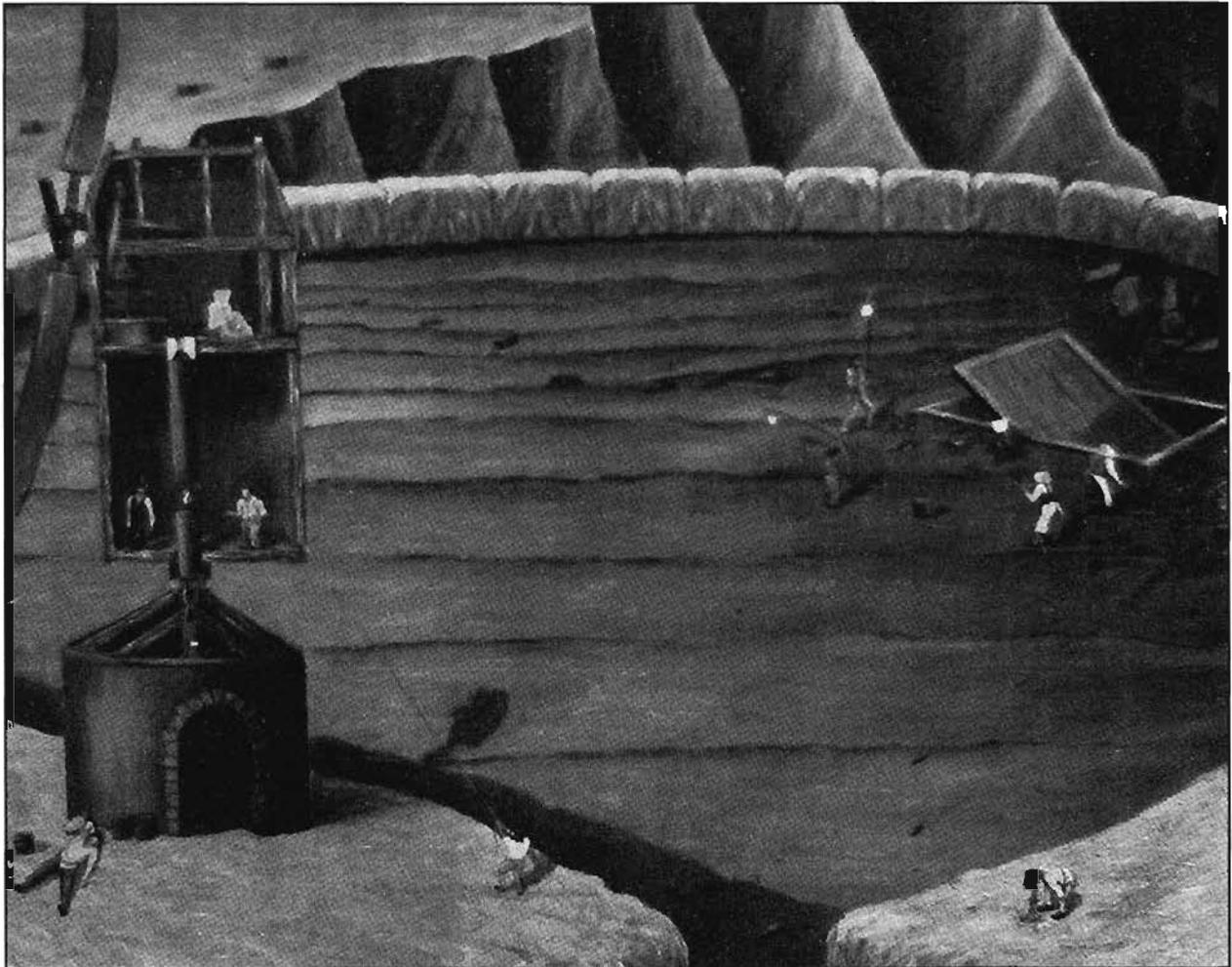
'Forget it. I knew something was wrong in my dreams last night. I came straight here this morning to look for you. Let's go home.'

'Raydon's magic...?'

'No magic is greater than a mother's love for her only son. Let's go home and never think about Raydon anymore.'

'Mother I shall obey you for the rest of my life. I shall never even talk about the Raydon house anymore.'

That is how Steve eventually got rid of the Raydon myth. He knew that one should not abandon one's parents for the sake of outsiders. 



Promised Land • Martin Steyn • Oil on canvas

Today, Kismoos

A whine of dog or bitch
Rends the darkness.
The waker empties
The frothed glass of last night's beer
To ease the snore — sore throat.

Groping the darkness
He sticks his dick
in the convenient crack
and hisses his piss.

She's sleeping right
his woman.
He gropes her groin
grunts his coming
in the moans of her sleeping.

In the adjoining room
his neighbour curses
his wife and her children
inveterate matins.

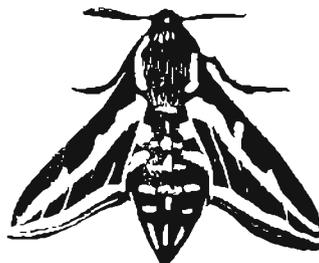
The bed creaks his rising
Uncaring for the dignity of his fly
One more swig
He shuffles amid his neighbour's coughing
and the sparrow's screeching.

Towards the store, still closed
the drowsy remnants
of the shacks
shuffle
for the discounted bread
of yesterday.

He leans against a pillar
Beneath a woman
flashing bright teeth
and large tits emblazoned on T-shirt
Her groin scored over and over
David was here,
Petrus also John.
Her son sucking ice-cream.
On a stick so bent, a toothless hag
approaches inside shoes
with mouths as large as guppies'
snapping at the world
lay preachers mouthing curses.

With uncomfortable smile
'Today, Kismoos' she wheezes
To no one in particular
While her lame dog
pisses on the pillar

Dev Naidoo



*Dev Naidoo**Two Poems***Love's Victim**

Lured by the racuous music
 and sounds of other life,
 kwashiorkor
 with jaundiced, lustreless eyes and grotesque
 limbs
 enshrouded in patchwork greatcoat too carnival.
 The city's tragedian
 abandons the convenient darkness
 of the alley
 stops
 peers
 lips compressed against the stained pane
 of a disco den —
 a frenzy of gyrations
 rotations
 and ululations.

The door squeezes out a coup
 hand in hand
 smiling
 oozing the confidence of swollen wallets.

Kwashiorkor springs to life
 outstretched hand
 time-honoured gesture.
 The man gently
 playfully
 prods
 the protruding belly
 in the navel
 with his foot.
 Kwashiorkor makes way.
 The couple move on.
 His fingers gathering in tightness
 her buttocks.
 He nibbles her ear,
 tongue teasing
 desperately protesting Love.

Poetry Lessons

I understand not the rhythms of the seasons
 That your poetry tries to teach.
 I know only the cycles of hunger and pain
 And hunger for freedom from pain.
 I understand not the freedom of West Winds
 Nor their music amidst
 laughing clouds
 so high.

I see not your billowing clouds like fleece
 Nor the twinkling of majestic stars
 up high.
 Unfamiliar — the melody of your babbling brooks
 and the dim momentum of the sea.

Speak to me of the suffocating dust clouds
 of my rutted streets
 or of the grey gaping holes
 above my head
 shack-holds
 that drop gusts of wind
 and blasts of rain —
 charities from hell.
 Write me songs of the mournful rivers of my heart.
 Whirlpools of hate, fear, anger.

Cesspools of my soul's clogging.
 The searing tears of my despair;
 The rude insult-torn colour of my skin;
 The paradox of uprooted houses;
 The irony of breasts run dry;
 The exaggeration of waste from fractured sewers;
 The alliteration of weary women wailing;
 So that I can understand.

And then your poetry books
 are far too clean, my friend
 For my soiled hands.

Sexual Politics and 'Free' Women in Achmat Dangor's *The Z Town Trilogy*

Jabulani Mkhize

'I have tried not to submerge the human dimension in this overtly political situation', Dangor (1990:35) comments with reference to *The Z Town Trilogy*. Indeed, without losing sight of the political realities that shape the fate of his characters, Dangor demonstrates, in a most profoundly critical and perceptive way, that human relations, insofar as they include the concepts of power and dominance, are inextricably bound to the realm of politics. In short, in Dangor's novel, the human dimension, which clearly dominates this fictional work, is skilfully reinserted into the political realm as 'sexual politics'. My intention in this essay is to examine the theme of sexual relations in *The Z Town Trilogy*, with special emphasis on how Dangor's central female characters defy patriarchal discourse by redefining their sexual roles.

The story of *The Z Town Trilogy* revolves around the lives of the Meraai family: Muriel, the mother; her two daughters, Jane and Dorothy; and Donovan, the only son. Donovan's role is, however, peripheral; for this novel takes women as its central characters. The beginning of the plot is marked by the arrival of Mr Paulos Samson as a new 'Representative' of Z Town and speculation amongst community members as to whether Samson is on the side of the oppressed or the oppressor. Mr Samson who, it clearly turns out, is on the side of the government, exacerbates the situation by being engaged in sexual 'adventures' (for that is precisely the way these relationships have to be seen) with all three Meraai



women. After a brief sexual encounter that involves Mr Samson and Muriel, they successfully negotiate that the 'Representative' takes Jane as his wife. Things come to a head when Mr Samson is shot to death after fornicating with Dorothy in the veld. The rest of the novel is largely concerned with how the Meraai daughters assume control of their sexual lives after the death of Samson.

In the Samson-Meraai episode political domination and sexual domination intersect. Samson not only represents a politically moribund ideology of racial and class domination in his capacity as Representative, but also, as a male, an equally contestable ideology, patriarchy, which is realised in the domination of women by men. In short, Samson, acting as a surrogate of the ruling class, contributes towards effectively suppressing the political aspirations of the oppressed classes of Z Town and, seeks to augment his 'manhood' by subjecting the Meraai women to blatant sexual exploitation. In the words of the investigating officer, who investigates Samson's shooting of Jane's former lover, Johnny, Samson is 'a womaniser who preyed upon innocent women, forcing himself upon them sexually in return for privileges' (41). For Samson's sexual relationship is underpinned by blackmail: to retain their illegal business, the running of a shebeen, through which the Meraais eke out their existence, the Meraais have no option but to submit to Samson's demands — lest he exercise his authority. Locally, the sympathy of the reader is, inevitably,

directed to the victims, the Meraais.

Dangor's treatment of the Samson-Meraai episode, however, is more complex than this. To portray women as mere victims of male domination without equally acknowledging their potential for assertiveness is to disempower them. Dangor captures this contradiction poignantly and, in accordance with the demands of his fictional project, which is to recreate 'sexual reality' from the perspective of his women characters, the author avoids this pitfall. The Meraais do not view themselves as victims in the way in which the reader perceives them, instead, they show themselves to be rebels both in the political and in the moral sense. To impose a 'moral' judgement on the Samson-Meraai sexual episode is to miss the point, because the very core of what we regard as 'moral' is completely shaken in this fictional work! When Muriel, for example, asks her critics: 'What do you know about morality?' (24), she seems to sum up, not only her psychological doubts about the rationality of morality, but also what she and her daughters represent in the novel — war against (patriarchal) convention. The resonance of this question dominates the reader's consciousness throughout.

If one leaves aside the significance of Muriel's question, one point has to be clarified with regard to Muriel's response to the criticism levelled at the Meraai family for their relationship with Samson and, significantly, with regard to the author's treatment of her as a character in the novel. While Dangor portrays Muriel as one of the champions in the defiance of convention, he makes clear the ambiguity of Muriel's commitment to the cause, an ambiguity which becomes crucial in that it distinguishes Muriel from her daughters. This comes out

clearly in the narrator's recreation of Muriel's thoughts:

How different are they, all those holy-holy people who talk about us? Yes, they are married, but they are also only objects to their men. Fuck-things to be used in the dead of night! To be fumbled at, a drain into which their men pour their filthy passion (28).

To portray women as victims of male domination without acknowledging their assertiveness disempowers them

As can be seen, Muriel adopts a defensive stance, a stance which is, at best, defeatist in that she attempts to come to terms with sexual exploitation by rationalising it. The contradictory effect of this rationalisation is that Muriel seems to uphold precisely the patriarchal discourse she is supposed to subvert!

An explicit message conveyed in Dangor's fiction is that morality is the product of male subjectivity in that it serves to entrench male domination. Through his female characters, Dangor's intention seems to be to subvert the notion that the 'male view of the world' constitutes the 'only view of the world'.¹ The most common way in which some writers seek to address patriarchy is by embracing a feminist discourse, but Dangor does not take this option. The Meraai daughters are surely not feminists because they do not in any way pledge solidarity with other female characters in the novel who seem to champion this cause. Jane's apparent indifference to Sandra, her neighbour in Mount Manor, who, we are told, 'was known to be the champion of women...who suffered at the hands of their ruthless men' (50), is a case in point. Furthermore, the Meraai daughters challenge to patriarchy is largely confined to sexual relations. As Smith (1990: 22) observes: 'Perhaps some fem-

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inists would take issue with the lack of control, other than sexual, that (Dangor's) women ultimately have over their lives....'

An obvious feature in the novel is the lack of political commitment that characterises the Meraai. This lack of political commitment of the Meraai women clearly distinguishes these characters from the broad concerns of feminism that feature prominently in such characters as Khethiwe, Nomakhwezi and Ntombi in Mandla Langa's fiction or Jezile in Lauretta Ngcobo's recent work.² More significantly, there seems to be a conscious decision (at least, on Jane's part) to desist from political involvement, and the decision, apparently, has a lot to do with male domination. During a party to which Dr Malik, Jane's new lover, has invited his Black Consciousness activist comrades and their wives, Jane observes:

Many of (their wives) lived like stricken shadows alongside their active, committed husbands. 'We can only risk one detainee in the family,' they said. But their eyes were comparing their way of dressing to hers, their activists' uniforms appearing fastidiously dowdy in comparison to her simple, daring elegance. It also seemed like a reflection of their lives. (71)

Implied in this observation is the apparent mutedness of these women, who are seen by Jane as leading a shadowy existence, because they allow their men to define their roles for them and, in the process, 'render (these women) invisible'. This 'conspiracy' by the politically committed men to suppress the female voice has been succinctly identified by Ibrahim (1990:81) elsewhere:

The colonised male, exclusively in his role as oppressor of the colonised female, has vested interests in the continued exploitation of the doubly (sexually and politically) colonised women. Therefore, he actively discourages sexual liberation for women, while soliciting

their support in the political struggle defined primarily by him.

In *The Z Town Trilogy*, the indomitable support (albeit apparently moral) which these women have for the political struggle being waged by their 'activist' husbands is implicit in the proud acknowledgement that they 'can only risk one detainee in the family'. Can Dangor's depiction of his central female characters as 'apolitical', then, be seen as based on the same premises as Ibrahim's?

This question raises a serious issue with regard to the portrayal of women in black South African literature of liberation. In the present South African political situation the black South African woman is torn between involvement in the political struggle and the struggle against male domination. To assign female characters in literature to political roles without equally being attentive to their struggle against gender oppression is tantamount to making them collaborators in their own oppression. In the same vein, to consign female characters to the gender discourse may be seen, in some circles, as marginalising the women's contribution to the struggle against racial and class domination. This seems to underline the need for a literary trope that would seek to examine the contradiction between political and gender discourse without, at the same time, assigning women to a collaborative role.

Nonetheless, it appears that in Dangor's work the focus is on the non-conformity of his female characters. While the Meraai daughters consort with political activists, they are not in any way influenced by their politics, nor are they impressed by a purely feminist option in which they would seek to challenge images that their male counterparts have of them. Their role has to be seen in terms of defiance of both the political male universe as well as the sexual one. The Meraai daughters are rebels against patriarchy which undermines their sexual identity and deifies male power by defining sexual relations from the perspective of male sexual (or political) potency. A more apt term to define the role of the Meraai daughters in this

novel is the label 'free woman', used by Little (1380: 13) in his studies of images of urban women in African literature. He argues:

By a 'free' woman is meant one who flouts or disregards conventional beliefs concerning the proper role and position of the female sex. One of the most common of these beliefs is that it is wrong for a woman on her own to take a major decision. This is a male prerogative. It is also wrong for a woman to undertake roles, including occupational ones, traditionally ascribed to the male sex. Perhaps the most common belief of all is that a woman's place is in the home and that it is her duty to marry and have children.

In their own way, Dangor's characters, Jane and Dorothy, demonstrate that the 'beliefs' enumerated by Little above have their ideological bases in patriarchy and, as such, represent the male version of 'reality' which can be challenged. The Meraai daughters' sexual experiences with Mr Samson seem to create in them an awareness of the power of their sexuality. It is by being in control of their sexual lives, defining their roles in their own terms, that the Meraai daughters undermine phallographic logic. While patriarchal order demands that males (be) sexually (or otherwise) dominant' (Spender, 1980: 175), the roles are somewhat reversed in the larger part of Dangor's novel — an affront to chauvinist readers? Dangor's characters reject a phallographic view of sexual relations in which the sexual act is arbitrarily defined as an assertion of one's 'manhood'. In *The Z Town Trilogy*, it is the Meraai daughters who decisively assert themselves or their 'femininity' by putting men firmly under their controls in 'man-made'

language, Dangor's male characters become emasculated. The concept of 'emasculatation' in the novel finds expression in Donovan's description of the power the Meraai women have over him as a brother:

I was too young then to realise the slight to my manhood. for although I was a male, it was a maleness that the women in my family, my mother and sisters alike, had absorbed within themselves and neutralised. I had become an extension of their bright and hard femininity distinguished from them only by my male genitals. (99)

**In his work,
Dangor
reveals the
ideological
determinants
of the nature
of sexual
relationships
and subverts
the gender
hierarchy**

Donovan's words are clearly suggestive of the Meraai women's potential and determination to violate the male universe.

Dangor defines Jane's departure from Z Town after the death of Samson as her 'first act of emancipation'; when she closes the door of her mother's bedroom, she closes it 'with the finality of someone closing the door to her history and her past' (43). In other words, Jane's departure marks her complete break from the male universe underpinned by restrictions of patriarchy which thrive on the denial of female assertiveness. She emerges from her relationship with Samson with a clarity of vision about the dominance/submission concepts that characterise male/female relationships. Jane's subsequent relationship with Dr Malik makes clear Jane's determination to assert her independence and deny Dr Malik any chances of controlling or dominating her. Dr Malik wants to possess her. '(finding) an increasing desire to be alone with her' (57) but Jane frustrates his attempts by demonstrating a sense of detachment from or indifference to his plans. For exam-

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ple, we are told that at one stage that:

(she) even accepted an invitation on her own...ignoring his stoic, silent suffering. When she returned, he joined her in bed, but she refused to make love. (57)

Jane's decisiveness and her sense of independence also come out clearly when she bluntly tells Dr Malik, who interrogates her about the money being paid by the government to her, that she is not accountable to him. 'I don't have to tell you anything' (65), says Jane, who is apparently angered by Dr Malik's attempt to intervene and turn back the clock of her forgotten history.

One way in which Dangor seems to highlight Jane's attribute as a 'free' woman is to accord her with the mythical qualities of birds. The frequent deployment of the imagery of 'flight' with reference to Jane in the novel seems to serve the purpose of re-affirming Jane's refusal to be pinned down to social convention which renders women inferior. But the bird mythology becomes ambiguous when one considers that birds also become symbols of destruction in the novel, 'birds of prey' — or are they intended to symbolise the destruction of patriarchal convention in this regard? Nothing in the novel, however, serves as a testimony to what the narrator calls Jane's 'conquest of history' (45) as much as when she regards with utter indifference Dr Malik's offer of marriage. When Dr Malik suggests that they be engaged, we are told that:

Jane decided, perhaps cruelly, to play along with his fantasies. In her heart she knew that she would never marry him. (69)

Having been 'sold' (4) to Samson as a 'commodity' before, Jane does not intend to compromise with her newly acquired 'freedom' by acceding to Dr Malik's marriage proposal. Jane may therefore be seen in this regard as one of the characters who, in Little's words (1980: 53), seem to realise that 'marriage under modern conditions is a trap'. In a word, then, Jane's conquest of history also involves her triumph over patriarchy which has historically sought to define the woman's role — including her role in marriage — from the male vantage position.

Nonetheless, it is in Dangor's characterisation of Dorothy that the concept of a 'free' woman is epitomised. Dorothy's attitude to male domination is unequivocally defiant. She emerges from her sexual adventure with Samson 'cold and scornful towards men' (99); an attitude that clearly stems from her realisation that, in patriarchal discourse, women are denied the right to be in control of their own destiny. For as the narrator tells us: 'Dorothy had the aura of a woman who did not belong, and did not want to belong, to anyone or anything' (110). Dorothy, even more than Muriel as well as Janey, represents a 'bright and hard femininity' as defined by Donovan,

in her critical but valuable assessment of the stark reality of gender relations.

Dorothy's critical judgement of gender relations under patriarchy can be found in her ambivalent attitude towards marriage in the novel. On the one hand, she concedes that marriage 'would bring her respectability'. But on the other hand, we are told 'she scoffed at first at the conventional morality that was turning over dully in her mind' (111). Her ambivalence, it turns out, has a lot to do with the 'powerlessness' of women in a male-dominated universe. The narrative makes clear the overtones

The black South African woman is torn between involvement in the political struggle and the struggle against male domination



Dancers
• T.S. Kabiba •
Acrylic on canvas

the ideological determinants of what we view as the 'nature of sexual relationships' are revealed, and gender hierarchy is subverted. Although some critics may take issue with what they may regard as Dangor's extensive attentiveness to 'sexual politics', in my view Dangor's contribution to the gender debate is commendable. 

Notes

1. See Spender in her feminist oriented argument about language as the embodiment of patriarchal reality. She vehemently rejects this 'monodimensional reality' and demands: there must at least be two' (62).
2. All the characters mentioned demonstrate and question in various ways, the existence of the dichotomy between political consciousness and gender consciousness in the national liberation struggle. They seem to subscribe to a more broader perspective which emphasizes that political liberation and sexual liberation should evolve concurrently. Jezile, in Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die* (1990), tries to reconcile her political activism with predominantly feminist issues. For more information on the question of gender and politics in Mandla Langa's fiction, see my article (1991), 'Liberating Women? Political and Sexual Consciousness in Mandla Langa's Fiction'.
3. This phrase is borrowed from Spender's definition of the concept of dominance and submission in patriarchal discourse which contributes towards constructing women's silence.
4. This literary trope would not only have to reveal these contradictions but also to subject the politics—gender dichotomy to some kind of scrutiny by being interrogative of the ideological premises on which this dichotomy is constructed.
5. Spender argues that because of men's monopolistic power to create language, males have linguistically sought to deny

females their sexuality and categorised them as 'non-sexual'. As a result, she goes on to argue, the word 'effeminate' has comparable meanings in male-dominated reality as to 'emasculate' (1980-976). The implication is that both words 'emasculate' and 'effeminate' are invariably used to describe males, who are in one way or another, seen as having been relegated to the level of 'powerlessness' that is associated with females in patriarchal terms.

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Ideological War

rat-tat-tat, they go, rat-tat-tat, these men
battering on their archaic machines,
backs to the wall,
carrying their enclaves with them;
on and on, they go, on and on,
explaining to the fence
to interviewers inside the fence,
and loud enough for those
on the other side of the fence

to hear them
extolling, excusing, exalting
to one another
their snail-like shifts of position
in relation to the fence:

these (almost purely) white (on the whole) male
(almost exclusively) South African
litterati —
not, for the moment, politicians,
no, indeed, not politicians,
for the men I mean continue
(mentioning Goldman and Adorno
in the same sentence,
faltering for the nearest little red flag of
progress,
rather like Pik espousing democracy
for the Chinese,)
to declaim (through indelible little black
letters
hammered on the white page)
the necessary apartheid
of politics and poems;

o it is so wearing, so wearing, as banal
as night after night of the SATV;
as draining as night after night
of a child's cries

shattering illusions of peace.

Joan Metelerkamp

Blues in Calypso

I watch a stranger in the streets
in modern days' wear
there seems to be wisdom
in his pockets
it seems there is truth in his silence
his voice emits sounds of wonder
leaving me with no exit way

there is a kind of man
he walks like a train on the tracks of time
every time I talk to him
the glittering beam rests upon me
the feeling of ease in my soul
but my body in pain
shrinks into the grave of longing

to the mother passing by
the stranger gives a scripture
to the child playing
he gives a gesture of goodwill
the words from his mouth
fill the oceans
the streams flow from his eyes
away he went into the world
of solitary souls

the man the stranger
was the prophet of shango
an escapee from Chingwe's hole
whose anger is the rain of blood
fire and pain.

Phedi Tllobolo

The Three Hundred and Sixty Dollar Tissue

Three Hundred Thousand
down.
And one
stands tall.

60% squirming
in the dirt,
and the same
licking the mud;
Extracting Water.

Yes, the Water;
A precious natural resource,
at a price
far less than
359 dollars
and 22 cents
an ounce,
and a whole lot
more wholesome,
but far less
life-giving.

So wipe your tears
on that
Worthless
presidential heartbeats
hacked by
a mound
of yellow dust

And as you open that sinister
black leather
artery,
a link to the heart,
scatter some more
of your
dust
onto those
earning a little over 260 rand
a month.

Or lay them to rest
with pick and spade
on a bed
of bloodstained paper.

Steven Brimelow

Morning Samba

It takes a great love
to walk in the shade of peace

darkness is our trouble
not just sorrow,
with its million teeth it devours
every bit of life

it takes the mighty love
of the free soul
to halt the confrontations
to correct that is wrong
to be free

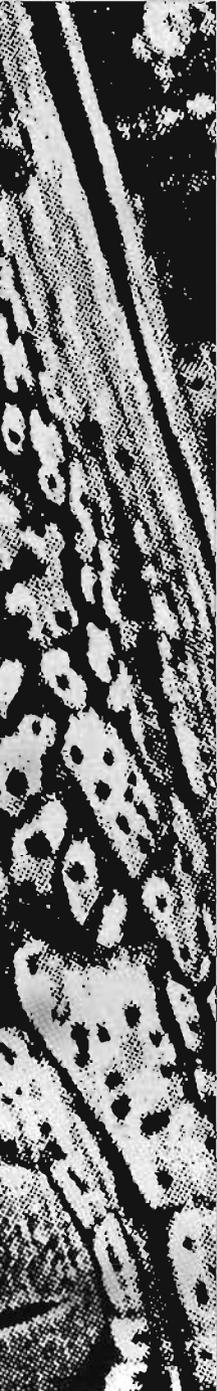
you have to speak in tongues
tongues of gods, angels and birds
dance the morning samba
to be the victor
of this fierce war

Phedi Tlhobolo

COURTESY OF NEWTON GALLERIES



By That Time • Helen Sibidi • Etching



Independence

E M Macphail

Her husband, Richard, had always attended to that sort of thing. Although Heloise had no idea of how to go about getting another form it was useless to go on hoping that it would turn up. So she would run down after taking Denise to school and before going to the rooms. Pa said that it would be quicker than writing. He, himself, never wrote to the department but just drove over from the farm, to the water affairs people when he wanted to ask about something or to complain.

It would be best, she thought, to try the parking lot on the right hand side of the ramp which descending from the M1, became Rissik Street. She drove through the lanes of cars. Some looked as though they had been there for weeks. She pulled up near one from which music gushed but the vacant place next to it was crammed with dancing youngsters. The three young men who sat on the back seat of the car drank beer out of cans, laughing and swaying their shoulders to the mixture of umbaqanga and reggae music. So Heloise drove over to the opposite side where there was more space. Empty bottles and Soneela beer cartons lay heaped against the fence and the wire mesh was plastered with pamphlets and plastic bags. The small group watching two others who played mruabarub wore the down-at-heel suits associated with office messengers. As she started to reverse into a place near them she heard a whistle and she spotted an arm waving from the ticket booth. So she changed direction and drove over to it.

The old man in the cabin said in a cross voice, 'Is no good for young women to parking so far away'. His white hair encircled a shiny dome on which his glasses perched. 'I'm not so young,' Heloise smiled.

In his khaki dust-coat he filled the little shelter, two sides of which were walled with glass.

'So long you picking up your feet you are young. You are old ven you shovel your feet.'

'Thank you.'

'Mind your hendbeg,' he answered.

She turned her back on a sudden gust of dust and asked over her shoulder.

'Which way to the Receiver of Revenue?' He jerked his head towards Joubert Street and his glasses fell onto the cash register that wedged him against the back wall of the hut.

'Isn't Rissik nearer?'

'Is nearer,' he said 'but they sit behind the wall and they wait for you. And from here I am not seeing you.'

It took a little while for Heloise to discover that the entrance to the building was not the big bronze door with the coat of arms above it but the smaller wooden door, on which was tacked a scrap of paper with the office hours scribbled in what looked like a child's handwriting. In the foyer she could find neither the end nor the beginning of the queue which the tall man was supervising. He wore a built-up boot and his hair reminded Heloise of her mother. The girl at La Chick, Mommy had said, was the only one who knew how to do a decent Marcel. Heloise waited for the man who was assisting him. When she heard him ask, 'Kan ek jou help vroutjie?' she turned to him. His one eye looked over her shoulder, the other at the clock above the lift and in the confusion Heloise lost her chance. Then all at once a space opened up near the man with the Marcel hair and she was able to ask where she should go for a provisional tax form.

'Een-nul-een. One-o-one lady. On the first floor,' he said before he was surrounded again.

The line of people stretched along the corridor to the top of the stairs. Heloise was relieved that she wasn't the only person to lose her tax form. She wondered if Richard had ever lost his. He had never said so but in any event he would probably have told his secretary to see to it. There were only three people ahead of her and she would be back at the rooms well before her first patient. As she stepped up to the counter the girl said, 'Ja.'

Heloise smiled. 'Good morning.'

The girl lifted her eyebrows and said, 'Ja', again.

'I have lost my provisional tax form,' Heloise said. The girl's eyebrows remained where they were. So Heloise gave in and said, 'I need another one.' 'Wat is you nommer?' the other asked.

'Which number?'

'Jou belastingnommer.'

The man behind Heloise said, 'You have to give them your income tax number before you can get another form.'

'But it's at home in the desk in the hall.'

The girl said, 'Next.'

In the foyer on the ground floor Heloise decided not to bother the man with the eyes that strayed. The tall one told her there was a public telephone at the corner of Marshall and Loveday.

'But that's miles away.'

She ran down Rissik Street and, turning into Marshall, hoped the phone would not be out of order and that she would have ten cents change. Pa didn't ask unnecessary questions or become flustered and he found the tax number at once. Heloise wrote it on the palm of her hand with a ballpoint pen and he said he would phone the rooms just in case.

'There's no need to Pa. I know where to go for the form and I'll be there well before ten.'

The hurried clicking of her heels echoed in the wide corridor. Instead of waiting for the lift, she ran up the stairs and met the end of the queue half-way to the first landing. At first the line for lost provisional tax forms seemed to be moving along quite well. But after fifteen minutes Heloise found she had not advanced any further up the stairs.

'What's happened?' she asked the young man in front of her.

'She's on tea,' he said.

Heloise decided there was no point in leaving and it might be even worse on another day.

The girl wrote the tax number on the yellow form and handed it to Heloise.

'But I don't want the yellow one. I've got the yellow one,' Heloise said.

'Dit is die IT12.'

'But the one I lost wasn't that colour and it was printed in blue.'

'Dit is die IT12.'

Heloise glanced over her shoulder unsure as to whether the girl was shouting at someone else further back in the queue.

'You have to go to another place for provisional tax forms,' the man behind Heloise said.

'But where?'

'Vier-vyf-sewe,' the girl shouted again. As long as they knew, at the rooms, that she would be late

E M Macphail

they would be able to make other arrangements for her first two patients. Since there was no point now in hurrying up the stairs Heloise decided to wait for one of the five lifts.

There was no queue outside Room 457. The woman who sat at the desk was explaining that the greater of R2250.00 or 22.5% of the wife's nett earnings was not taxable. The person to whom she was talking seemed unconvinced. When at last she was finished Heloise stepped into her office, but the phone rang again.

'You are not allowed to come in until I tell you to,' the clerk said.

'But I just wanted....'

The woman picked up the phone and commenced an explanation of what constituted a salary in terms of the Taxable Income Act, No 58 of 1962. Perhaps she might hear something that might be useful to herself, Heloise thought. In any event she was not going to leave without the form for which she had come.

She heard the sound of rubber-soled shoes on a shiny floor. The squeegee noise, coming nearer, was interrupted every so often by long pauses until it stopped beside her. His moccasins with small leather tassels on the front were the same as the pair Richard had brought back from the States after his last trip. She tried to decide whether he was nearer to thirty than fifty. She had always found it difficult, unless they had grey hair or wore school uniform, to tell with Indians. The woman put down the phone and immediately picked it up again saying nothing while a voice quacked out of it. She drew what looked like the rays of a setting sun on her notepad. Then she said, 'Vra vir extension drie-vyf-nul,' and put down the phone which immediately tinkled again.

'How many calls has she had?' the Indian asked. 'This is the fourth since I've been here,' Heloise answered.

He looked at his watch. 'Good. The one after this will be about her food.'

He was right.

'En luister, Toekie...die horrog met tomatiesous

nê...as dit weer met mustard...ek sal vir hom iets sê...en luister Toekie lemon meringue pie...ja...en Fanta. Baie dankie Toekie.' the woman crooned, then put down the phone.

Heloise said, 'I have to get to my work.'

'What do you want?'

'I have lost my provisional tax form and my income tax number is....'

'Ja and who told you to come here hey?' The other narrowed her eyes.

'Downstairs. At...at...I've forgotten the number. On the first floor....'

The phone rang.

'But....'

The Indian said, 'Room two-three-six. Two floors down but you had better hurry up.'

Heloise looked at him. It is the amount of melanin in their skins which reflects heat and light and prevents skin cancer and she wondered, perhaps ageing.

'Thank you. Thank you very much,' she said and she could tell by his eyes that he was nearer to fifty than thirty.

The clickety-click of her heels bounced off the walls of the passage and there was no reply to her knock on the door of room two-three-six. Its solid brass knob was almost too big for her hand and leaning her weight against it she collided, when it opened suddenly, with the man inside who waited at the counter which divided the room. In the bigger section the clerks sat at tables similar to the one that they had bought from Isabel's, when they were first married. The Chinese butcher's assistant who spoke only Afrikaans and worked next door to Isabel had sawn off the legs to the right height. Even so Richard said you could tell it wasn't really a coffee table and they had quarrelled for the first time. Not about the table but because he had told her never to let on to anyone from his office that she could speak Afrikaans.

'But I am half Afrikaans,' she had said and Richard had told her to stop it as though it was a bad habit.

'How long have you been waiting?' Heloise

asked the man with the grey and white peperkorrel hair standing beside her.

'Too long,' he said.

'What are you waiting for?' she asked. 'Paper for deferment of payment.'

'Haven't any of them asked you what you want?'

'These ones can't see me,' he nodded his head in the direction of the clerks.

Heloise stared at the fattest one. She had black hair which, although scraped tightly back into a pony-tail, was creased into narrow corrugations. Heloise heard her own voice say 'I am waiting.'

The one with big red lips and a thin face said, 'Ons is besig.'

And again Heloise heard herself say, 'We pay your wages and you must attend to us.'

The door opened and, looking around, Heloise saw the Indian who craned his neck to read the big clock on the wall above the door.

'No chance,' he said. 'In ten minutes they will be on lunch.'

'Is that the right time?' she asked. 'It is the only time,' he answered, closing the door behind him as he left.

Heloise measured, with her eye, the width of the counter. As she hoisted herself on to it the fat clerk stood up and said, 'It is not allowed to sit on government property.'

'Don't worry,' Heloise said, 'I'm coming over,' and swung her legs across.

'For why?'

'For my provisional tax form.'

'But you got to have your number.'

Then coming up to the counter and glancing towards the clock, she added, 'We don't give no forms if you don't got a number.'

'Here it is,' Heloise said, holding out the hand on which she had written the tax number that Pa had given her. As the other bent forward to look Heloise caught hold of her hair. It felt as if the woman's fatness had leaked through her skin into her hair. As Heloise twisted it around her hand she was reminded of a lecture on how to handle violent patients after surgery. She was pleased to find that her hands and

wrists were as strong as ever. She gave the pony-tail the sort of jerk that helped stiff necks and locked her elbow into her side to exert more force. There were brown threads in the irises of the eyes that stared up at her.

'I want my provisional tax form,' Heloise said.

From somewhere behind a voice shouted, 'It is too late. We are on lunch.'

The pony-tail bounced in time to the words, 'Jou hoer. Jou fokken hoer. Jou hoer.' And Heloise heard the words Pa had always hoped his little girl wouldn't pick up when she came with him to the shed to watch the cows being milked. The clerk said, 'Mevrou. Mevrou...'

'Don't you mevrou me,' Heloise answered. 'I want my provisional tax form.'

She held the palm of her hand closer to the other's face and yanked her hair again. The woman scribbled the number on a notepad, tapped the keys of the computer and handed Heloise a white form printed in blue from the pile.

Before letting go Heloise said, 'And this man wants the form for deferment of payment.'

But the man with the peperkorrel hair had gone.

Heloise's feet seemed to touch the shiny floor of the wide passage. She was reminded of the weightlessness that followed the birth of her children. She felt like one of those fluffy seed-heads that float in the air at the end of summer and she heard herself laughing. In the foyer she called 'Totsiens' to the tall man around whom people still milled. In Rissik Street she took the short-cut behind the building which the old man had said was not safe. She passed the youngsters dancing in the dust and, crossing over to the other side of the parking lot, saw that some new mrubarub players were hard at it. She fiddled in her handbag for her keys and searched for the ticket. Then putting the change that the old man handed her into her purse, she waved the white form printed in blue at him and said, 'I managed to get it.'

'Get vat?' he asked.

'My own provisional tax form,' she laughed, putting the car into gear. 

Topic van Jueluit

Da's 'n serious topic
wat thick and fast fly
hier buite.
Dis 'n topic van jueluit:
Ouens complain om te sê
jueluit is skaars

Maar om die waarheid te wietie
da's baaie ouens
wat ok nie wil try om te gaan market.
Vra net 'n mens om te sê
hoekom hy wil nie job gaan phandi:
'Sanctions my bla, jy ken van die
sanctions, jy's mos 'n mens wat papiere
lees — hoe kan jy my sulke question vra?'

Maar ek voel ane's
maak net 'n excuse
hulle exaggerate die speech van sanctions.
Ek meen 'n ou moet try....
'n outjie kan nie net sommer hope
so serious verloor

Hoor net wat sê Bra — Bonga
as ek hom by ou — Bra spirit se tavern
nou die dag kry:
Hy sê hy wil net met 'Gong' lewe

Hy vertel my hy worry nie.
En ou-Bra Zonk sê
hy sal net spien tot hy dood gaan.
Maar om te spien is mos 'n risk,
hy kan mos anytime tronk toe gaan
or up

Nou vertel my is dit nie
net wise om jueluit te gaan seek?
Want daar's nie logic
in die ding van Gong
en spien.
Of hoe Jack?

Aonageng Mogapi



Susan Mathieson

Two Poems

To Miranda

Looking in your doorway
I wonder are you there
behind the great desk
behind the great pile
of bursary application forms

Yes I begin to see you
jaunting stockily down the corridor
in your short, tight skirt

You told us tales
of sitting at road blocks.
Your daughter, only five
writhing, 'Mummy, I've got a tummy ache'
Just on cue.

Were you ever scared, we wondered.
'I believed we could never be caught —
you know we would do anything for freedom.
You should have seen me in my disguises,
sometimes dressed like a prostitute,
so many different faces.'

I find it hard to imagine you disguised
for I can see you even from behind
in these corridors.
Is it because perhaps, at last,
coming home
you have been caught?

To my Mother-in-law

You greet me, your face lined by disapproval,
softened over the years by resignation to the
limited sphere of your power

I offer you flowers from my garden
still hoping that you might love me for what I am
and cease regretting what I am not.

'So you are going home again.
Who will look after Yunus?
He will miss Hannah.'

The mother sees in her son
no comfortable well fed patriarch
('he must eat here while you are away')
still reigning supreme in her power
to satisfy his stomach.

Comfortable in your resignation
the doors are closed.
Within your walls
all appears tidy,
even the cockroaches fear
to scuttle across your floors.

But I have seen them at night
emerging from inside your cupboards.
I enter your house not as woman
but as daughter-in-law.
(Less than perfect — not even memmen
with no understanding of our ways,
does not know how to look after my son as I do)
Closed doors let in no light,
allow me to cast no shadow
On your polished floor.
No shadows to dance on your walls

Let me come in
And smear mud on your floor
In the mud I will plant the seeds of flowers
to satisfy the hidden
Spirit of love.



Those Who Stayed

Farieda Khan

Cape Town shimmered in a grey haze of December heat as I maneuvered my car through the growing traffic jam. Thank God I turn off at Woodstock. I thought, I can't stand much more of this. Reaching home, I staggered through the doorway, weighed down by supermarket purchases.

'Here, Julie, let me give you a hand with that.' Surprised, I looked up to see Dave. I smiled at him. 'I thought you were going to be busy till quite late.' We kissed briefly.

'I cut the rehearsal. After all, it's been, what? ten years since we last saw Mike.'

'Yes, it's been a long time. But I didn't expect you to care one way or the other — you didn't know Mike that well.'

'No, but I always thought he was a straight oke. Besides, he was the only one of your friends who liked my music.'

I laughed and aimed a playful blow at him. Just then, the doorbell rang. Dave opened the front door and Laura breezed in.

'Hi, you two. I hope you don't mind my coming early. My housemates are busy arguing about whose turn it is to cook tonight, so we'll probably end up having supper at midnight, if at all.'

'No, I'm glad you came over. You can help me make supper.' I said.

'Great, by the way, have you seen the piece on Mike in tonight's paper?'

'No,' replied Dave, 'I haven't had a chance to read it yet.'

'Listen to this: "Dr Michael Roberts, in self-imposed exile for the past 10 years, has left Britain to visit South Africa at the invitation of the Organisation for Community Health Workers. Dr Roberts will be addressing a number of medical and political organisations on strategies to meet the AIDS crisis in South Africa..."', and then it goes on to list his numerous medical achievements, his work for the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the Committee for Health in Southern Africa and World Health Organisation. Quite a busy boy, is our Mike.'

'I wonder whether he plans to return permanently?' Dave asked.

'I would imagine that for most exiles, that would be a very difficult decision.' I replied. 'Most of them have made new lives elsewhere and, like us back here, were caught unawares by the events of the 2 February.'

'More difficult for him than most. After all, he holds a senior position at an internationally respected institution where funding for research is never

a problem. I can't see him giving all that up for the chance to work in cash-strapped hospitals here,' said Laura.

'Always the cynic, Laura,' commented Dave before walking off to the living room to put on a jazz compact disc.

'So, how was work?' asked Laura.

'Don't ask,' I replied. I was still smarting from my latest brush with the editor of the women's magazine where I worked.

'Well, if you think you've got problems, you should try surviving university politics. The power struggles and blatant jockeying for positions is sickening. Do you remember Faldie "I'd-rather-not-get-involved-in-politics" Adams?'

'Yes,' I asked, 'Isn't he now the Chairperson of the Belhar branch of the ANC?' I asked.

'There're far too many of these born again politicians around. But what really concerns me is that their opportunism poses a danger to the political autonomy of the university.'

'Lecturing again, Laura?' said Dave, coming back to the kitchen.

'Here, have a beer and forget about work. By the way, is Thoko here with Mike?'

Laura and I exchanged significant glances.

'If I were you I wouldn't mention Thoko. Last I heard, she'd left Mike and gone to the States. I believe she's completing a Masters thesis entitled 'Feminism — Diverting the Anti-Apartheid Struggle?' And anyone less qualified to consider that issue than that manipulative little yuppie-on-the-make, I'd be hard put to think of,' Laura said.

I remained silent, remembering Thoko twelve years ago. Then nineteen, she was a singer in Dave's band. I had known both only vaguely at the time. I was completing an English Honours degree and my future plans included Mike and a career in journalism.

Mike was then a medical student in his final year. A serious, politically aware young man with clearly defined goals in life. We shared the same sense of humour and occasionally, the same bed.

'Okay, okay,' Dave was saying. 'So she's a

political late starter. So what? Not everyone was reared on 'relevant' literature and schlepped along to meetings while still a babe in arms like you were, Laura. The trouble with you is, that you're hostile and judgemental towards anyone who doesn't fit your narrow definition of a progressive thinker. And you're always on about political tolerance. What a joke!'

'Well in this case I'm right,' Laura retorted hotly. 'When she lived here, all she could think about was herself and catching a white guy because she thought that that was the shortest route to an easy life. And the irony now is, that she's so busy being 'ethnic' and exploiting the African heritage she spent a lifetime rejecting, that Dave is now quite the wrong colour.'

'God, you're so self-righteous. What makes you so certain you're always right? That everything in life can be neatly labelled 'right' or 'wrong'? I knew Thoko quite well, remember and compared to hers, your life was one of unimagined privilege. Think about that before you go into one of your condemnatory raves again.'

Before Laura could reply, I quickly said, 'That's enough, both of you. Listen, Mike will be here soon. Let's organise supper and try to calm down before he arrives.'

'Come on, let's smoke another joint, don't be such a bunch of faders,' Mike was saying, as he downed another brandy.

'Not for me thanks,' Laura replied. 'I still have some work to do, so I think I'll get going.'

'I'll give you a lift, Laura,' Dave said quickly. 'I have to pick up some cigarettes at the cafe anyway.'

Laura's face was uncharacteristically composed. It was difficult to read the expression in her eyes. We said goodbye, promising to meet later that week. When I went back inside, Dave was pouring yet another drink.

'C'mon Julie. Have one with me — for old

Farieda Khan

time's sake.'

I refused. 'I've had more than enough already and so have you.'

'Oh for Chrissake, don't be so moralistic. I can remember a time when you were a lot of fun to be with.'

I didn't bother to reply. I didn't see much point in stating the obvious, such as the fact that we were a lot older, that everything had changed...that we had changed.

'All right. So you want to be serious. Fine. Let's talk about what you're doing now, about why you left the People's Front. About why you're working for some two-bit magazine writing love stories or thinking up recipes, or whatever the hell it is you do there. Why did you leave the newspaper? You had great writing talent...you were going to write 'the great South African novel'. What happened to you, Julie?'

I had not allowed Mike to upset me up till that point. His continual harping on the past, on our regular graffiti painting raids, the time we had both been arrested for being in possession of banned literature...all that had merely irritated me. But now, his casual assumption that our shared history and above all, his position as a political exile, somehow allowed him to occupy the moral high ground, filled me with anger.

'How dare you judge me!' I burst out. 'It's easy to be critical from the vantage point of your lofty idealism. It's even easier to make pronouncements and decisions on every facet of life in South Africa from within an expatriate community cushioned from reality by time and distance. You want to know what I've done for 'the struggle'...let me tell you. My life is a series of routine and petty battles with bureaucrats which I usually lose. Every day I have to make compromises in order to survive. There is nothing glamorous or dramatic about the daily struggle that I wage to protect my spirit from finally being crushed. Yes, I'm no longer politically involved and yes, I've become disillusioned by

political rivalries and in-fighting. But you should be the last person to criticise my lack of commitment — you were the one who left, remember?'

'God, I can't believe this. You're blaming me for having left when you know damn well that I left to avoid being conscripted. You even supported my decision at the time. No, I reject your accusation. You accuse me of wallowing in nostalgia. Well, at least it's better than wallowing in the politics of victimhood.'

We, who had once known each other well, used our knowledge now to attack the other where it would hurt most. Accusations of betrayal were met with counter accusations of defeatism. Angry, bitter words widened the gulf, begun more than ten years ago. Finally, exhausted, we faced each other wordlessly.

'I'm going to make some coffee,' I said and left the room abruptly.

Dave returned a few minutes later and said, 'What's the matter with Mike? He seems to have passed out. Hey, you're crying. What's been going on here?'

'I'll be all right. We just said some things that needed to be said.' I looked away, then added, 'Dave, do you think I've allowed myself to become a victim?'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, have I just given up, allowed life to defeat me?'

'As far as I'm concerned, Mike is as much a victim as you are...as we all are. Anyway, there's nothing to be gained by point scoring. Listen, we're both tired. Let's go to bed and leave Mike to sleep it off.'

'Okay, I'll join you in a minute,' I said.

I walked through to the living room. Mike was stretched out on the sofa. I looked down at him for several minutes, then I reached over him and switched off the light.

By the time we woke the next morning, Mike had gone. 

Blessed be the Poor in the New World Order

1. *Been to the USA*

Man! We got the whole
Twen-ti-eth century
In our hand:
The whole world in our hand.

Brother,
Just look at this item.

This is a pocket-size music-machine
It can blast out the best at 35 amps....
Just imagine, 35 amps, in the pocket.

Trouble is, it's made in Hainan
And I can't join up the wires....

Still, it only cost 20 in LA,
And I'll get it going some day.

2. *La Revolutionnaire Tropicale*

I
Married
Into the Leadership
Class
Of Course

And if
That means
Nothing
In Dialectical Terms

At least
I've got a Fridge.

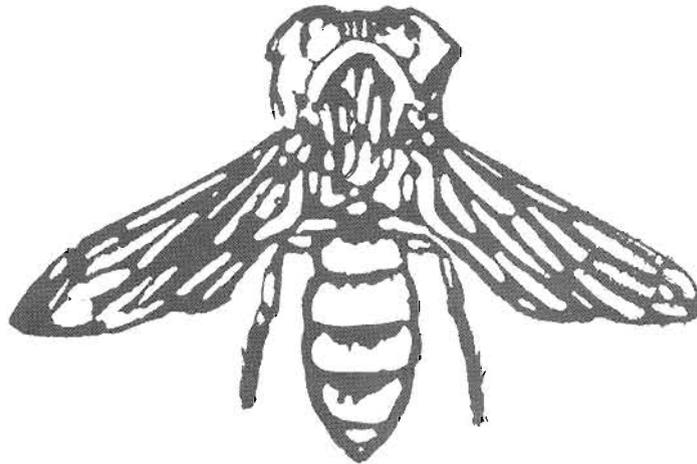
3. *Home Economics*

The Laws of History grind on.
Manifest Destiny looms on horizons:

Three-piece London suits
(the temperature is 92)
Wear double jowls and paunches,
Murmur 'Money-is-no-problem'
Rubber nosed:

The house begins to stink
The rodents' piss:
Ratbane is needed
See if the Chemist's closed.

Timothy Homes



In the Body of the Earth

I

we salute our new dawn
from trenches of gutted sunsets
in disembowelled memories
where a bullet opens a hole in the soul
of the nation & lays it bare
to the glare of a flash-bulb
in nights of interrogation
of broken heartbeats & torn tattered veins
of stains on the brain on time
where mutant scientists of torture
pry the nerves of the land loose
of the grip of reality
where howling dog sirens & the silken silence
of jacket & tie complacence
give murder licence

II

we swing down the rope of death
to the hole of lost hope
in the body of the earth
bleeding at the mouth of birth
spewing the seed of greed's disease
foreign funded in aborted investments of the
imperial thrust
to power

III

minds torched with torment
pyred in the conscience of the nation
& that is station
to hearts exploded in barren minefields
here our dreams flow in bloodstreams
where our mutilated hopes grope in gutters
hauled home from foreign horizons

IV

we drag entrails along dusty landscapes
across sands of exile blasting our dreams
to reality's reckoning
of eyeballs turned marbles
in the rubble of decayed humanity
at the feet of super-powered hostility
turned tramps to sample weaponry in camps
of alienated fraternity
to storm the fort of the worm of mortality
its walls jellied to trembling anticipation of the
FIRE

V

cannibal gullets of prison
& bleeding graves
& wounded tombs
& stunted wombs
& brains drowned in the nation's drains
& bloodfloods bashed bones mangled flesh
mud in the trenches
on the face of genocide
where the vulture dawn
spews red at the mouth
in the re-birth of destruction

VI

the glitter the dazzle the gleam of hope
in the flowers of power
sprouting out of machine-guns
of a still-born revolution
in anarchy's vision of order
in the beauty of our ruined dreams
in the splendour of our destruction

VII
 where
 deranged
 predators pestilence parasites
 are dawn's mid-wives
 to usher in posterity
 we stand on the peak
 of our mountainous allegiance
 to the struggle against despair
 IN THIS NEW AGE
 holding on to the mane of time
 riding the back of pain
 where the planes come down
 & border posts spill their innards
 & throw up the children
 of revolution

VIII
 the smile of our land
 is broken beneath
 the jackboot
 we chew the dust
 of history
 of bullets planted in bodies
 for a harvest of diseased minds
 & spit the future
 of memories turned rotten corpses
 floating to the surface
 of the present
 open our mouths & the smell shoots through
 in OPERATION ERADICATION
 of all past ill

IX
 homecomings are a flaming flag of joy
 we wave
 red as dawn
 at the mouth of birth
 awaiting the after-birth
 of our land's WELCOME
 of atrophied anger
 of wounds congealed to explosion
 of eruptions of disillusion
 of split skulls of a limpet time
 of war's horns blown at full blast to distant
 tomorrows

lesego rampolokeng
 29 january 1991



Over This Long Road

For Willie

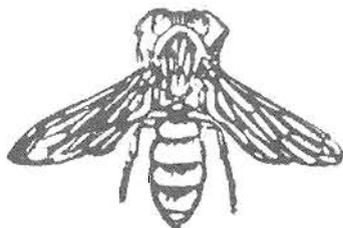
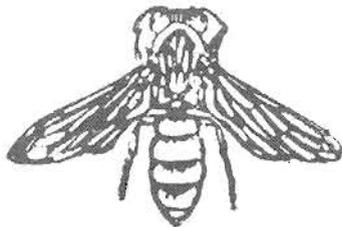
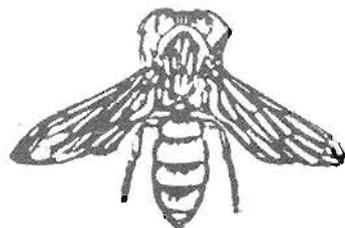
Over bones of distance
Over sometimes If feel like nobody
Over hip-hop bibles
Over backseats in history
Over Piece a paper in my hand
Over years on Parchman Farm
Over Robben Island
Over Jim Crow
Over Apartheid
Over the dues I owe
Over overcoming
Over vultures in disguise
Over poems in aches
Over piles of lore
Over 'Fessor of hard knocks Over diplomas
Over admissions
Over depths inside palms
Over handclaps
Over buddies on the run
Over polls of treachery
Over bullet teachings
Over highwayed sermons
Over nineteen years old
Over duke
Over recognition
Over going down slow
Over tin pan alley
Over agony inside shuffling feet
Over my legacy
Over yo bro
Over howdy howdy
Over testifying hands
Over Lucille's open door crying
Over BB's finger-rinsed tales
Over mercy on its knees.
Over yo bro
Over silent generations
Over sayings on ironing boards
Over directions in run down shoes
Over Alabama mushrooms
Over yo bro
Over nigger nigger
Over ropes
Over nigger nigger
Over hit the sucker again
Over closed eyes
Over thefts from death
Over vampiric images
Over nigger nigger
Over secrets kept
Over snake eyes
Over skulls
Over awakenings
Over ghosts
Over holy run down shacks
Over inventions
Over blues ponds ignored
Over graffiti on souls
Over silhouettes of hurt
Over skeletons of worry
Over nigger nigger
Over unplowed wastelands in spirits
Over lilacs
Over tears for fruits
Over black rain falling
Over overcoming yesterday
Over crossroads
Over maps of genocide in wrinkles
Over nappy years
Over suns
Over drums
Over a geography of pain
Over solos
Over choruses
Over mountain peaks
Over Amandas
Over names I named
Over chromatic callings
Over harmonicas
Over shebeen lyrics
Over unknown wanderers
Over singers

Over insanity
 Over long longings
 Over distances
 Over fences
 Over tall winds
 Over Mississippi mud
 Over strange fruits
 Over muddied wonder
 Over questioning scars
 Over who done gone
 Over where shall I go
 Over what the dream said to daybreak
 Over why saints come stepping in
 Over when I get to the city
 Over whichaways of blood callings
 Over dimensions
 Over pain covered up
 Over mosaics of women in struggle
 Over Harriet
 Over Winnie Nomzamo
 Over Nzinga
 Over tenants reaping dust
 Over laborers with nowhere to sleep
 Over women alone
 Over pallets of mercy
 Over sweat
 Over nuances
 Over pulpits
 Over eagles flying on Friday
 Over drowning on dry land
 Over a master plan
 Over tapping to Rap
 Over yo bro
 Over genius abbreviated
 Over excellence
 Over ashes
 Over improvisations
 Over the goodfoot
 Over got something for you baby
 Over big boss man
 Over bad bad whiskey
 Over cotton sacks
 Over flooded hopes
 Over sunnyland
 Over tell me how long the train been gone
 Over fat mamas
 Over passionate throbs
 Over fat mamas
 Over sweet sweet touches
 Over flags
 Over defiance
 Over clenched fists
 Over picture shows
 Over for colored signs
 Over Sowetos
 Over children
 Over futures
 Over firing squads
 Over nigger nigger
 Over the watusi
 Over languages
 Over mashed potatoes
 Over weeping at holes in the ground
 Over hooded assassins
 Over outside places
 Over lynchings
 Over names stolen
 Over cayenne pepper in eyes
 Over lynchings
 Over moral vagrancy
 Over the wind accusing
 Over hollering insides
 Over goober dust
 Over trials
 Over Nat Turner's vision
 Over alphabetic cries
 Over volcanic repercussions
 Over nicknames
 Over heads pushed down
 Over crutches of time
 Over I wanna be your personal manager baby
 Over panther changed gangs
 Over my names
 Over yeahs
 Over amens
 Over say it loud
 Over lordy lordys
 Over lord have mercys
 Over triangles of moans
 Over a place without a place

Poetry

Over my soul
Over fast talking space
Over daddy-yos
Over echoes from tightening ropes
Over nigger nigger
Over yo bro
Over saxophone heaven
Over tenor gatekeeper
Over alto usher

Sterling D. Plumpp



enjeman

salaman
salaman
 rise with yr sun
 rise with yr armies
 salaman

from all sides
the darkness of betrayal
 & her long knives
 knotted into fangs

darkness from all sides

the thin rumble
of empty minds
 from this side

 from that side
history bleeds into an avalanche
of racist scum
 what malans verwoerd
 my land into abyss of wound

from this side
the castrated whisper of pinstripe revolutionaries
& the dying fires
 of their cankered integrity

rise rise
 salaman
 & preach yr love
 of unrelenting bazooka
 rise prophet man
 & whirl me
 yr tornado
 of advancing guerilla

from all sides
 betrayal like violent deaths spewing ash
 from burning bridges
 fire & her snake of tongues
 sooner in our midst
 than love

rise salaman

too long now
 we bend & grovel
 scraping & screwing
 scratching where
 we don't itch

too long
 salaman
 too too long
 we seh so much
 to mean so little
 look for my people
 beneath the heap
 of their pleas

too too long salaman
 the fire in the machete
 rotting into a cryptic parable
 too too long

truth has fallen
 has fallen down
 so air earth water
 that is land
 life
 have become foreign

& it has become a ritual
 hacking thru this forest
 of lies betrayal & blood
 seeking freedom

worms seek other distractions
 other rots
 a rag of a name
 like filthied flags
 hanging limp & dead
 scrawled into the mud
 of the history pages
 of the caucasian usurper

while the bleeding rattle
 from the teeth of contrived smiles
 sends tremors thru tribe

worms seek other filths
 the double-grind jive of power
 too long chained to damp dungeons
 now they hurtle shuttle
 into the slaver's warm arse

rise salaman

& while i wait for you
 teach me yr love
 of unrelenting bazooka
 send me yr tornado
 of impatient guerilla

rise rise
 salaman
 is yr time

Desiree Lewis

Stinking System

A play
Gamakhulu Diniso

The stage depicts a township toilet built out of corrugated iron with a wooden seat with no bucket underneath it. This toilet is sandwiched by a jail window with bars on the right and a township house wall with a window with a torn curtain on the left. Near the edge of the stage on the left is a wire fence with papers and plastics stuck to its bottom. The fence depicts a hostel fence.

PROLOGUE:

Township voices from backstage mocking at Baba-ibaca the night-soil collector.

CROWD: Mmm..Kuyanuka Baba! Kuyanukaaa...!

Enter Baba with a bucket on his head, his shirt fastened around his neck and under his armpit. He is sweating and angry. As he reaches the stage edge he scolds the people mocking him.

BABA: Kunuka amasibenu mikhonyovo ndini! Ndisinyisa mna. Your teachers and parents are not teaching you manners, you stinking children.

He exits as he avoids stones thrown at him by school children.

SCENE ONE

Enter in a hurry a middle aged man. He quickly unfastens his trousers and sits on the wooden seat in the toilet. Just then Baba enters, shouting.

BABA: Phuma! Mkhonyovo ndini!

(The man gets out and struggles to dress)

Uyanya' pha! Your children are mocking me, throw-

ing stones at me. Instead of teaching them manners you are busy shitting! Khanim' jongeni.... Look at him — he is shitting but there is no bucket here Kanti ninjani abantu base' lokishini?

He turns to the audience.

What you do know is to shit — you are always shitting! You don't even prepare the place where you are going to shit. Look at the situation under which you are living. The township is so dirty, but...Nina, niyathanda ukuzenza o' clever ...ngaphandle nase dropini. Kodwa, ngapha ngase tweiliti elokishini. Niphenduki' phukuphuku ...bloody gemors! *(pause)* Uyaleka, uyanyibula... ndingakubetha ngale bhakete! Voetsek apha! Sphukuphuku ndini! That is why 'kunuka' in the townships. It is because of 'nina man' elderly people. You don't teach your children manners. Teach them how to wake up in the mornings, teach them how to work with their hands, teach them how to speak, teach them how to shit. Teach them how and why you put stones on top of your heads when you squat and shit in the field. *(long pause)*

Look what is happening in the township now. Everyone is shitting on top of other's shit. Parents are shitting on top of their children's shit. And now in turn these children are shitting on top of their parent's shit. *(pause)* Today you ask a child: 'Hai, nana, o kae ntato?' The answer you get: 'Ntate o ilo nyela ka tlostong'. These children are getting rotten inside. *(points to his head)* Outside, 'baphenduku' matarasi' — half-boys half-girls. Ditumphehle! Kluphema amantombazana — kuphema nabafana. Abafana baqhoka' mabruku — nabafana bazithela ngephufumi. Kuinyova-nyova yenyula njee elokishini. *(pause)* And I wonder 'ukuthi' what do you

call such a system, you elderly people? (*pause and listen*) What...! Do you call it 'Siyanjalo system'? Hej musani ukudlala nina maan.... Do you know what your children call this system? They call it 'Thina Siyainyova'. And 'bainyova nikhona'...right in front of your eyes. And if you don't stand up you elderly people...right now! Teach these children 'ukuinyova', teach them about their kings, leaders and heroes, teach them who is their real enemy. Ndifungu tata, if you don't teach them these things, ndijyanixelela, bazoinyova kuni and smear you with their shit. Shit! ndaze ndaphathwa ngamakaka ngenxa yendaba zenu nabantwana benu.

He prepares to shit in the toilet by putting the bucket under the seat. He begins to shit hard, struggling he exclaims:

Shit! it is even difficult to shit in the township, because of this 'stinking system'.

After shitting, he looks around for a piece of paper to wipe himself with and finding nothing, he angrily says:

Look, just take a good look. When you are in need of them, in times of emergency, they are not there...*Die Burger — Beeld, Die Volksblad — Vaderland, Vereeniging and Vanderbijlpark News, The Citizen* — that tell shit. These useless newspapers, where will I get them, put them where they belong. Right in here! *He points at the bucket. He searches his pockets for a piece of paper. He finds something that he slowly pulls out.*

Ha...haaa! My Dompas! You bloody dompas! Ndikufumene namhlanje! Ha... haaa! (*stops abruptly, his expression suddenly hardens*) People died because of you in Sharpeville. (*turns it around*)

Look at it...cover — as brown as 'impundu zethu'. Now you go where you belong. (*pages and reads from it*) 'WARNING: It is an offence for any person other than the owner to wipe himself with the pages of this book.' Hamba Dompas!

He tears the pages and wipes himself with them. After that he dresses and goes around the stage chasing the shit collecting lorry. He runs whistling. He is collecting shit while speaking:

Running from one street to the other with a bucket on my head sweating blood (*he wipes his sweat*) entering one toilet after the other collecting shit and piss and coughing blood (*he coughs painfully*) chasing the lorry from one section to the other section breathing like a dog.

He runs in all directions collecting shit. At a certain point he stops and recites:

In Sharpeville
 ndibone amadoda — men
 staggering on Saturday
 drunk — matahwa!
 ndabona mna
 same men on Sunday
 swaying to the rhythm
 of their hymn books
 — amadodana asewesili!
 ndabona
 in Sharpeville — abesifazani
 women on Saturday
 in uniforms of societies and stokvels
 exchanging coins and gossip
 — motjhaelano!
 ndabona
 on Sunday same women
 wearing garments of various colours
 worshipping the priest
 others making love to 'muruti'
 — abazalwane!
 ndahthuka umandibona
 right in Sharpeville
 when fathers making love to their own daughters
 sis! ibolile le' township
 boys are lost
 detained and dead
 refused and refugees
 (*pause*)

babies are aborted and
thrown into buckets

phu! iyanuka lekasi...gaa!

He runs around the stage and at a certain point trips against a stone and falls letting the bucket topple. He lays on the ground until the pain has eased, then crawls to the bucket and leans against it still sitting on the ground. In pain:

Abantu bayawa....
People are falling in the township.
Educated and non-educated people.
Old people and young people.
Leaders in the struggle,
and collaborators in the system.

As long as you are living in the township,
You fall right into the sharp claws of the Security
Branch.
They kill you or they use you.
You fall between the grinding jaws of the Stinking
System.
They brain wash you or they crash you.
(He regains his strength and stands half-way up)
Sharpeville people — rise up!
Sharpeville people — stand up!
You won in the 60s — No pass!
You won in the 80s — No rent!
Township people stand up now!
Fight against this Stinking System.
Otherwise....

Takes the bucket and dashes out

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO

Songs from back stage:

eDube hostel
Zibanxa zodwa

Mcwi s'true
My ma hoor my
(song continues until he appears)

Enters carrying a plastic bucket. He is wearing trousers, bare-footed and bare-chested with a hat on his head. He is still singing as he kneels next to a wire fence to drink from the bucket. The bottom of the bucket exposes the following words: BANTU EDUCATION.

While drinking he stops suddenly and begins to vomit. He is leaning against the fence. He comments about the stuff:

Gaaa...! This stuff is dangerous.

He sees a woman passing by and whistles at her.

Helloo...darling! Dhodlo-maifholozo...sihlala-sa-
magwenya-gwinyeni! Dictation standard two!
Amadikhazi aselokishini andithanda tu! Many years
ago — amamenemene ayeza ngoku! *(pause)*
Angenayo ibaskete...uyaya emakete.
Anganawo amaphiko...uyabapa naye.
Anganayo inkomo...uyaidla inyama.
Ngisho naye angenayo itombi...uyaidla iny...*(listens)*
Aga! foetsek nawe..skebereshe ndini.
Fokof sbombo sakho!
Undijonge kakuhle mna, andihlali elokishini.
Ndihlale Sharpeville hostel.
Not Dube Hostel.
Andihisiso isibanxa.
Hai, uyazi abafazi base lokishini. They think they
are clever. They refuse to be married 'isithembu' —
polygamy. And that is why they are prostitutes.
They sleep with this man, and that man, and that
man again. And one round is enough...they get wet
quickly...bapanshile. These women think they are
men. That is why they smoke cigarettes drink liquor
and wear trousers. They are having men's diseases.
I once slept with a drinking woman, and I got what
I asked for. Shoo...when she woke up in the morn-
ing, she smelt double...ngapha.

*Points in the mouth, mumbles 'Amasimba'
And 'ngapha'.*

*Points under between the legs, mumbles —
Ponyonyo.*

Some women are fools, fooled by men who want to exploit them. They must wake up.

He collects the bucket and exits, only to come back.

SCENE THREE

Enters dressed only in a shirt and hat and carrying another bucket and a spout that he hangs next to the toilet. He pours the contents from the bucket into the spout. On the bottom of the bucket is written: CHRISTIANITY

He spouts himself then rushes to sit on the wooden seat and shits. He comes out of the toilet dizzy. He appears to be drunk.

Yesis, this stuff is poisonous. If township people are using this liquor, they are killing themselves. Committing slow suicide. *(pause)* I wonder whether you know, the more you use this stuff, it's just like drinking liquor, that means, the more you drink liquor, the more your brain shrinks, whether you drink occasionally or regularly. Whether you drink when you have eaten or not. Whether it is spirits or brandy. A glass of wine or a glass of beer or a carton of sorgum beer. Be it at a shebeen, party, stoki, tavern or in the toilet, or at home. Liquor is dangerous. Sharpeville is becoming Hoboville. You see one township — you have seen them all.

He collects the spout and bucket and exits.

SCENE FOUR

He enters with a towel around his waist and a hat on his head. He begins to shower whistling a happy tune.

Yirrr...I nearly showered with a hat on my head. The township stench nearly choked me, as it has choked township men. Have you seen them —

amadoda aselokishini? Yirrr...they are finished ...bapanshile. They have been finished by brandy and spirits. That is why their Point 45s azisavuki. And they are having women's diseases. That is why they are using...*(Demonstrates perfume spray)*. They have lost their muscles, their nerves. They behave like women. They are stupid...stupidified by their women. Umabethi bayathetha...bathetha umsuzo njee. *(He showers)*

Hei, nina abantu baselokishini...township people, do you know that when you buy a bottle of beer, you are contributing to SADF to buy bullets, so that they can shoot your children? Now, drinking a glass of liquor, is like drinking a glass of your child's blood, a glass of your sister's blood.

This stinking system is using the liquor money, to support schools of their crippled white children, whereas your intelligent children, are loitering the dirty streets during the day and at night they become 'Majete' and 'makabasa' gangsters. And they terrorise you!

He dries himself with a towel.

When you have seen one township, you have seen them all. Townships are independent hostels.

Dim until darkness.

SCENE FIVE

When lights come on, he is dressed as in scene one and carrying a bucket. And he says:

White people eat black people's shit. White people drink black people's piss. This Stinking System, eats your shit — your strength...at the Firms. Drinks your piss — your sweat...in the Offices. Wee...Mlambo, Wee Tambo, in Sharpeville, this Stinking System, changed the bucket system and replaced it with sewerage system. Removed the black buckets and installed the white buckets, but the toilets are the same old ones, and...the seats are still facing the same direction. 

The Viability of Grassroots Cultural Organisations

Junaid Ahmed

Introduction

A plane was flying over the Drakensberg mountains, circling for hours. The passengers were getting restless. Finally, the pilot announces in a strong, reassuring voice — ‘ladies and gentlemen, I have some good news and some bad news — the good news is that we are two hours ahead of schedule. The bad news is that we are lost’.

One day the snake was riding his horse coiled up, as was his fashion, in the saddle. As he came down the road he met the toad walking by the roadside.

‘Excuse me, sir’ said the toad, ‘but that is not the way to ride a horse.’

‘Really? Can you show me the right way, then?’ asked the snake.

‘With pleasure, if you will be good enough to step down a moment,’ said toad.

The snake slid down the horse and the toad jumped with alacrity into the saddle, sat bolt upright and galloped most elegantly up and down the road. ‘That’s how to ride a horse,’ he said at the end of his excellent demonstration. ‘Very good, very good indeed. You may now step down,’ said snake.

The toad jumped down and the snake slid up the side of his horse’s back into the saddle and coiled himself up as ever before. Then he said to the toad ‘Knowing is good, but having is better. What good does fine horsemanship do to a fellow without a horse?’ And he rode away in his accustomed manner.



These two anecdotes present some dilemma’s or problems facing grassroots cultural organisations. We could spend hours extending, analysing and discovering new significances in these anecdotes, but for the purpose of our discussion, I will confine my analysis as to how it relates to our work as cultural organisations and practitioners within the progressive movement. The first anecdote proba-

bly implies that our work is going farther and farther, but bereft of a sense of direction. The second story would suggest (the obvious being one’s status in a class society) the relationship between the acquisition of skills to the availability of scope for their practice. The stories therefore bring into sharp focus our problems regarding skills training and resources, planning and a collectively shared national vision regarding the role of cultural work in South Africa. I would like to address these and other issues and make some suggestions or recommendations for discussions. I hope this will lead to a good grasp of the viability of grassroots cultural organisations, with particular reference to funding costs and impact.

Funding Fatigue: International Funding for Grassroots Cultural Organisations

Over the past months, it has become evident that foreign funding, particularly for cultural projects,

has begun tapering off as the international community perceives the emergence of a future democratic South Africa on the horizon. They reason that time has come to divert funding to other 'crucial' areas of the world, which in many instances spells Eastern Europe. Others quite boldly state that they are ravished by the 'funding fatigue flu':- Africa is a 'bottomless pit' and dependency never seems to stop. In some cases, withdrawal of funding may be based on an assessment that the financial aid given has failed to recolonise the disadvantaged. Other funders have stopped aid once their self-serving interests have been satisfied.

Undeniably the withdrawal and/or the reduction of funding has caused severe harm to organisations and alternative newspapers who have had to re-trench staff and make posts redundant.

However, two vitally important issues emerge from this:

Firstly, withdrawal or reduction of foreign funding has brought into sharp focus our past and present dependence on foreign donors, and our inability to have had strategies in place when such a situation arose. There is now a growing understanding that dependency can actually be a causal factor for underdevelopment.

Secondly, the present situation forces us to re-evaluate, re-define, re-structure and re-think our viability as grassroots cultural organisations. If we do not, we are bound to perish.

Attempting to Reconstruct

However emotionally the local cultural community reacts to foreign funding 'drying up' it is imperative to make bold moves as grassroots organisations in order to survive, and to honestly reflect, with the wisdom of hindsight, on some of our past actions. Specifically it is important to identify that which weakened us.

In my view the two main drawbacks have been firstly, a lack of a national vision and the absence of a forum for skills training. I will deal with these

in turn. With regard to the first, grassroots cultural organisations can attest to the valuable work done over the past years, and attempt to defend their programmes and projects, particularly in reference to cultural work done in disadvantaged communities. While in many cases this is true, the fact that much of the work has been done in isolated pockets, with unnecessary duplication, lack of communication and exchange of information have tended to dilute the work of organisations.

There has been no feeding into a national vision, and as a result of such absence, it becomes extremely difficult to assess and monitor our progress. Ideological differences between cultural organisations (in some cases offices housed in the same street) has led to situations where, whilst involved in similar work, there has been extreme reluctance to work together. In the end, this leads to unnecessary duplication of work, finance and resources. Who is the 'recipient' of this unfortunate scenario? Such actions only reinforces the grave and very real possibility that many of the disadvantaged in our society will be the least able to benefit from our projects and programmes.

Concerning skills training a forum that sets out a national strategy would have to consider, as immediate and urgent, problems related to skills training. It is evident that organisations need to train people in a more vigorous and formalized way — in order to redress some of the imbalances caused by apartheid in our society. The tendency has been to conduct, what I term, the 'wham-bam, thank you comrades' workshops. Many workshops, especially those geared towards empowerment and skills training, have oftentimes been devoid of consistent planning. It is not enough to conduct workshops on an ad-hoc basis, choosing areas at random, not establishing criterial objectives for workshops, the basis for selection of participants and other apparently minor but crucial aspects of planning and implementation. Skills training has to carry with it a long term vision.

I would like to identify two important areas for skills training and the manner in which this can be

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pursued at a national level. There is one crucial area in which cultural work lacks sufficient expertise, namely arts administration. Good arts administration is crucial to the efficient running of an organisation. Management of cultural institutions can be creative and have a positive impact on the quality of cultural life in this country.

Arts administration encompass managerial and financial skill, knowledge of pertinent artistic disciplines, awareness of community dynamics and sensitivity to the artistic process. Cultural organisations have a responsibility to provide the conditions for nurturing the development of such a person, especially through practical experience.

As arts administration is essential to all organisations, this can perhaps form the basis of a unique funding proposal by all organisations to establish a formalised centre for the training of arts administrators. Future civil personnel for a democratic South Africa are presently being trained — why can't this apply to the arts? As an initial phase, we can motivate for at least five persons from regions to attend a centralized arts administration course for the duration of 1 year to 18 months. This would imply an initial process of research, locating a venue, drawing up criteria for selection, identifying prospective lecturers, drawing up budget proposals etc. If we agree on the principle, we can later sort out the practicalities/mechanism for such a process.

A prospective syllabus for arts administrators will encompass some, or most, of the following:

1. Basic theory regarding specific aspects of management, planning and programme development. Marketing and publicity.
2. Courses in arts administration relating to the performance and visual arts, including museums,

galleries, venues etc.

3. Policy, including aesthetic, economical and political questions that define the responsibility of the role of arts administrator.

4. Support structure for the arts. This will encompass studies in the diverse sources of public and private financial, administrative and logistical support for the arts. This would include practical experience in fund-raising, research and proposal writing.

5. Arts and the Media. This will involve training in how to adapt with existing resources and also advancing knowledge regarding use of TV, radio and print media.

It will also include examining the economic, artistic and policy implications raised by these developments.

6. Law and the Arts. Courses should cover copyright law, trademark, misappropriation, role of trustees or board of directors, labour relations, contracts with authors, composers, publishers, record companies, singers, performance rights, dancers, actors, directors, music groups, venue owners and staff.

7. Field research. This area will deal with an in depth study of specific problems relating to parastatals and development of new models

in arts management.

8. Marketing. This will focus on audience development, arts markets and strategies, promoting the arts, communication strategies, policy issues, marketing for funding sources, self sustenance and self-reliance.

9. Internship programmes located within grassroots organisations.

This formalised arts training centre can also operate a correspondence programme, catering for workers who might not have the privilege to study fulltime.

**The
withdrawal of
foreign
funding has
brought into
sharp focus
our
dependence
on foreign
donors**



COURTESY OF NEWTOWN GALLERIES

Ivory Towers • Johnathan Comerford • Linocut

The establishment of a national Translation Centre is another consideration for grassroots organisations with regard to skills training — dedicated to encouraging, stimulating, documenting and publishing in the national languages.

Beyond the skills training programme for translators, the Translation Centre should also promote the development of literary translation and encourage the development of new translations by means of awards or incentives — made annually for outstanding translations. In addition the centre should

publish information leaflets in co-operation with other organisations and act as consultants for regional and national organisations involved in translation programmes.

Sustainable Development

In relation to the change in the situation with regard to funding, grassroots cultural organisations should investigate the concept of sustainable development

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when implementing national, regional or local cultural projects. Continuation with the perception that organisations can forever rely on donors with unlimited funding, have no concept of independence from the donor, or believe that a future democratic government will provide money, are in essence going to limit projects in scope and effectiveness. Creative ways and means have to be examined in which projects and programmes are not determined by such factors. It is in this regard that strategies that promote self-reliance and self-sufficiency must be seriously considered.

I would like to emphasize the central role of grassroots communities in helping achieve sustainable development. It is not often that communities play an integral role in the planning process of projects and programmes initiated by grassroots cultural organisations. The projects which are 'geared' for grassroots communities are, at the best of times, initiated, planned and executed with little or no consultation with members of that particular community.

However if our work, as grassroots cultural organisations is to help develop a community, then that process of organisation must enable communities to fully participate in, or control, those programmes and projects. A group of community leaders, who are involved at some level in projects (advisory committees or other responsible designations) will do its utmost to sustain grassroots cultural programmes. They can form a powerful group to agitate for resources, including outside funding and self-funding. Such truly grassroots interaction based on genuine collaboration, would be acknowledged by communities as equally important as the project. This would ensure that, between the community and the cultural organisation, creative ways and means could be achieved in helping to sustain projects. The whole exercise is negated, however, if organisations involved in this process start to claim credit on the backs of community involvement merely to boost popularity and influence, and see it as a viable source to procure more funding. But this need not arise if organisations give quality

to the process of maximising the participation potential of communities.

Reinventing the Wheel

It is imperative that grassroots cultural organisations implement programmes that have been thoroughly researched. Very often, the projects we initiate have been successfully implemented elsewhere, including Africa, Asia, Latin America. However, we take the painfully long process of facilitating programmes without the benefit of having examined and investigated the success/failure/recommendations of similar work done beyond the borders of South Africa. A natural consequence of this is that we would then spend more money, time and other resources on such projects. I would like to briefly examine the Cuban example to strengthen my argument. When the Cuban Ministry of Culture was formed, it prioritised the following on a national scale, and accordingly implemented a programme that was extremely successful. It included the following:

- the development of the material and technical basis for art.
- addressed problems concerning material resources and financing.
- instituted programmes in technological development.
- created arts schools.
- publicised cultural work, including the promotion and propagation of culture.
- initiated socio-cultural centres.

The immediate objectives included a literary and literacy campaign, extension of primary and secondary education networks in rural areas, created spaces for the development of ballet schools, The National Orchestra, The National Folklore Group, The National Dance Group of Cuba. The Cuban Writers Union, The National School of Art etc. It **was not creating artists, but creating the neces-**

sary conditions so that artists may emerge — thereby ensuring that talent was not frustrated or smothered. It further encouraged and supported national festivals and carnivals, including the Festival of Latin American Cinema, Havana Theatre Festival, Books Fairs, Dance Festivals and an International Music Festival.

Whilst obviously cultural organisations in South Africa cannot attempt such ventures on a grand scale (the absence of a Ministry of Culture sympathetic to democratic ideas being one inhibiting factor) — we can certainly develop on some of the ideas and projects. It would require that grassroots cultural organisations need to work in a much more co-operative manner with each other, whilst still retaining their autonomy and independence. Imagine a South African Book Fair, Festivals in Theatre, Music, Dance, Film — developing integrated arts centres, neighbourhood museums, research centres and a host of others. The benefits are incredible — creating a vibrant, progressive national culture in all its diversity, sharing tasks and cost, creating employment, understanding one another in our commonalities and differences, mounting an effective counter-culture to racism and sexism, not being allowed to become absorbed in the mainstream — the list goes on.

Being informed by what is happening in the world, and together with our own unique, impressive range of projects, performance and visual artists, grassroots cultural organisations can rightfully assert themselves as a powerful force. Working together with a national vision will not dilute, divert or dissipate us as organisations — but rather enrich the cultural life in this country. Such dynamism would undoubtedly impact on international or national funders. But if we continue to be cocooned in our own organisations, being protective and defensive, project ourselves as cultural commissars, allow ourselves to be dictated to by politicians, fearful of losing, at the best times, positions of power, fearful to take bold and imaginative steps into the unknown, we must begin to question the necessity to survive as grassroots cultural forma-

tions. How can we begin to facilitate the development of all viable artistic forms, based on South African cultural history and resources if we remain narrow-minded, self-serving and myopic?

Re-examining Funding

Earlier in my paper, I examined 'funding fatigue'. The scenario might look bleak, but there is still the presence of some funders who are committing themselves to supporting grassroots cultural projects, others are adopting a 'wait and see' stance. There has been occasions where funders became unhappy regarding the way money has been spent — not consistent with budget proposals, inadequate report-backs etc. It seems that we need to become more decisive about how we relate to funders. As points for discussion, I would propose we consider the following:

Firstly, we must move away from a situation that might have any implication that a group of individuals or organisations want to control or set up as the clearing house for funding.

Secondly, that Non-Governmental Organisations in South Africa be relieved of the task of assessing cultural projects. In its place there should be a representative national cultural structure that interacts with funders regarding the funding of cultural programmes. This may not apply to organisations who seek funding from other sources beyond local NGOs. This national structure would be drawn from representative regional committees, whose task could include the following:

1. Drawing up regional budgets addressing crucial areas of needs.
2. Assisting in the formulation of project proposals.
3. Examining funders involvement in projects.
4. Ensuring community development cultural projects have community credibility.
5. Encourage moving away from narrow project focus to projects with long term vision.

Junaid Ahmed

6. Impression on funding in an area over extended periods.
7. Continually develop association with funders and ensure proper control of funds — reviewing and assessing projects.
8. Ensuring that funding is not a complete dependency — but that a measure of self-reliance and self-sufficiency is built in.
9. Assessing priorities for cultural funding.
10. Ensuring equitable distribution of resources, especially with regards to rural development.

It is important that funds should not be disbursed according to claims as to how big we are on paper (large membership for instance). It should rather be based on the quality of our work and cultural vision.

In summary I am suggesting that we seriously discuss the following that will have an impact on our funding strategies:

One, the establishment of a National Cultural Forum. This must be a truly representative forum drawn from the democratic movement to initially consider a national cultural strategy for the short and long term. Its primary concerns should address crucial areas of training, projects, arts administration, funding, networking, resources and recommend strategies and programmes to implement on a national level. The scope, task and nature of such a forum can later change or be extended, depending on the workability or success of its limited life span. Such a forum can, in some measure, provide a sense of direction for the overall cultural vision in this country.

This forum might initially experience problems because of different political tendencies and past hardened suspicions of each other — but in working through together such problems, we can only enrich ourselves rather than remaining aloof. Where there is no acknowledgment of diversity there will always be disunity.

Two, the provision of skills training. I want to again emphasise the importance of skills training as we move towards a democratic South Africa. Let me illustrate this point with an example: If

tomorrow, by some magic miracle, we wake up in a truly liberated South Africa, how many of us within the democratic cultural movement will be adequately skilled to fill positions in institutions like the present performing arts councils from management to technicians? How many would qualify to become museum curators? How many would be competent to administer arts galleries? The list goes on.

In acknowledgment of this, grassroots cultural organisations, through co-ordination, networking and communicating with each other, should devise long term planning to address these crucial issues regarding skills training.

I have in my paper given two examples of urgent areas of skills training (Arts Administration and Translation Centres) and proposed structures and content. Let us examine other areas and immediately implement programmes to this end.

Three, funding. The viability of regional/national cultural funding committees, and strategies to raise funds both internationally and nationally must be examined.

Perhaps, as a start, we can convene a seminar on development which could investigate or address the following:

1. Gather theoretical and practical knowledge on the cultural dimension of development.
2. Draw attention to donor responsible for development projects as to the importance of the cultural dimension.
3. Develop new thinking and ideas on the subject.
4. Strategies that would contribute to the development of progressive culture.

Fourthly, sustainable development. I have mentioned the crucial role of communities in this regard. What other mechanisms can we employ to lessen dependency on donors and create avenues of self-reliance and self-sufficiency?

How can we involve industry and local business in assisting us with regards to sustainable development?

In the fifth instance, we should examine ways in which some successful policies and programmes have been implemented in other countries. This can enhance and add impetus to cultural work in South Africa. In this regard I briefly mentioned the Cuban cultural experience.

In the sixth place, how do different grassroots cultural formations organise together to lobby resources, become forums for addressing pertinent cultural issues or policies and collectively enrich cultural life in South Africa?

Seventhly, addressing our relationship with the

government and its cultural parastatals.

Finally, prioritising short and long term goals.

These are some issues that needs intense discussion and active, creative implementation. This will undoubtedly have an impact on the viability of cultural organisations, and hopefully very soon, the toad will be riding the horse, with the snake 'safety belted' in the back seat. 

This presentation was made at the Kagiso Trust Seminar on Culture and Development, Johannesburg Hotel, 15 February 1992.

Secrecy

Like it or not mtanami
 A secret is not permanent
 It started with a kiss
 In the late eighties
 When a grey haired man from exile
 SAM NJOMO
 With honour and respect
 Kneeling down at the Namibian Airport
 Kisses his real mama
 Who was away from him for so many years
 As there is no space and place
 For honourable people on this planet.

The spirit is not the uniform
 And the spirit is not the uniform too, sometimes
 As the man 'inside the rock' in Cape Town
 GREGORY ROCKMAN
 Is informing the whole world
 'My spirit is with the oppressed people
 While my uniform is supporting the oppressing Hulumeni,
 People! take care of the variation between the uniform
 And the spirit, and think of the motive behind'
 In your failure, ask the man inside the rock
 A secret is not permanent.

Poetry



Here comes a Sunday
 To be honoured of the double one
 Of the second moon of the early nineties
 When a cell in prison is as hungry as a lion
 While a giant UMAFRIKA quits
 With a pride next to his soft partner
 Greeting his followers:
 'Comrades! Countrymen! I greet you all in the name of peace
 I stand here not as a prophet,
 But as a humble servant for you, the people. I place
 the remaining years of my life in your hands'
 Between the devil and the deep blue sea
 A secret is not permanent.



A man on top of the hillock
 Is telling Chico to halt seeking for Manelo
 While Ray Phiri is telling the people
 'There is trouble in the land of plenty'
 Asking them too, 'Wobani abakhathazi umoya wethu'
 When Mhlabuzima Maphumelo sings when he struggles
 And struggles when he sings
 While the tummies of Pinetown prison cells
 Are satisfied with the Deputy Minister of the Eastern
 Government in murder charges
 A secret is not permanent.



In a building as high as mount Olympus
 In Marianhill
 UMAFRIKA newspaper is opening
 Eyes and minds of Africans
 Disembodying secrets of both
 Hit squads camping at Vlakplaas
 And Mkhuze camp
 While the civil servants tell their bosses
 'All animals are equal'
 When Security Guards with their placards
 Informing Adriaan Vlok
 'Scrap Security Officers Act NOW!'
 While De Klerk is standing firm on the policy
 'Divide and rule' by partial lifting
 The State of Emergency, and so resembles
 An angel in connection with the hit squads, while not
 'Kuyabhina mzala, ngama 90s lawa konke

Sikuqondisa ngemashi'
 When domestic workers
 Informing Eli Lou 'We demand a living wage'
 A secret is not permanent.

Even Wiseman across Tugela river is my eyewitness
 Let him cross the Tugela river westerly
 To the basis of Contralesa
 While Mama Afrika, Miriam Makeba
 Is returning to her Mama Afrika
 Kneeling to her Mama's grave
 'Mama, I'm back to you real Mama
 From Step-mama'
 A secret is not permanent.

'Xelani ndive makwedini'
 When L. Sebe's voice is trembling down stairs
 While the velocity of a coup is accelerated
 At the rate of two metres an hour
 When L. Mangope is reading a placard
 'When poverty knocks at the door, love
 Flies out the window'
 Inkulu lendaba madoda
 A secret is not permanent.

When more than a Clergyman
 Is artificially accused of natural
 Love sensation by the men
 In the same box
 'I'm part and parcel of nature
 I can't control myself, only the Lord
 Who controls nature'
 While there is a saying
 'Listen to what a man says
 Not to what he does'
 A secret is no more permanent.

When Roger Milla simultaneously with Cameroon
 Is standing perpendicularly and vigorously
 On top of the Kilimanjaro Mountain
 With the black African badge
 On his powerful shoulders

To disclose the concealed
 Black skills in the World Cup
 Where Secrecy football club
 Is devastated five-nil
 By Truth United Brothers football club
 In Pretoria Stadium last night
 A secret is not permanent.

There is a man above the skies
 With ancestors next to him
 Who can see in the darkness
 Inside the locked rooms
 Inside the locked wardrobe
 Inside our hostile minds
 Inside our cruel hearts
 Inside their misleading tongues
 A secret demises.

Shoba Mthalane



A Brief Visibility

Gavin du Plessis

‘**N**og ’n doppie Oom Klippie,’ the hefty barman cordially offered the elderly man another drink.

‘Ja seker Bertus.’

It was a day like most other days. At five in the afternoon. Oom Petrus van Staden would arrive at his ‘local’ for two single brandies before returning home. Tant Truia didn’t mind this small indulgence — Oom Petrus was a moderate drinker and a man of frugal habits.

Almost everyone in the neighbourhood who knew old Petrus van Staden, affectionately referred to him as ‘Oom Klippie’, a nickname stemming from his taste for Klipdrif Brandy.

Patrons frequenting the particular Cape Town Northern suburbs hotel pub that Oom Klippie had chosen as his daily watering hole, even respected the bar stool on which he regularly sat silently sipping his late afternoon tot.

Here he would reflect on former years as a railways fitter and turner during the 1940s in Johannesburg. ‘Where are your thoughts wondering today Oom?’ Bertus the barman would occasionally ask Oom Klippie.

‘Ag Bertus, when one gets old like me — you know how it is...,’ his sentence would trail off preferring to remain evasive. The barman sensed instinctively that he had to respect this chosen distance.

Petrus van Staden had always been quiet by nature and did not involve himself in the quarrels and arguments so typical of habitual drinkers. In fact he paid very little attention to the others.

Not far from where he sat, a heated debate was taking place with some new arrivals at the pub.

‘We’ll fuck up these Kaffirs, I’m telling you,’ blurted a podgy young man in a green sleeveless vest with ‘Love/Hate’ tattooed on his upper right arm.

‘Ja, that’s what we learnt to do in Angola alright, you check,’ replied his acne faced friend.

‘Fok the new South Africa — I’m not having a Hotnot or Kaffir living next door to me and that’s it. Bly blank my land,’ said the podgy one.

‘Hey Nols, I’m not a racist, ek sê, I just hate the bastards,’ replied the acne face followed by roars of laughter.

‘And now the whole donnerse spul, liberals, commies, kafferboeties en God weet wat nog, are free, we’ll see. One must just walk in here today — ooh fok,’ said Nols.

All the while Oom Petrus had been listening to the tirade of these bigots

whose prejudice bordered on the pathological. It was becoming difficult for him to contain himself, the unbannings of the previous months and the present moment unleashed years of self-oppressed rage and humiliation.

'Hey boetas how old are you?,' he suddenly turned around questioning the two young men.

'I'm twenty-two Oom,' said the podgy one answering to the name of Nols.

'And you?'

'Twenty-five. Waarom vra Oom dan?' asked the acne face.

'I was wondering whether you know what you're talking about,' Oom

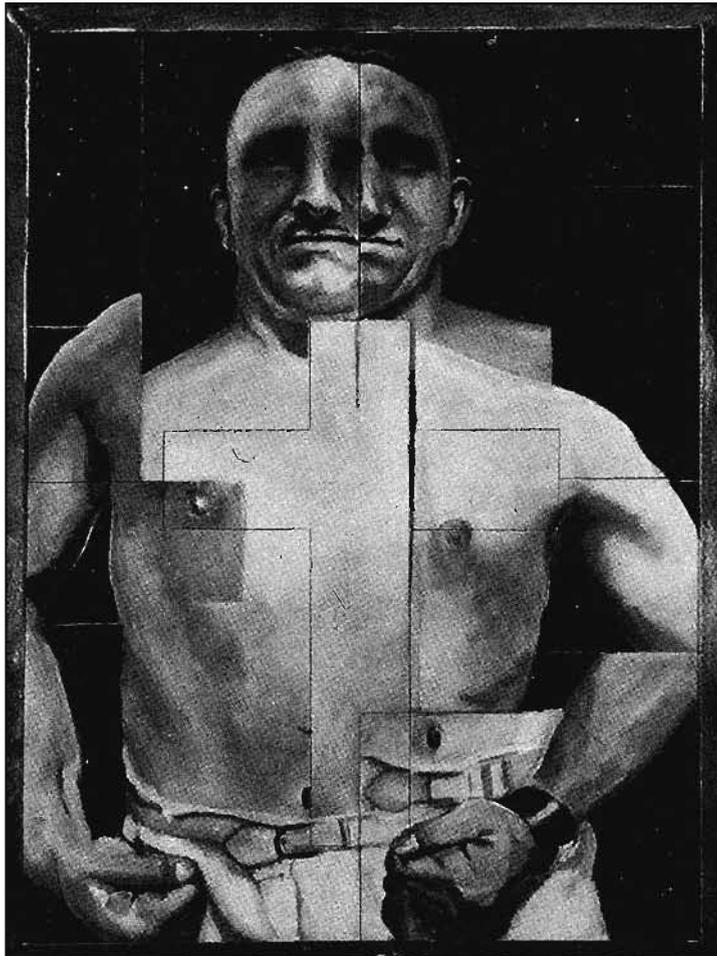
Petrus spoke firmly and deliberately, it was difficult for him to contain himself. Something had exploded inside him after all these decades of being in the shadows.

'Hoe bedoel Oom dan nou?' asked Nols.

'As I've just said — I'm wondering whether you know just what you're talking about, because I think you don't.'

'What are you trying to tune us, ek sê — are you some kind of outydse Sap or what?' Nols shot back.

'If you chaps would care to listen to me I'll give you the answer to that one,' Oom Petrus said and walked over to their table and seated himself beside



the acne face.

Bertus looked at Xola, the waiter cum cleaner in a puzzled manner. Why this sudden change in the usually uncommunicative Oom Klippie? Xola faintly smiled and gave the old man a knowing glance.

Oom Petrus looked Nols straight in the eye, 'I'm very disappointed in the attitude of young men like you. Do you boys think that hatred of another human being is the answer to a peaceful future?'

Nols looked at his friend and grinned.

Oom Petrus was becoming visibly more agitated, 'No, no, come on — just

answer my question.'

'We don't see them as human beings Oom,' said Acne Face.

Oom Petrus sat pensively for a while, then spoke, 'More than a century later and the Afrikaner, or at least, too many of our people haven't changed one bit.'

'Jissis man can't Oom see they're selling us out, giving away our land,' said Nols.

'Afrikaners are part of this land, white, brown or black — all are Afrikaners, the word Afrikaner to me implies African, children of Africa if you wish,' Oom Petrus replied.

Gavin du Plessis

Nols who was quite intoxicated and more aggressive than Acne Face began to question Oom Petrus. 'Just where do you stand when it comes to our survival, our future and don't compare me with a Kaffir please. What's your trip hey, China?'

Oom Petrus did not reply.

'Nols die ou bal praat kak man, bogger hom ek sê.' advised Acne Face.

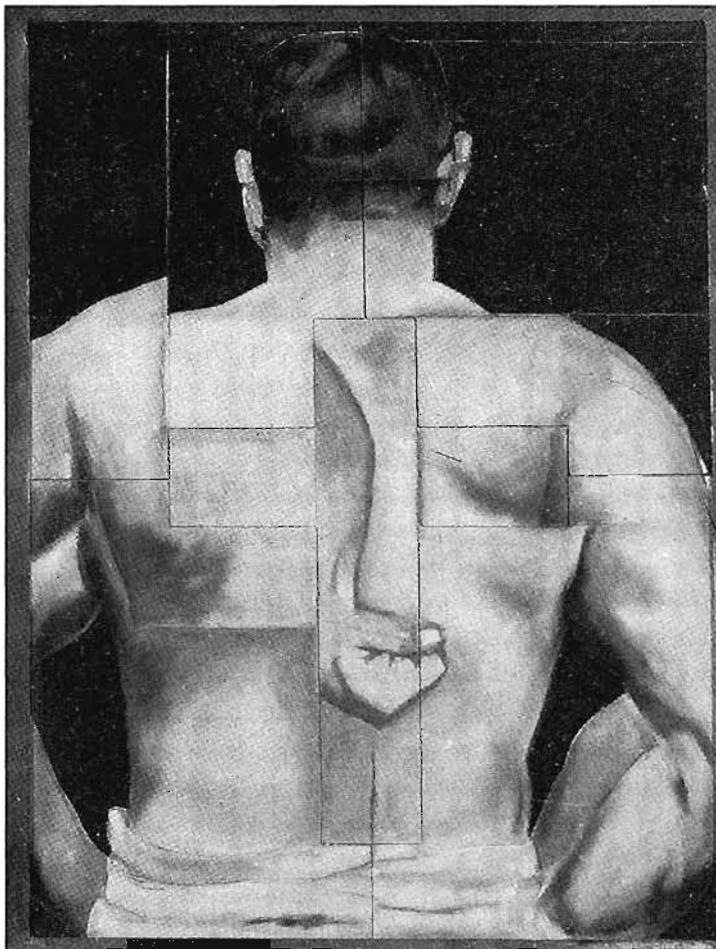
'No wait, hang ten man, I want to check him out,' said Nols lighting a cigarette and stretching out his legs before him. 'Tell me just what do you believe. Let me be straight, what are your politics?'

'I only believe in peaceful co-existence and mutual co-operation.' Oom Petrus answered momentarily slipping back into his usual evasiveness.

'I mos said he's talking kak,' retorted Acne Face, 'The ou bal is a fokken draadsitter man.'

'Listen here boys, I thought we could have a reasonable and a decent conversation. Nothing but nothing has changed since 1947, do you realise you're sounding like your fathers and grandfathers before them.'

'No, no my friends I'm not a draadsitter as you've just put it, I have never been, my party was banned in 1950. I was active in trying to reason with



our people in establishing an open trade union for my fellow railway workers. In the end I was dismissed from my job, stabbed in the back by the very Afrikaner brothers I tried to help and uplift.'

'What party was that nogal?'

'A party that believed in equality and saw all races, cultural and religious groups as persons only.'

'Just like I thought — 'n vuil bleddie kommunis!'

'That's not news either...well indoctrinated like all the rest,' Oom Petrus frowning replied.

'Listen don't come and get insulting here OK,' Acne Face spat at Oom

Petrus, 'We don't want to talk to you — so just make yourself scarce.'

Xola had been listening with interest to their arguments, deliberately slowing down the cleaning, changing of ashtrays and wiping off the tables everytime he got near Nols, his friends and Oom Petrus. He had a special place in his heart for this elderly man everyone called 'Oom Klippie'. Far from being the oddity and the unsociable old codger, Petrus van Staden was a passionate man. And Xola knew it.

'I know that I may have forced my conversation on you boys and for that I apologise, but I won't

apologise for trying to bring you to a level of deeper insight.

'In this country we all need each other now as much as we did then. I was humiliated, my child ostracised at school and in the end we were forced to move down to Cape Town. Thanks to a dear old friend, Abie, I was given employment as a maintenance person at his wood joinery firm.'

'Oom...you went seeking and you found...groot stont, ha ha,' Nols blurted out laughing loudly.

'And I wonder whose going to be on the receiving end one day? I'm referring to what you've just mentioned,' said Oom Petrus, a pained smile playing across his lined face. 'As far back as 1939 I remember warning our people. Things were going badly for us as workers and I was desperately trying to organise a trade union with the help of a few other comrades. I can still hear the jeering of the others in the railway yard that afternoon as I tried to address our people,' he paused to make sure they were listening to him.

'“Friends and comrades,” I began. “The propagandists of Afrikaner capitalism, our own brethren, are out to persuade the Afrikaans speaker, that trade unions are foreign to us — volksvreemd, this is not so. They exert endless energy in trying to slander, discredit and disrupt our efforts. Also I know that if we as Afrikaans workers united in an effective trade union system with our fellow workers of different nationalities and colours, we will never again allow ourselves to be used as pawns by those who have the capitalist monopoly”.'

'Hurrah Viva ou Kafferboetie,' Nols and Acne Face mockingly chorused.

'Mister Klippie it's no use, hulle verstaan tog

nie. Can I bring you another drink, mister Klippie,' Xola interrupted the argument that was threatening to get dangerously out of hand.

'Thank you, Xola,' Oom Petrus acknowledged.

'En kaffir hy's baas hoor,' said Nols as provocatively as possible.

'Look this has gone too far, he's as much a person worthy of respect as I am, chaps like you have no sense of dignity. I'm sure you can reason intelligently but you're too damned obstinate.'

Nols jumped up and grabbed Oom Petrus by the lapels of his tweed jacket and started shaking him violently.

'Luister hier, ou kak!'

'Break it up right now, enough is enough,' boomed Bertus as he stormed out from behind the bar counter and pushed Nols aside.

'I think you had better leave Oom Klippie...this is becoming dangerous...I know it's none of my business Oom, but I'm shocked.'

'Buye — Buye,' a piercing cry could be heard echoing down the main road awakening people still asleep in the surrounding homes and blocks of flats, at six am the next morning.

'Buye comrade Petrus van Staden Buye.'

Xola was the first to discover the body lying in the alleyway behind the hotel, the skull crushed, his face beaten beyond recognition and veiled by a pool of semi-coagulated blood.

When the police eventually arrived, Xola could say no more to them, except that another life had been sacrificed for the sons and daughters of the land. 

Poetry

Now I Live

After the burial
before the grave
eye-full of casket
jerking down —
down the hole
gulping my childhood

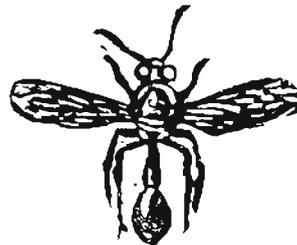
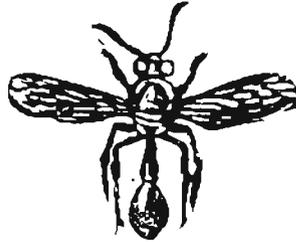
Crickets chuckled
a song inimical of me
the swamp gurgled
miming our squandered hopes
leaves rustled
echoing our uttered hopes
& I stood memory-full
of days spent together

In life
I saw you
weaving courage —
chanting our march
to reach our land
searchful after freedom
long due

Together we sang
in the 'Jazz Hour'
thought — filled of 'mchina'
the due to reach home
to trace ancestor trails
& forge new paths
where spears were stunted
against invaders muskets

Now you've gone
left me the load
to this end
I'll march
on this march
I'll end!

Makhanda Senzangakhona



Three Haikus

Birdcalls at dawn in
Wynberg arouse and enlarge
the age-shrunken heart

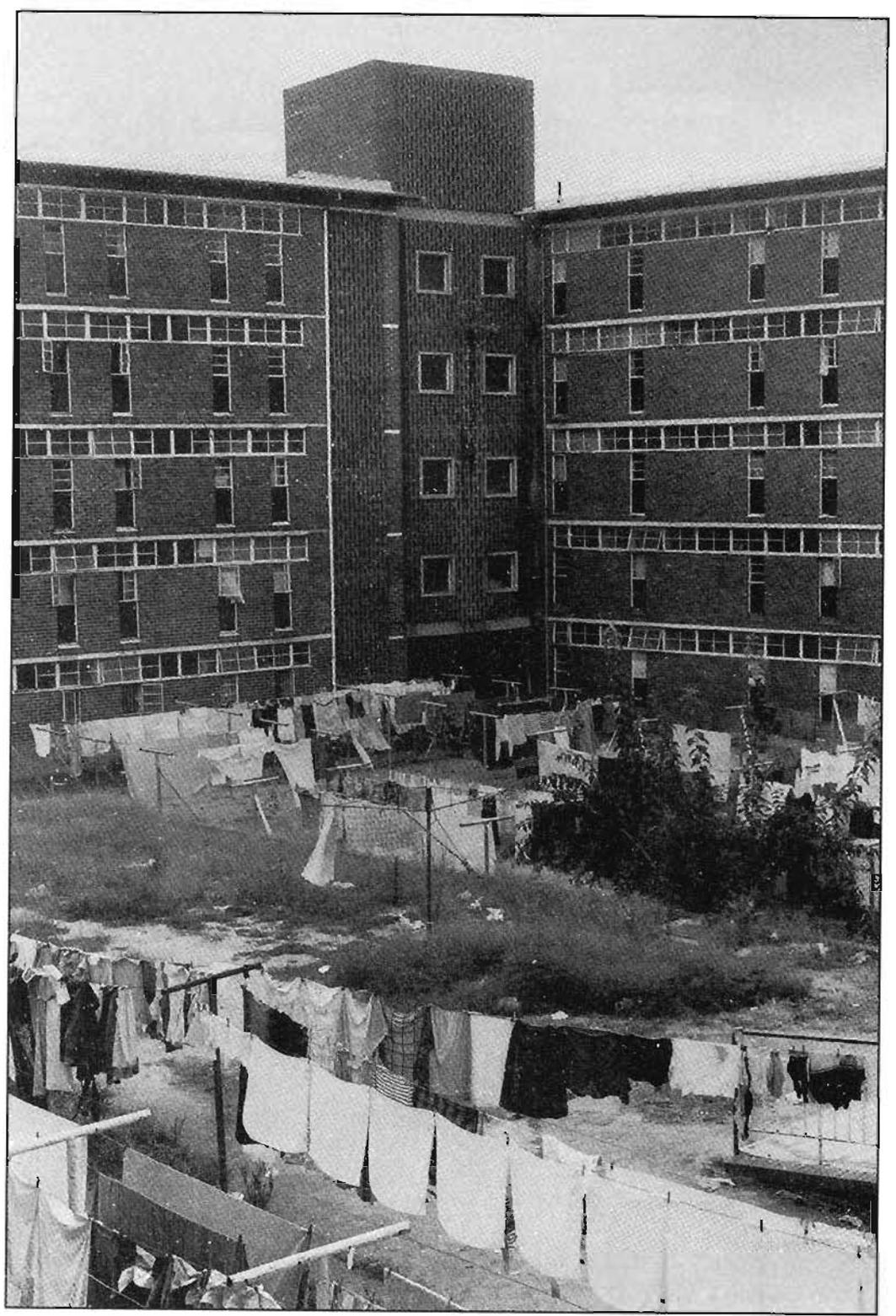
*November 1991
Wynberg*

Summer heat has doused
the aloes: vanished is spring's
pentacostal flames

*December 1991
Durban*

Soundlessly, lilac
flowers drop on the terrace:
butterflies at rest

Dennis Brutus



Exterior, Women's Hostel, Alexandria • November 1990 •

The 'Helen Joseph' Women's Hostel, Alexandra

Photographs by Anna Zieminski

The 'Helen Joseph' Women's Hostel was built in 1972 at a time when the government planned to bulldoze Alexandra and build eight hostels. In the sixties and seventies many families were forcibly removed to Soweto and Tembisa, but the residents resisted and a number of 'Save Alexandra' campaigns were launched. At present there are two men's hostels and one women's hostel in Alexandra.

The women at 'Helen Joseph' come from all over the country with one objective: to find work. Arriving in Johannesburg and finding an acute lack of accommodation, they are forced to stay in schoolgirl-like conditions at the hostel, leaving their families and children behind. Their occupations range from office-workers and teachers right through to informal businesses such as sewing, hawking, hair dressing and so on.

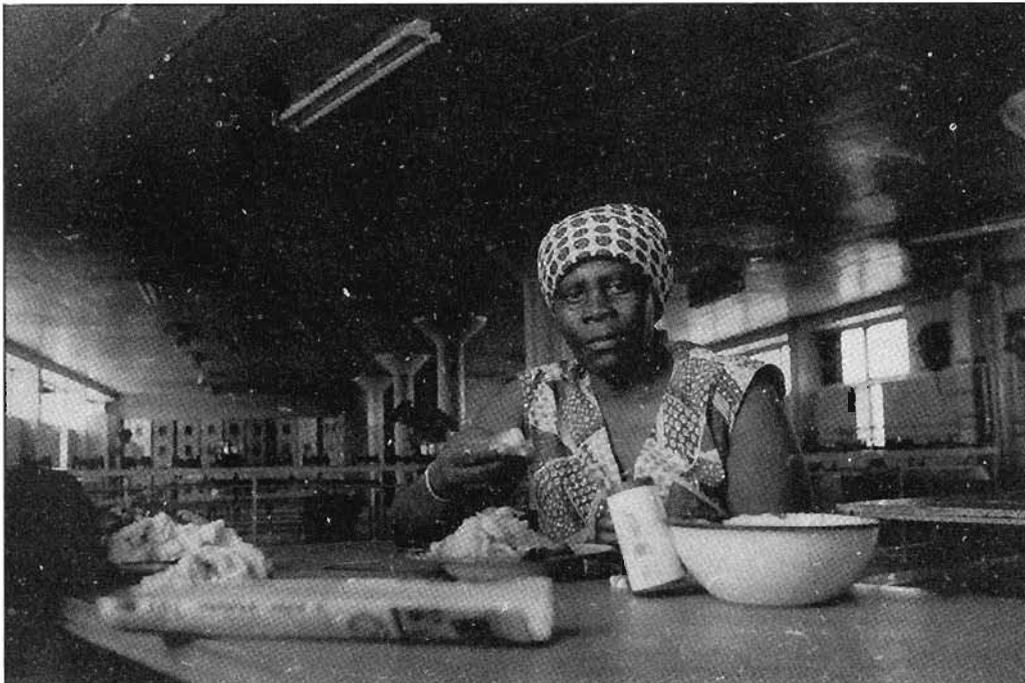
A grim, dismal complex of multi-storeyed

buildings, the hostel houses approximately 2 800 women, each sharing a tiny space with three others. There is little storage space for possessions, even though for some women it is their home for many years. A feeling of melancholy and boredom is prevalent — there are no recreational facilities and no electrical plugs in the rooms, although some enterprising women run appliances from the single light fitting in the centre of the room. A frequently voiced complaint is the fact that the buildings are not maintained, and although there are municipal guards at the entrance the women feel vulnerable as men continually slip into the hostel, harassing the women and stealing the washing that is in great evidence.

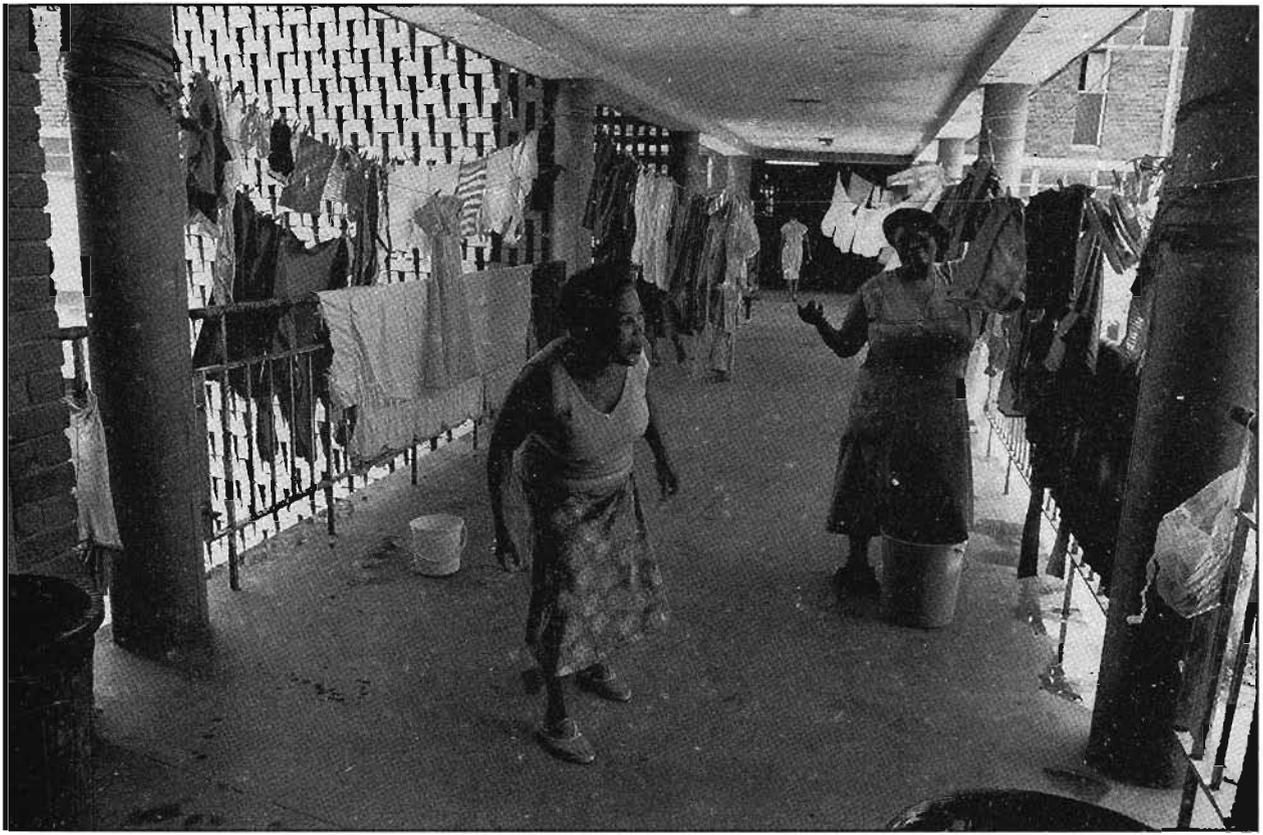
Unhappy with living in a cramped situation with no privacy, and feeling isolated from their families, most of the women feel that the hostel should be converted into family units or bachelor flatlets. 



Quadrangle • February 1991 •



*Communal
Kitchen •
November
1990 •*



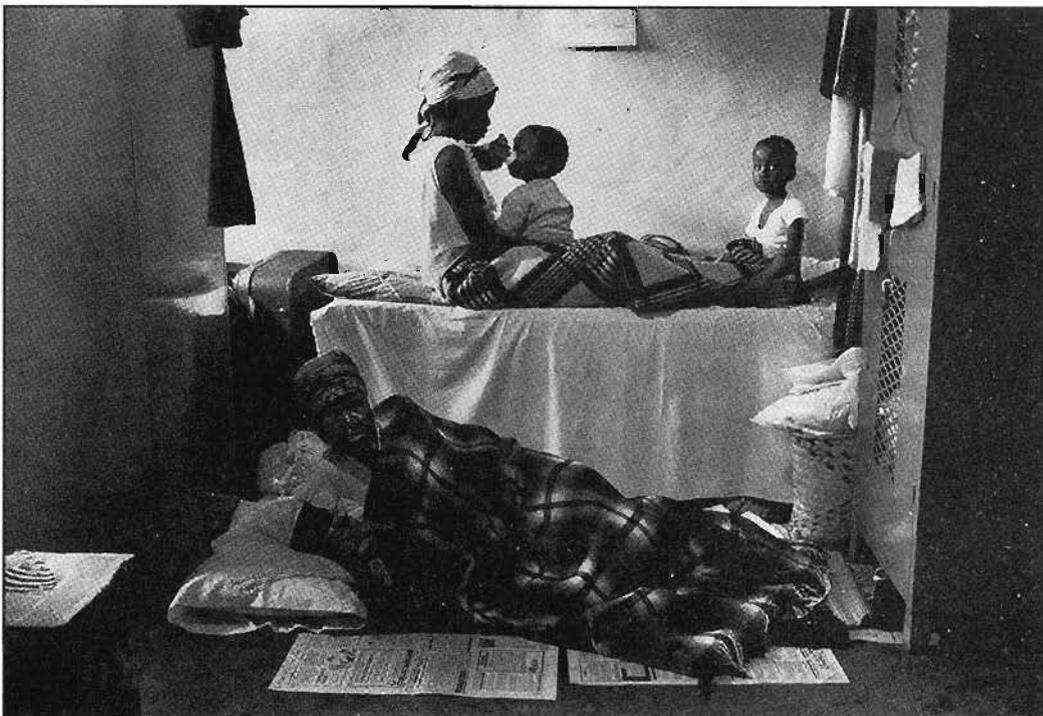
Barbara Ponde on the Walk-way • October 1991 •



*Visiting
• November
1990 •*



Above:
*Lorielta
Seshangi
and daughter*
February
1991 •



*Zodwa
Mahlangu
and family*
• February
1991 •



Above:
Residents
• November
1990 •



Resident
• November
1990 •



Passages • November 1990 •





Resident, Women's Hostel, Alexandra • November 1990 •



Diary from a Sanitorium

Fred Khumalo

The scene re-enacted itself in his mind with blinding clarity: under the cover of darkness, silhouettes of armed men surround his home.

Some of them hurl petrol bombs and stones at the windows of the four-roomed bungalow. Amid screams and the sound of shattering glass some of the gun-toting men break into the house, looting valuables while others are calling out his name, others venting their sexual frustrations on his two sisters: a seven year-old and a thirteen year-old. By now the house is aflame and his mother has been tied with a rope to a bed frame. Her cries for mercy mingle with the music of the flames as they slowly close in on her. Her body begins blackening and her flesh sizzles as she wriggles and twists in a slow macarbe ballet of death....

He yelled out but his attempts at running away were frustrated by the fact that he had been shackled to his bed. He was attacked by a headache that felt as though a knotted rope was being twisted slowly, tighter and tighter around his forehead. He was sweating profusely. He felt something cold touch his forehead.

'Relax Bheki, you're safe here,' a voice said.

He was catapulted into reality. He was in a hospital or some other institution of that sort, he realised, feeling the bed linen with his hands. The whiteness of the walls soothed him.

'Don't ever think about that incident again,' the voice spoke again.

He looked up and was greeted by the smiling face of a white doctor.

'Don't worry yourself about the past. It won't do you any good,' the doctor said still smiling.

Bheki nodded. But how could he forget about a past which had taken with it a crucial part of him? His home, his mother.... Had it not been for that past he wouldn't be lying in this bed. He would have finished his law degree at the University of Natal. He wouldn't be worrying about anything.

'Dammit, it wouldn't have happened...' he muttered to himself.

Trying to banish the sad thoughts, he said, 'Doctor, I want to go and relax in the sun.'

'Okay, that will do you good as long as you don't allow your mind to drift into the past,' the doctor undid the shackles.

Bheki slunk into his gown. As he stepped into the morning his face was



Traitors • Lauryn Arnott • Etching

caressed by the warm breath of summer. The morning was splendid and heart warming, alive with the sounds of nature. The birds which flap-flapped merrily above Fort Napier Mental Institute, at which

he was an inmate, sang praises to the warmth of summer. The chorus was supplemented by the chirpy refrain of the crickets.

He placed his stool against the wall and sat

Fred Khumalo

facing the sun, absorbing its warmth. He was soon joined by another man, also in a gown. A cigarette dangled from his lips and smoke curled up from its lit end to his eyes.

'Molo, Baba,' Bheki greeted.

The man planted himself on a stool and continued puffing away at his cigarette, oblivious to everything.

'Sawubona, Baba,' Bheki said even louder.

'Man, I'm thinking. I don't want to be disturbed. Not by a madman in any case,' the man growled like an enraged lion, the cigarette slipping away from his lips.

Bheki remembered that he was among abnormal people. Insane people. He was sane enough to know that. Sane enough to back away when the man charged towards him. But he was also insane to be among insane people. Why do people ever become insane he wondered. Clicking his tongue endlessly, the other man took his stool and left Bheki in peace. Again Bheki savoured the noisy silence of nature.

At nine the bell rang, summoning everybody to the dining-hall.

In the dining-hall Bheki joined the inmates who were queuing for porridge. In his hands he had the weapons with which he was to launch his ferocious attack on food: a soup plate made of enamel and a spoon. He was hungry and could hear his intestines chanting slogans of anger at the approaching enemy, food.

'Hey, are you crazy? Give me your plate,' the man who was dishing up said to Bheki whose thoughts had wandered so far away that he did not realise when his turn had come. He had in fact forgotten what he was queuing for.

Having voraciously gulped his porridge, he launched his clean-up operation on the buttered slices of bread which had been placed in front of him on a plate.

He was so absorbed in what he was doing that he didn't hear the noise made by the inmates with whom he was sharing the table. He washed down the chunks of bread with a mugfull of hot coffee, doing all this religiously, with the undivided concentration

which he thought it deserved.

Then words penetrated his separateness, 'Hey, mate, you eat like a pig. You've finished your meal already!'

Boiling with rage, he overturned the table screaming at the men who were teasing him, 'Bloody madmen, don't ever mistake me for a madman.'

Soon the dining-hall became a cauldron of madness with inmates trying to register their blows on Bheki, while others tried to act as peacekeepers, saying, 'Forget about the man, he's just mad.'

In an instant a battalion of doctors had scurried into the dining hall to maintain order. The doctors were like olive-bearing doves in a war-torn territory. They were charged with keeping order in the lives and minds of the insane fellows.

The doctor who attended Bheki earlier, looked inquiringly at him. Shaking his head sadly as if sympathising with some poor demented soul, Bheki said, 'You see, doctor, these crazy bastards think I'm like them. I don't know how I'm going to make them realise that I'm not what they think I am. No, I'm not nuts. No, I'm not nuts. No, I'm not nuts....'

'Point taken, Bheki. But look what you've done now. You've spoiled other people's meals and appetites. Now, there is the door. Use it.'

Belching noisily and thumping his chest with his open palm, he shuffled his feet and swaggered his way out of the dining-room, a string of abusive words pelting him, erupting in quick succession from the mouths of men whose food he had spilled.

For a moment he believed that the morning had been missing him while he was in the dining-hall. Now that he was back, the morning cheered up again, embracing him in her tender warmth.

As he sat on his stool, a tingling sensation crept up his spine and it seemed as if a shaft of light was piecing its way through his mind. Smiling, he knew what it was. The creative fit had struck home again. He dug his hand into the pocket of his gown and fished out a notebook and a pencil.

Muttering to himself, 'I'm going to show them I'm not mad,' he scribbled on the notebook. The scribbling was accompanied by the chant, 'I'm not

mad. No, I'm not mad.' It seemed as if he was deriving his creative energies from the mantra, 'I'm not mad. No, I'm not mad....'

Scribbling with zeal, 'I'm not mad. No, I'm not mad.'

Turning the pages and blackening them with indecipherable scrawls, 'I'm not mad. No, I'm not mad....'

Jerk! Screech! The rhythm of the pen was broken by the toiling of the bell at ten-thirty, time for physical training.

'Dammit,' he whispered to himself as he quickened his pace towards the locker room. By the time he reached the door of the locker room he was breathing heavily. Having abandoned his pyjamas and gown in an untidy bundle, he got into his shorts, T-shirt and joggers.

With the door of the locker room behind him, he quickened his pace towards the training ground, a well tended soccer field. Some inmates were already warming up, flexing their muscles. The training instructor, a short tempered doctor of mixed ancestry, was impatiently waiting.

'Hurry up, Bheki. We're waiting for you,' the doctor shouted, waving.

'What d'you mean you waiting for me? I'm not late.'

'Okay, sir, don't waste our time. Join us now. We're running four laps around this field,' the instructor said and broke into a sprint, a train of joggers trailing behind him. Bheki also joined. The fervour with which he took the jog was so intense that he did not stop after four laps. He was running blindly.

However, his intimate affair with the jog was broken by the roaring laughter from the crowd of inmates. Embarrassed, Bheki joined the team and they went about their exercises: push-ups, frog marches and all.

After the training session they resigned themselves to the dining room for a refreshing cup of tea, then they headed to the communal bathroom. Washed up they put on clean clothes, then went to the hall where they normally attended their literacy

classes.

They hurriedly reached their desks and focused their minds on the teacher in front of them. The blackboard behind her was dirty with chalked diagrams accompanied by scrawls which literate people call words. Words defacing a blackboard. Bheki, as usual, was the last to arrive. He came up straight to the teacher and bowed slightly, mumbling an apology, then went to his desk. In one of his hands he had his notebook, a dog-eared pad and a pencil.

'Now, class, as part of our lesson today we're going to give names to these objects,' the teacher said in her sing-song voice, pointing at the board.

'As you can see, on the board I've drawn objects accompanied by words. Each object is accompanied by a wrong name. What I want you to do is match an object with its correct name. Understand?'

'Yes, ma'am,' a chorus of contented voices said.

But Bheki was not part of the class. He was turning the pages of his notebook, scribbling, smiling with satisfaction, and pausing, frowning, smiling as he resumed his scribbling.

'Now, class..., ' the teacher said, turning from the blackboard to face her pupils. But she lost track of what she wanted to say when she saw Bheki, his head buried in his desk, labouriously scribbling away in his notebook.

'Bheki,' she said taking two steps towards the class, 'Bheki, are you still with us?'

Heads turned towards Bheki, who mumbled something without lifting his face from his pad.

'Bheki, what're you doing?'

'Are you deaf? I told you I'm writing a book.'

The teacher smiled. The class broke into raucous laughter, 'Heeheehee, writing a book. Crazy man writing a book. Heeheeheehee....'

There was even more laughter when Bheki slammed his fist on the table saying, 'Look at the monkeys. Jealous monkeys can't appreciate good things. Look at them, laughing jealous monkeys.'

The teacher restored order, 'Okay, class, back to our lesson.'

The pupils refocused their minds and eyes on

Fred Khumalo

the task before them.

'You're also jealous,' Bheki said referring to the teacher, 'Yes you're jealous. I'm writing a book and you don't even ask me what it's about. Think I'm crazy!'

Bheki left his desk, his notebook and pencil clasped in his hand.

'You're jealous and selfish. I'm going to show you all that I'm not a crazy bum,' he said, storming out of the room, leaving the puzzled teacher trying to quieten her laughing pupils.

The sun was baking the earth. Bheki retired to a Jacaranda tree under which he sat and opened his vein on the notebook, scribbling like a man possessed.

The two o'clock bell chimed, summoning the inmates to the flower gardens. There wasn't much to be done there. No weeds to be plucked out, no paper and other litter to be removed. The gardens were neat and the shrubs pruned, the edges of the lawn neatly manicured. But it had become a routine to go there and hover around idly. Just a routine, one of many routines.

At two-fifteen the inmates gathered around the dining-hall for lunch. After a filling meal of rice and chicken curry they walked about the premises, happy to be free from routine. But their freedom was wrenched from them by the chiming of the bell at three.

They strolled to another hall for a video screening. It was one of those detective stories. Was it *Magnum* or *The Untouchables*? Anyway. Bheki hated those kind of movies. However, he had no alternative but to go to the hall and stare at the screen. It was the regulation. It was dusk when the inmates filed out of the hall, their voices mingling into a meaningless babble as they tried to mimic the actors they had just seen on the screen.

Bheki, who had been sleeping through the entire showing, hurried to the toilet. His eyes were still heavy with sleep as he unzipped his fly and fingered his way into his underpants.

He looked at himself in the mirror. His chocolate complexioned face boasted a goatee and a thick

moustache which somehow belied his youthful age. His face was fleshy and his lips thick. His ears were barely visible under his thick afro styled bush of hair. He thought his eyes were those of an intelligent man. Didn't Nkwame Nkrumah have eyes like these? He mused, smiling to himself.

And so the days rolled on. He succumbed to the fits of creativity which attacked him frequently and scribbled his thoughts in his notebook, documenting a slice of his life in this abnormal institute. Words, images, rhythms, phrases became his bosom friends. They became the pillows on which he nestled.

No sooner had Bheki been released from the sanatorium — having spent a year there — then shockwaves rippled the publishing world after the publication of *The Diary of a Not-So-Mad Man*, his graphic description of life at the Fort Napier Mental Institute.

The book looked at his life at the sanatorium against the background of the trauma that had gripped him after his home in Mpumalanga township had been pounced on by right-wing extremists who unleashed terror on their political opponents. Having searched each and every nook for Bheki, the leader of Mpumalanga township Youth Congress, they had looted the furniture, raped his sisters and set the house aflame, his mother perishing in the inferno.

For three months the book was on the bestseller list at Unique Books, the nationally renowned distributing network. After six months it went for a second printing. And then for third...and fourth, fifth, sixth....

But the author had by then been recalled to the sanatorium. His condition had deteriorated. He had found the outside world cold, harsh and unwelcoming, seeming to hurl back at him that harrowing scene: the screams and the sound of shattering glass; men interfering with his sisters; his mother's desperate cry drowning in flames; her body blackening and her flesh sizzling....

In literary circles, Bheki's work was discussed with zest while the not-so-mad man sank into the oblivion of his secluded place, sheltered from the madness of the world that acclaimed him. 

Mkhozi

dedicated to all black women

When birds sing in the trees,
cows graze in the veld,
crocodiles and lizards
enjoying the warm hands
of the queen of the day,
she is out screaming aloud:
Mkhozi!! Umshanyelo!!!
She is loaded with brooms
wagging labouriously like a duck,
yet very few realise
the good service she renders:
Always exposed to sharp
rays of the queen.
Even in cold days
she is here and there
perambulating with
unprotected feet
shouting aloud to make
her presence known
Shouting aloud to sell
her products.
Unlike salesmen and sales ladies
she does not move from
house to house
but up and down
the dusty streets.
Shouting on the top of her voice
advertising her products:
Mkhozi!! Umshanyelo!!!
In rainy summer days
she is there in the street also

despised and undermined
as she is
but not the service
she offers to Africans
Indians, Coloureds and
even the Afrikaners themselves.
Sometimes harrassed
by peelers
for not being in possession
of imvumo to be in that
area.
Sometimes jailed
for failing to produce
imvumo of selling.
Yet she does not stop
to render her good service

Walt oyi-Sipho ka Mtetwa

that sound

there it is again
that sound of afrika

and we dance
without the chains

Sam Hallat

Short Story

That night something fell out from the sky —
 something like a typewriter, or maybe it was a
 bomb.
 'Oh God', you said, but God didn't answer.

G. S. Cummiskey

Poem

Several weeks
 After
 You walked away
 I discovered
 A brooch
 That you had left
 Behind
 Ah fine
 Now I have
 Something
 With which
 I can
 Tear out
 My soul

G. S. Cummiskey

The Last Embrace

Silent night, two quiet voices,
 Our shadows follow loyally
 Even through the darkness;
 And we, conscious of our second
 Nature only when we come out
 To the illuminated edges of town;
 Tightly knit hands, as though we both
 Were afraid the other would escape into
 The calling distance, the dark void.
 Our bodies touched, and our hearts beat
 With momentary sync;
 As yet, neither was ready to shed a tear,
 Neither was ready to throw the first lot,
 But still we embraced, we kissed,
 And we cried, silently, secretly, in the
 Loneliness of our hearts.

Mashupye Ratale Kgopala



The Forbidden Fruit

Jerome Morrison

‘**Y**our place is lovely,’ Peter remarked. ‘Could I look around?’

He didn’t wait for my answer and walked into the study. Passing through the passage, he returned a few minutes later. His eyes had the promise of what was to come as he took off his suede jacket and plunged into the leather couch. The old grandfather clock ticked away the painstaking minutes with the familiar sound of execution against lust and time.

I took out the little bit of dope and Rizla paper. The smoke, it seemed, complemented the idea of ‘coffee together’. I rolled a joint letting him smoke first.

Peter was nestling his crutch. His eyes intently on me.

‘Mind if I make a phone call quickly?’ I asked experiencing great difficulty tearing my eyes away from the bulge between his legs.

‘Take your time,’ he said, smiling arrogantly.

To me it felt as if I had already used up all my time. Even the number I dialed felt unbearably long. The receptionist on the other end hardly had time to present her routine.

‘Good morning. Could I speak to James?’

‘He hasn’t, come to work yet...any message, Za-noon?’

I panicked. God, where is he? On his way home? This raced through my mind as I asked.

‘What time do you expect him?’

‘He’s supposed to be here already,’ she replied in a tone which alarmed me even further.

‘I’ll phone back later,’ I responded trying to conceal my anxiety.

But as I returned to the living room my tension and worries were cast aside by an anticipating smile. My eyes fed contentedly on Peter who already had his trouser off by then. He was everything I expected him to be. Hairy, athletic, clean, easy.

‘I liked you the minute I saw you,’ he drooled.

‘Me too,’ I said as we slipped into each other’s arms. His body was warm against mine. There was a longing in both of us as his penis throbbed gently against mine.

In the background the clock ticked away its punishing seconds.

‘You’re not relaxed...’ Peter snorted and pushed me away gently while

placing his hand on my arm.

It felt as if everything came down onto me at once. I was anxious and tense. I was overcome by fear. Fear of being discovered feasting on the forbidden fruit. The wrong. The nice. Oh God, help me. I'm a pig. All this went through my mind.

But then his thick, pouty lips crushed onto my neck. Just as the soft thuds dulled my anxiety, the phone rang, ripping through our simmering passion. I jumped to answer it.

'Hello,' I asked in a flat but polite tone.

'So you're home. Where were you last night?' he asked predictably.

'Hi James,' I replied cheerfully and continued, 'I slept at Cindy's place. They had a jol there.'

'Couldn't you let me know,' he responded coldly. 'I was worried to death. Anyway did you enjoy it?'

I hesitated thinking how I enjoyed it and that I was about to enjoy it all over again.

'It was OK. Are you phoning from work? When are you coming home?' I responded and asked in one breath.

'I'll be home at three.'

'I'll make supper.'

'What are you doing now?'

'Relaxing,' I said crisply and added, 'Cleaning up,' in a rather brusque manner. There was a silence. 'Are you phoning from work,' I asked calmly.

'I might be home early,' he said not answering my question. Somehow I knew this meant he really wanted to say, 'I miss you'.

'I love you,' I said knowing that he was at work.

I returned to the living room and rolled another

joint with taut fingers. I tried to overcome my tension and my relentless desire by focusing on rolling the joint. Peter seemed unaware of my unease as he helped me out of my trousers and underpants.

We slipped into each others arms. Just then we heard the sound of tiny pieces of glass falling on the carpet. We sat up and saw that the bulb had fused. Our eyes were glued to the tiny fragments of glass strewn over the carpet. It was a sign, I thought. Something is withholding us from each other.

But lust, the destroyer and fiery instigator, melted our bodies together once more. We rode high on our want. The clock chimed twelve. Whether we were a minute too slow, or a minute ahead, I do not know. But we were halfway through. There was no stopping now. The sofa beckoned and we fell onto it, our bodies rubbing feverishly against each other.

It felt so good. I wanted it to finish and to last forever. But if we finish too soon I will feel remorse and wasteful. If we go to slow...the time.

Peter left me no choice. He started moving wildly on top of me as he worked up his suppressed passion. It rubbed off on me. But I responded dubiously.

Too quick...too long...too....Oh fuck...let's have it in any case. It here...yah. it's now...ooh...it's beautiful.

'I'm gonna come.'

'Me too.'

The moist liquid our bodies are drenched in feels good for a minute or two. Then, like an animal, I rolled away from him. 





COURTESY OF FURA

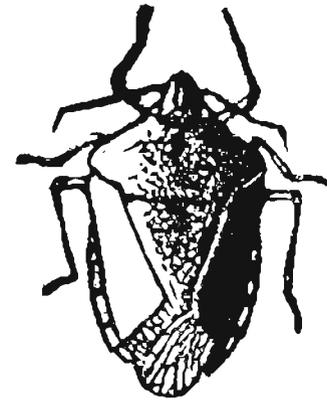
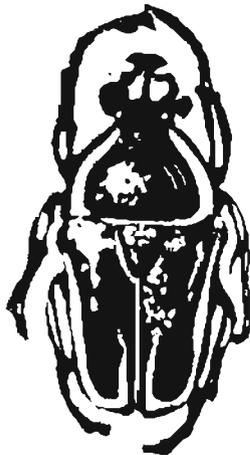
Self Portrait
• Lucky Madonsela •
Etching

Why LahlumlENZE?

Why lahlumlENZE if can't face the consequences?
 Why lahlumlENZE when still after nicetime?
 Why lahlumlENZE if not credence your partner?
 Why lahlumlENZE with us if not prepared?
 Why lahlumlENZE if not courageous?
 Why lahlumlENZE if stop nonsense not applied?
 Why? Why unlock the unlockables?
 Lahla umLENZE uzothola umendo,
 That mendo is not important,
 Why lahlumlENZE?
 LahlumlENZE is exciting,
 The most pleasure game,
 Easily repeated game,
 The come again game,
 Makes women mumble,
 Men own heaven and earth,
 Amateurs rumble,
 Adolescent uncontrollable,
 Why lahlumlENZE?
 Meditate the injections,
 Think of the prevention tablets,
 Loops are there,
 Be self-disciplined,
 Be synthesized,
 Be playful,
 Sleep with your imilENZE tired,
 Don't inherit men as your culture,
 Why lahlumlENZE?
 Too many men umLENZE will work
 Visiting expensive hotels umLENZE will work,
 Attending night parties umLENZE will work,
 Independent and limelight seekers umLENZE will
 Always swing,
 Luxurious incline ladies milENZE will go apart,
 Lack of shelter milENZE will always fly,
 Unemployed ladies milENZE will always do the
 trick,
 Money seekers imilENZE will always open,
 Why lahlumlENZE?
 Infants are dumped like rubbish,
 Sewerages are their places,
 Toilets are misused for that,
 Dirty boxes are for the innocent infants,
 Streets are for breathless babies,
 Dogs eating the innocent infant's limbs,
 Train toilets as storages for poor infant bodies,
 Yes, infants, new from the stomach,
 Then why lahlumlENZE?
 Infants doctors to be,
 Infants lawyers to be,
 Social workers to be,
 greatest leaders to be,
 They occupied our poor infrastructures,
 People watching with disbelief,
 Women saying 'Sis, zinamanyala lezizinto'
 School children 'Ncincincinci damn it'
 Why lahlumlENZE?
 African women with savage wombs,
 African women with ever open thighs,
 Those who always fail mentally,
 Who don't know the word 'no',
 The violators of their dragon wombs,
 The chief murderers,
 The flusters of our community,
 The monsters who care not for human's life,
 Why lahlumlENZE?
 Yes, it is happening,
 At Diepkloof dogs tasted infant's flesh,
 School children spotted one at Phomolong's veld,
 Inside one of Naledi's train toilet
 An infant was found,
 The Mzimhlope Women's Hostel infrastructure
 Was disturbed,
 In Turfontein's main sewerage
 A living infant was found,
 In Katlehong, an infant's dead body lay on the street,
 Many other areas experience that too,
 Why lahlumlENZE?
 African flowers why do that?
 Shapeless women after our fathers,
 Women killers after men.
 Full breasted women after young boys,

The helpers of needy men,
The owners of all men,
The chasers of the small boy,
The purpose being lahlumlenze,
Why lahlumlenze?
Why? Why?
Is it the child or the adult abuse?
Or intentionally lahlumlenze?
Is it encouraged by men or capitalism?
Is it small business co-operation
Or free enterprise?
Dogs are better,
They have time for lahlumlenze,
They keep their puppies,
But why? Brothers and sisters why?
Why lahlumlenze?
Africa don't kill,
Give to somebody else,
Africa don't kill,
Give to child welfare,
Africa don't kill.
Avoid lahlumlenze,
Africa don't kill,
Think: think: think Africa
Why lahlumlenze?

Mboneni Wangu Ike Muila



Smart Alecs

Isicamtho my sister;
lister nou mojanero-
jump-tdy mmatimba;
van gister-maubani-izolo

ek het jou gawietie;
om te sê alles verstaan
sweet no mukatakata; nee —

jy is half moja-daar-hou;
Alles is covered on los chandies;
finya-skuks;
ek raak vole-vole tot daarby die
dollie my ousie, skuwet nee —

You sing me a song worth singing
Smart alecs is it not
good enough I sing;
Wesis-Lizah, mntaka-maduna,
ngizokuthengela ubhanana;
nginama-pillowcase, nginama-shidi
nombhede-wokulala.

Mboneni Wangu Ike Muila

*Judith Sternberg**Two Poems***Palms Soothe**

I cannot work in white, its starkness
burns scars upon the eyeballs
leaving no sensitive place of darkness
in which to rest the mind that crawls
for rest in a world, once colourless
would soothe within the palms
of a love-ride's finger-laned singleness.

Working on alone I find night
the only companion to clothe and shelter
thoughts which cry for all the fousty
world which runs downwards, helter-skelter
to its hell of riches piled above the heads
of all the merchants, played out above
the labouring of their feathered beds.

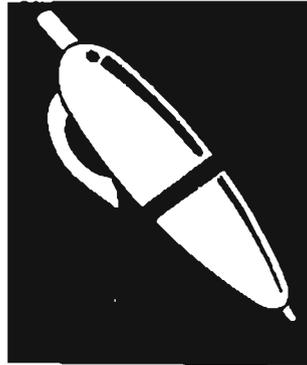
Drought

pinned into the shrouds
of our dying
I pull the clouds
of rain, sighing,
holding the weight
that leaves us
to heap
our lust
in the dust
of memory.

So we float in
salted oceans
crest waves,
cork-screwing
with a demotion
that craves
the moment
when seeds
go spewing
on our barrenness.

A Case For Motsisi

Bruno van Dyk



Casey (Moses) Motsisi was one of a group of talented black writers, which included Can Themba, Ezekiel (now Es'kia) Mphahlele, Bloke Modisane, Arthur Maimane and Nat Nakasa who wrote for *Drum* magazine in the fifties. Of this 'coterie' his was the only humourist voice, a successor to other black South African writers, like R R R Dhlomo, and other black American writers, like Damon Runyon, who had also used a distinctively proletarian, and characteristically ironic, idiom in their sketches. As a *Drum* staffer, Motsisi would write occasional articles, a short story ('Love in the Rain', December 1955), a satirical 'Bugs' column, and a later 'On The Beat' column which would run continuously in *Drum* until Motsisi's death in 1977.

Motsisi's particular skill as a humourist is an individualistic reaction to life in the fifties. His comical vision is wide-ranging, often satirical, poking fun at the folly of both the State, and, in his later pieces, the ordinary township dweller. The underlying considerations, however, are serious, pointing to the deprivations that apartheid had wrought on the existence of the black inhabitants of the Reef. The sketches reflect on the disintegration of the moral and social norms that occurs in a society in which a normal existence is rendered impossible. In this regard, the absurdist 'black Charivari' of Chaplinesque characters that populate Motsisi's sketches, is a fitting reaction to the madness that the Nationalists were pursuing.

The ironic register (the touting of serious issues under the guise of humour) is an important aspect of

Motsisi's work. It ensures that his jocular swipes at the idiosyncrasies of his township 'Kids' in his 'On The Beat' column are not merely gratuitous. The humorous frame within which the sketches operate is demanded by satirical convention. The humour of Motsisi's sketches, however, is often tinged with an underlying pathos, a feature which is commensurate with the serious considerations

hovering in the sub-text of his work. As Esther Sangweni has observed: 'The author's attitude appears to be one of nonchalance, but behind the innocent portrayal of township 'types' is a deep concern for the people he writes about — the suicidal nature of their lives, the inversion of values, their lack of feeling for others, and the total lack of any aim in life'.² Furthermore, the escapades of Motsisi's characters comment on the 'civilised' values of South African white society. In this regard, Rowland Smith has argued that, 'Such a freewheeling existence in the lower depths was an implicit comment on the ordered white lives in the respectable areas of the city'.³

One other effect of Motsisi's ironic register is that instead of depicting the fantasy tableaux of the comic strip (which is to be expected in a sketch populated by bugs and kids) the sketches provide the most authentic portrayal of the proletariat and lumpenproletariat black inhabitants on the Reef. The sketches depict, for instance, both the less savoury aspects of township life, as well as the more quotidian aspects, like dodging the landlord, flirting, attending all-night parties, visiting with

friends, and so on. Against this backdrop of daily events, Motsisi's prose questions the assumptions that are held about 'civilisation', especially 'civilisation' as conceived by whites. In his final (unfinished) 'On The Beat' (1977), Motsisi sums up the kind of humanism which was to characterise his work over three decades: 'Folks is different irrespective of their colour'.⁴

Motsisi had come to *Drum* via Can Themba's short-lived magazine, *Africa. Drum*, of course, as is well documented elsewhere,⁵ acted as a black literary magazine in the fifties, during which it published over 90 short stories, when very few white-owned magazines would touch a story by a black writer. By the late fifties, however, *Drum's* literary role had all but ceased, as the then editor, Tom Hopkinson (with Jim Bailey, *Drum's* proprietor's support) viewed *Drum* as a photographic, and not a literary magazine.⁶ Fortunately, Hopkinson would make one literary concession, in that he commissioned Motsisi to write his 'On The Beat' sketches, after having seen his 'Bugs' sketches in back numbers. At the time Motsisi had been removed from the writing staff altogether, and was a clerk in the photographic library.

Motsisi's first satirical column, which had featured mischievous 'bugs', had begun on a high note which set the tone for the sketches that were to follow. This first sketch (August 1957) features two bugs who are conversing in 'a nook of a wall in the House of Discussion'. The one bug contemplates the evolutionary process, arguing that as he had 'bugged the President' on the previous night he might one day be president himself. The bug then goes on to describe his period of rule:

...I will ban all disinfectants; encourage bug immigration; and tighten up on emigration.

Anybody who disagrees with me, even on such a small matter as the weather, will be named a bugomist and banished to a concentration camp for an indefinite period.

By bugs, I'll make such laws bugs will build me a monument after I'm dead for being the one bug who fought relentlessly for to uphold Bug supremacy.⁷

**'Folks
is
different
irrespective
of
their
colour'**

— *Motsisi*

When this bug is warned by his companion that he 'wouldn't escape criticism from other democratic countries if [he] carried on like that', he replies, 'Woe unto those who dared point a finger at me. I would of necessity have to be tough. After all, my problems would be unique. What with a president who was once a bug'.⁸ With dialogue of this nature it is soon evident that the sketch is satirising the excesses of the Nationalists in the fifties (or in any period since).

The 'Bugs' column was to continue in this fashion, with satire on white wealth (and policemen) ('Man, I've reached the conclusion that all people who have too much coppers get high blood pressure, and then their blood gets that copperish taste'⁹); black on

black violence ('Here you don't have to crawl out in the middle of the night and dig through human flesh for blood. Blood is lying around everywhere just for the picking'¹⁰); drunken revelry ('That night I threw a small shindig with a few friends to drink in the New Year. That night I drank enough beer to fill the Huddleston Swimming bath...'¹¹) and a host of other issues in which blacks were embroiled.

The 'On The Beat' column is cast in slightly different mould as it is populated by a group of 'kids' from the lower echelons of society. There is, for instance, Kid Hangover, Kid Playboy, Kid

Bruno van Dyk

Sponono, Kid Newspapers and Kid Cucumber ('He's pickled with booze, and I reckon that's why the guys call him Kid Cucumber'). The general concept of the 'On The Beat' sketches is similar to that of the 'Bugs' sketches as they also comment in a broadly humorous fashion on the kind of existence that the proletariat were forced to eke out, caught as they were between the brutality of the authorities and black gangsters alike. The nature of the 'On The Beat' sketches can best be illustrated by reference to an example. Consider then the sketch that appeared in the August 1958 issue of *Drum*.

This particular sketch follows the adventures of two friends, the narrative 'I' (always present in the sketches, a Motsisi-figure) and Mattress, who attend what is apparently a wake, but which is actually a stokvel.¹² They pay their donation and are served alcohol (which is stored in the coffin) while the 'priest' and his 'congregation' mourn in the adjacent room. After having their share of the 'two straights and two beers', the protagonists return home. En route, Mattress informs the narrator of his new scheme to escape arrest for being without a work permit; he padlocks his door from the outside and climbs through the window to give the police the impression that he is not at home.

Once having reached his 'cardboard and zinc shanty', the narrator settles down to finish off his meal of fish and chips which he had hidden under the bed when Mattress had arrived. He is soon interrupted by another knock which turns out to be his irate landlord in search of the overdue rent. After a prolonged haranguing session the narrator manages to get rid of the landlord, and makes for bed, 'feeling het-up at life and landlords in general'. But there is one more surprise in store, for, in the early hours of the morning, 'a cop kicks [his] door open', and takes him to the police station where he is charged with being 'in arrears with his poll tax'. The sketch ends, 'I should've taken Mattress's advice'.

There seems very little 'point' in a sketch of this nature, which can quite simply be taken as a chance to laugh at the cavortings of a few drunken bum-

blers, a kind of township slapstick. David Rabkin, in his doctoral study of the *Drum* writers, has criticised Motsisi's sketches for their lack of 'explanatory resolution'.¹³ Yet, for one thing, laughter is an important component of Motsisi's work, as it undermines the madness of the world that the Nationalists had created, and in fact positions itself in opposition to the regularised, strictly-administered world that the Nationalists were at pains to engineer. Michail Bakhtin, in his examination of humour, makes a pertinent point in this regard:

The serious aspects of class culture are official and authoritarian; they are combined with violence, prohibitions, limitations and always contain an element of fear and of intimidation.... Laughter, on the contrary, overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations. Its idiom is never used for violence and authority.¹⁴

Equally important, however, is the recognition of the serious, underlying experiences that the sketches tap. References are made, for instance, to black poverty:

It's Friday night and I'm sitting in my Sophiatown shanty busy filling myself up with a plateful of Bachelor's Diet [fish, chips and bread], when I hear a knock at the zinc-and-cardboard door. I remove the plate of fish, chips and bread and hide it beneath the bed just in case the guy who's knocking might have a sudden inspiration to help me assault the fish, chips and bread;¹⁵

to social gradation:

[The landlord] tells me that he wouldn't be seen dead drinking coffee with me, and throws the bomb I've been expecting right in my face. When do I think I'm going to pay my last month's rent, he wants to know from me;¹⁶

and to police harassment:

In the morning a cop kicks my door open and arrests me for no permit. But when we reach Newlands, just to break the monotony, he charges me with being, shall I say, in arrears with my poll tax.¹⁷

These, and other, casually inserted details, serve to create a composite image of the public and private existence of the black proletariat in the fifties.

Most commentators have reacted favourably to this kind of writing. Rabkin, for instance, although he has some misgivings, argues Motsisi as the 'most naturally gifted of *Drum* writers'.¹⁸ Ursula Barnett considers Motsisi's work, in comparison with other *Drum* writers, as an 'exception', arguing that 'Humour, even satire, is rare in the [*Drum*] stories. One exception is the work of Casey Motsisi, a natural humourist, who used satire in his *Drum* column... subtly to expose the absurd state of the world he lived in'.¹⁹ Others, alternatively, have disapproved. Don Dodson, in his 'The Four Modes of *Drum*: Popular Fiction and Social Control in South Africa', deriving his conclusions from the 'On The Beat' sketches written between 1962 and 1965, sees some value in the 'Bugs' sketches, but is dismissive of Motsisi's 'On The Beat' sketches. In his article he has argued that, instead of posing a challenge to Nationalist rule, the 'On The Beat' sketches help to bolster it:

Preserving social order is not a manifest function of Motsisi's humour, but it is a latent one. It poses no threat to authority: so it is allowed to exist. It helps the artist live

with society: so it is written. It eases — however briefly — the burdens of oppression: so it is read. Thus humour serves the interests of everyone in an oppressive system except those who dare to change it.²⁰

Keeping in mind that Dodson's method of interpretation demands that 'literature' be socially mobilising, it is nevertheless apparent that Dodson's thesis fails to come to grips with the finer specificities of the South African world. For instance, the mere depiction of drunken blacks (during prohibition times) ignoring legislation imposed by a government which demanded respect, cocked a snook at the racist notion of the 'cheeky kaffir'. If taken as a group, the sketches are a stinging indictment of a system which has caused people of colour to struggle from one moneyless period to another, to be harassed by both white legislation and black gangsterism, and to be drawn almost helplessly into a state of total inebriation. Like the mad fool, the gaiety of Motsisi's characters uncovers the truth of apartheid's rotten core: if whites are in charge, the aberrations of the black proletariat are of their making.

As a 'victim of apartheid', it would have been easier for Motsisi to have directed his invective in an overt fashion at the excesses of Nationalist rule. Yet instead, he chooses to focus on the ordinary existence of the township dweller, depicting the degeneration that apartheid was causing in the life of the ordinary inhabitant. In this, his sketches are very much akin to a proletarian literature (and ironically Dodson's particular analytical mode would probably require the mobilisation of just such a proletarian readership).

In another sense, Motsisi's sketches can be seen

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to connect with our own literary moment in another way. They are very much of the character that commentators like Es'kia Mphahlele, Njabulo Ndebele, and lately, Albie Sachs have advocated. Ndebele, for instance, basing his observation on the kind of stories that are heard on the 'buses and trains carrying people to and from work in South Africa', has argued that,

The vast majority of the stories were either tragedies or comedies about lovers, township jealousies, the worries of widows; about consulting medicine men for luck in horse racing, or luck for getting a job or winning a football match; about fantastic ghost stories.... And we have to face the truth here: there were proportionately fewer overtly political stories.²¹

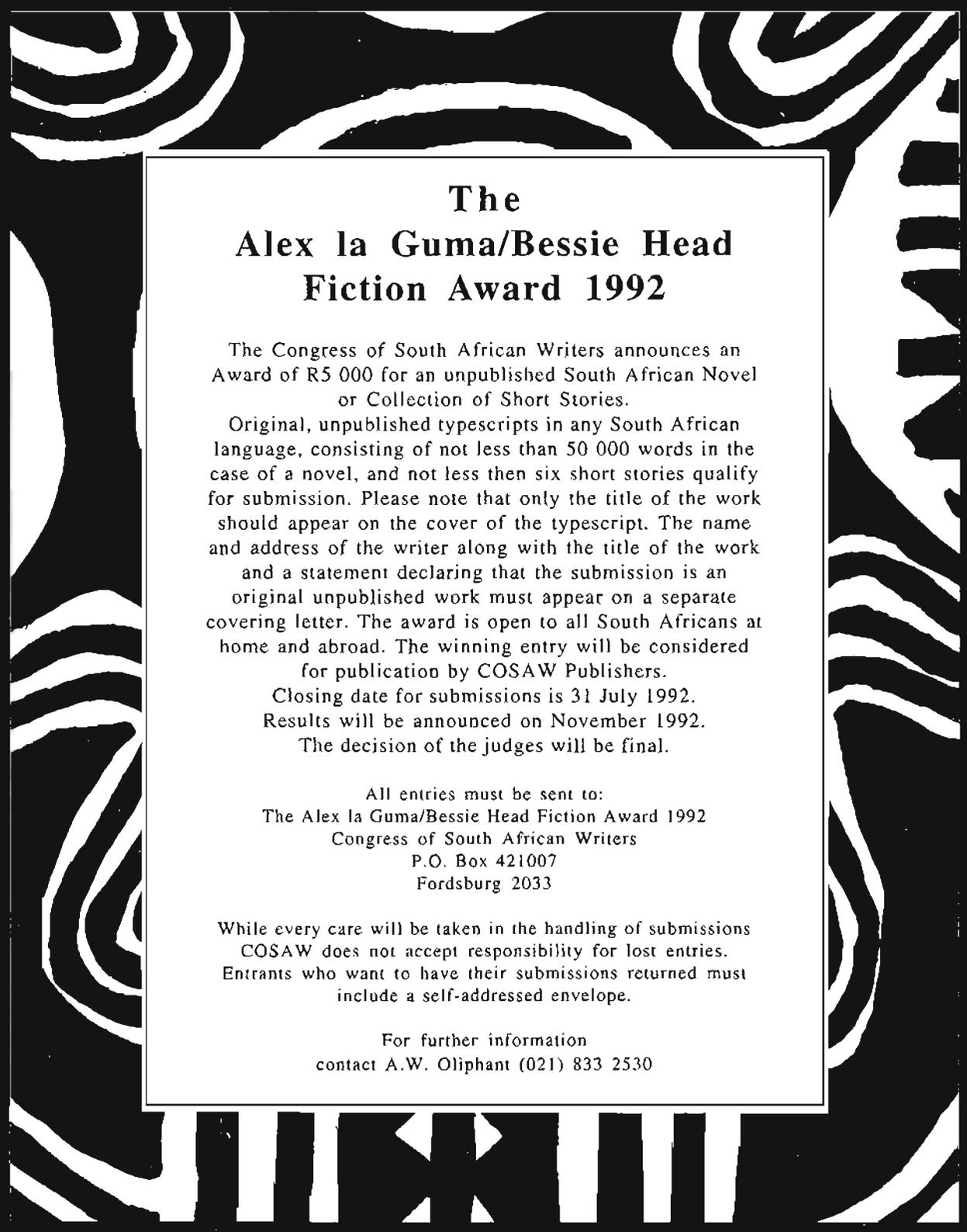
Sachs, likewise, in his relatively recent 'Preparing Ourselves For Freedom', has stated that the narrow formulations of 'protest' and 'resistance' literature has impoverished South African expression. He requests that writers, instead of viewing writing as 'just another kind of missile-firing apparatus', should 'shake off the gravity of their anguish and break free from the solemn formulas that people (like [himself]) have tried for so many years to impose upon them'.²²

Motsisi's decidedly anti-heroic sketches are undeniably interested in the same kind of ordinary existence suggested by Ndebele and Sachs, exploring as they do the activities of the little man whose sense of oppression has given him a survivor's mentality: his influence is minimal, his drives are basic, his desire for self preservation devoid of idealised heroism. To state, that the 'boodle-and-booze-humor' of the sketches is 'not an effective medium for political comment'²³ is a naive injunction, as it ignores, for one thing, the ideological potential of such irreverence in the face of a mas-

sively restrictive system. If anything, Motsisi's characters celebrate the one aspect over which no-one had any control: the human spirit. 

Notes

1. David Rabkin, *Drum Magazine (1951-1961): And the Works of Black South African Writers Associated With It*, Leeds University, 1975, (unpublished dissertation) p. 113.
2. Esther Sangweni, *Black Journalism and Black English Literature in South Africa: A Study in Relationships*, University of South Africa, 1986, (unpublished dissertation) p. 45.
3. Rowland Smith, *Drum: The Voice of the Townships*, (unpublished paper), Dalhousie University, p. 21.
4. Casey Motsisi, in Mthobhi Mutloate (ed) *Casey and Co: Selected Writings of Casey 'Kid' Motsisi*. Ravan, 1983, p. 69.
5. See David Rabkin's study; Graeme Addison, 'Drum Beat: An Examination of Drum', *Speak*, 1, 4, July-August, 1978; Bruno van Dyk, *Short Story Writing in Drum Magazine, 1951-1961: A Critical Appraisal*, University of Natal, 1989 (unpublished dissertation) and Michael Chapman (ed) *The Drum Decade*, University of Natal Press, 1990.
6. As Hopkinson would say later of his tenure, 'Our photographers were the basis on whom everything would depend'. Tom Hopkinson, *In the Fiery Continent*, Victor Gollancz, 1962, p. 60.
7. Casey Motsisi, *op cit*, pp. 2-3.
8. *Ibid.* p. 3.
9. *Ibid.* p. 8.
10. *Ibid.* p. 6.
11. *Ibid.* p. 11.
12. A stockvel is an informal syndicate which organises parties at members' homes by rotation. An entrance fee is charged which in turn is pooled to pay for food and drink. Any money that is not used is held over until the next meeting.
13. David Rabkin, *op cit*, p.113.
14. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (trans. Helene Iswolsky) Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 37.
15. P. 63.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. David Rabkin, *op cit*, p. 111.
19. Ursula Barnett, *A Vision of Order*, Maskew Miller Longman, 1983, p. 183.
20. Don Dodson, in *African Studies Review*, XVII, 2, 1974, p. 328.
21. Njabulo Ndebele, in *Staffrider*, 6, 1, 1984, p. 47.
22. Albie Sachs, 'ANC In-House Seminar on: Culture Discussion Document'.
23. Don Dodson, *op cit*, p. 324.



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Realism and the African Novel

Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane

Harvest of Thorns by Shimmer Chinodya.
Boabab Books, 1989

Harvest of Thorns by Shimmer Chinodya is the moving story of Benjamin, whose *nom de guerre*, Pasi NemaSellout, means Down with Sellouts. He drops out of school, abandons his family for the forest, and joins the growing band of guerrillas fighting the Rhodesian army in the Chimurenga war, Zimbabwe's war of independence. Written in the tradition of Pepeta's more successful novel, *Mavombe*, set in Angola, *Harvest of Thorns* details various guerrilla campaigns, focusing on how life in the countryside bordering Mozambique was transformed by the war and how it affected Benjamin, who 'in the crucible of a war which leaves nobody untouched...develops into manhood and a remarkable maturity'.

At its best, Chinodya's prose is highly evocative, as in his description of ghetto scenes at the beginning of the novel:

When he woke up the sun was already three hours old, blazing on the township scene. He whipped open the thin curtains and looked outside. A group of young boys were playing football in the street. An ice-cream man and a firewood vendor were jangling their bells from opposite ends of the road. Young girls sauntered from the grocers with loaves of bread or packets of milk, neat little green packages of meat and bottles of paraffin, frugal tots of cooking oil and bunches of choumoellier. A mother with a blanket round her waist was slapping a naked child playing with a garden tap. The child was screaming wildly and stamping her feet.

Though marked occasionally by moments of such splendid evocation and lucidity, the novel fails to rise to the promise of the early section. The proof-reading in parts is appalling and a constant irritant to the reader. Awkward syntax sometimes mars the work, as in the following example, again from the early section of the book:

The afternoon of the day he came back he went out with Peter to the shops and she stood at the window watching them; Peter hobbling on his crutch beside him, the stump on his leg jiggling in his shorts, his face flashing and him striding on and she thought how tall he had grown, how broad now his shoulders, how sunburnt his face.

This is not stream-of-consciousness or any such technique but loss of control, about which more will be said. However, the novel's most regrettable aspect lies perhaps in its missed opportunities for innovation, by a writer singularly well placed to become innovative. Though always gesturing towards it at the linguistic level, by dropping the occasional Shona phrase in his narrative style, Chinodya squanders an opportunity to dip into his Shona storytelling tradition in order to capture the spirit of the countryside and its people, who are worshippers of Chaminuka and Nehanda! He is a writer yet to find his own voice. His technique, like that of many African novelists writing today, remains imitational, influenced in the main by the tradition of realism, which aims simply at faithful,

authentic, and objective representation of actual life.

Generally realists are believers in pragmatism: the value of our thoughts and actions they uphold, lies in their practical consequences in human affairs. Logical thinking must be subordinate to practical life, to satisfying some practical end that life demands, not to a search for some abstract truth. The truth realists seek is associated with discernible consequences which are verifiable by experience, the final arbiter of truth. This is a literature of what Njabulo Ndebele describes as surface meanings, never probing beneath the deceptively placid surface and the seemingly self-evident. We see little in the lives or campaigns of the guerrillas that is truly illuminating and, like the guerrillas, the workers and peasants relive such banalities day by day. It is a small miracle they triumph in the end. In fact, with the exception of Benjamin, his mother, and perhaps his father, the novel contains numerous faceless characters, always moving in the shadows, never in full glare of the reader. Such are Benjamin's wife, who lacks any presence, the workers and peasants, and his guerrilla comrades.

The occurrences realists tend to describe are the common, average, and everyday or contemporary experiences. However, realists also tend to be selective in their choice of material, focusing upon what seems real to their largely middle class readers. Indeed, realism can be thought of as the ultimate in middle class art: it finds its subject in bourgeois life and manners. Therein lies a difference between Chinodya's novel and the work of realists. In the manner of Sembene Ousmane, Alex La Guma, or Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinodya's novel is proletarian in its appeal and characteristic concerns with the liberation of the downtrodden and oppressed. We see in this another truth of fiction from outside the Western world: As African and Third World authors in general came to eschew the traditional patterns of the novel, in their hands realism came to be a protest against the falseness to their experience and what they considered the sickly sentimentality of Western life and fiction. They

turned, paradoxically, like the romantics, to novels marked by strong interest in action, presenting episodes based on adventure, combat, and love. Yet they retain the realist's concern with character as the centre of the novel and, like Chinodya, explore the psychology of the actors in their stories.

Realists also advocate what is essentially a mimetic theory of art, a technique akin to focusing the camera lens on the character and events imitated. Thus realists centre their attention in the thing imitated and ask for something close to a one-to-one correspondence between the representation and the subject. 'Truthful' treatment of a subject consists of faithful imitation of surface details, as in a photograph, with the goal of creating the illusion of reality. Creating such an illusion, however, requires certain artistic choices: Characters have to be ordinary, average, contemporary people rather than remote, exceptional extremists who form the central subjects of much earlier literature — the Agamemnons, the Pechorins, and King Lear. Plots have to be unobtrusive, not contrived or with some predetermined end. The plot is made up of the trivial incidents of everyday life, as natural as possible in their development, capturing the wandering, indeterminate nature of ordinary experience rather than contriving the tensions and climaxes of traditional plots. Here again Chinodya departs from the norm but not always with gratifying results, for often authorial intrusion is felt in the action in order to pull off the spectacular or heroic deeds of his guerrilla characters. To be fair, the guerrillas suffer certain setbacks but, as with tendentious novels of this kind, victory is certain.

Finally, like the plot, the language of realism is equally natural or at least gives the impression of being so. Not only are characters made to speak in the intonation of everyday life but the authors strive to make themselves as invisible as possible, through merging their point-of-view with that of the characters, thus becoming neutral reflectors of impersonal reality. Chinodya's dialogue, however, is stiff, formal, and in some parts unnatural. The improbable scene in which Benjamin speaks to his mother about

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his new wife, their first real conversation since his return from the Chimurenga war, is unconvincing, veering towards the melodramatic, and therefore taxing to the reader's credibility. The fault lies in the tone — there has been no estrangement between mother and son to account for it — and reflects Chinodya's failure to handle dialogue with authenticity:

'I want to talk to you about Nkazana,' Mrs Tichafa told Benjamin in her bedroom that night, taking advantage of the breeze of tenderness brought by the groceries he had bought her. 'I want to be sure what you want to do about her.'

'What's there to be sure about?'

'Do her people know she is here?'

'What difference would that make?'

'Anything can happen to a pregnant woman! Besides, her people would need to know.'

'In the bush hundreds of girls had babies without anybody knowing.'

'This is a different situation! What if something should happen to her?'

'If something happens it happens....'

'Oh, Benjamin. Whatever you did out there has...'

'What do you think I did? Shoot birds with a catapult?'

She gaped at him.

'All right, all right. I just walked around with my gun. Nobody fired at me and I didn't fire at anybody. I didn't see corpses and didn't touch any. I'm clean. There are no vengeful spirits after me. You don't have to take me to a *nanga* or to a priest. Is that what you want to hear? Does that satisfy you? Does that make you happy?'

Her eyes quivered, stewing in horror. 'Why don't we just not talk about it, mother?'

'If only your father were here and I didn't have to face all this alone. I just hope she doesn't have complications.'

'What are hospitals there for?'

'But you'll be good to her, Benjamin, won't you? Promise you won't hurt her. She's just a stranger here until we let her people know she's here.'

'Her people died in the war.' Benjamin said.

The best thing here is the startling revelation at the end, but there is a multitude of things that are wrong with this scene. It simply does not ring true to life, and it comes as a complete surprise that he still calls her 'mother'. Like Mrs Tichafa, the reader can only gape with incredulity.

The few experimental techniques in the novel are seldom successful. The 'asides' or introspective parts in Chapters 20, 27, and 32 barely touch the intended heights of lyricism and are like thorns sorely stuck but never integrated into the texture of the novel. There is, indeed, little innovation, successful or otherwise, about the novel, which is deficient in yet another regard. As earlier implied, Chinodya displays little control over his material, as evidenced by his rambling style. The fault lies in the over-ambitious scheme of the novel, whose author tries to handle material for two novels. Consequently he meets with little success in merging the story of his parents — their youth, courtship, marriage, and estrangement — with Benjamin's story. The two stories have no necessary or cause-and-effect connection.

Benjamin joins the Chimurenga war to escape charges of participating in student demonstrations to protest announcements by the Smith regime that African students will be drafted into the Rhodesian army. The novel's preceding events, dealing with the family situation from which he springs, have no bearing upon his choice. Nor do we see how his upbringing has affected his character and determined his choices, except in the very indirect sense that he is an African boy growing up in 'the turbulence of the 1960s and, typically of his generation', experiencing an adolescence dominated by political events in the country'.

However, *Harvest of Thorns* adds, not in any

particularly distinguished fashion, to the growing corpus of Zimbabwean literature as yet dominated by the war theme, as Kenyan or Algerian or American literature once was. The literature has still to come out of its forest hide-out into the open arena of post-colonial reconstruction and its seemingly intractable problems that are as much a challenge to

the politician as they are to the novelist seeking to set down the experience. In the hands of Chinodya, the literature has yet to go beyond its apprentice phase to realism. He does not represent any giant leap beyond Dambudzo Marechera and Chenjerai Hove, with both of whom he inevitably invites comparison. **S**

Makhanda Senzangakhona

Two Poems

Hymn

I thought of you
whom I buried
in far off lands
without hymn but with slogan

Thought of you
detained my mind
soldiers without tombstones
along the road I interred
you
for lost souls
to take note
of paths you traversed

Roses I had not
to serve you passage
Hearses I possessed none
to line your routes
after battles

Your flag I saw
seethed in smoke
of right-wingers
still seeped in right-wing
ignorant of your trials
I pray without God
lest their wings
rot in flames too
tomorrow bodes neither right-
nor left-wing
but freedom's will



Remember

Here we're
'from far-flung' lands
in Neto's language
& battle in our hearts

There we've been
married of mosquitoes
& befriended of flies

In deserts we dwelled
strapped to hunger's back
We soared
stripped off wings
broken off flaps —
nonetheless —
we crawled,
ran & rolled
after freedom

Tormented we're still
tortured our fate seem —
but dawn seem not far
when smiles will
wear us after this
naked night

A New Beginning for SA Poetry

Dirk Klopper

Poems 1964-1989 by Peter Horn,
published by Ravan Press 1991.

One hopes that the publication of Peter Horn's *Poems 1964-1989* will finally lay to rest the quarrel between materialists and formalists, and expose the imprudence of making absolutist claims on behalf of any one aesthetic. Inasmuch as Horn's poems are both unashamedly political and highly crafted, they demonstrate that materialist and formalist concerns are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and that it is possible for a poet to dedicate his writing to a political cause without automatically sacrificing technical achievement.

Horn's work is premised on the belief, as he expresses it in his acknowledgements to the collection, that 'poetry has a function in the struggle'. Judging from the diversity of the poems, this 'function' is not, however, conceived in a narrow, dogmatic way. It embraces both the public function of resistance poetry, where the exhortative and the rhetorical predominate, and the private function of confessional poetry, where the reflective and the lyrical predominate. Often the public/rhetorical voice and the private/lyrical voice overlap, thereby linking political struggle and personal travail.

The collection is divided into eleven sections, corresponding broadly with Horn's previously published volumes of poetry, although additional subdivisions have been added. The arrangement is basically chronological, with the exception of the first two sections where, seemingly for thematic reasons, the order has been inverted. Chronologically, the volume *Voices from the Gallows Tree* (1968) precedes the volume *Walking Through Our Sleep* (1974).

The value of retaining the true chronology is that it enables one to consider *Voices from the Gallows Tree* in its actual context of the sixties. The introspective anguish of this decade of poets (most memorably exemplified in the case of the late Arthur Nortje) is overwhelming present in this section of poems, the characteristic themes of which are prosecution, exile and madness. The poem 'Hurricane in a splintering skull' shows the persona grappling with the inability of language to address a condition where meaning has been violently dislocated, and exploring the paradox that such dislocation, such madness, offers the promise of a renewal of meaning:

That is the madness of our dreams: the sanity
of tomorrow. Our lies are the truth.

A hurricane.

With force it sweeps the market clean,
terrifies the righteous, and whirls
dead branches.

This is the language of the hurricane. The
violence
of life reborn.

Many of the elements of *Voices from the Gallows Tree* that characterise it as a product of the sixties — its apocalyptic tone, utopian vision, antithetical and even surreal formulations, and radical stance — are evident in much of the subsequent poetry, up to the most recent.

This is not to say that Horn's poetry has failed to change over time. As the excerpt from 'Hurricane

in a splintering skull' suggests, change is a central concern of the poetry, both thematically and stylistically. Focusing on the political upheavals that began in the early sixties and that continued into the seventies and eighties, the poetry articulates the transformations in consciousness that have accompanied these events. A later poem from the section *The Plumstead Elegies* describes, by way of a prophetic view of the future, the transformations of consciousness that will have been required:

Yet, it is strange, to live on earth no longer,
as we had known it from birth, to have to
forget the rituals
of competition and egoism: to become
healed and whole
is a strange ache in the heart. What I was,
held by fearful hands, I can no longer be,
even my name,
that hallmark of my self, has to be left behind.
What we valued, broken playthings of childhood.
Strange, not to go on wishing the wishes
of yesterday,
strange to see all that was solid wing
through space,
trying to find a new perspective.
(The tenth elegy)

Early on in the collection, Horn expresses the realisation that the quest for a 'new perspective' requires, also, a new poetic idiom. Many of the poems in the first section of *Walking Through Our Sleep* deal with this realisation, as in the pithy 'Explaining my new style':

I do not walk in the forest
admiring flowers and trees:
but among policemen
who check my passport
and my political background.

Walking Through Our Sleep was probably placed first for the very reason that the poems in it announce a new poetic credo. This credo includes the

renunciation of the romantic imagination ('Explaining my new style'), the ironic inversion of conventional poetic symbol ('Morning in Durban'), the displacement of traditional meanings (South African town life'), and the choice of a revolutionary public voice over a bourgeois private voice ('Poems at bargain prices').

As the rest of the collection makes clear, however, there is no question of a chosen style being adequate indefinitely to the task of conveying a changing reality. Rather, the poet has continually to reinvent his poetic language. The hazards of such an enterprise are portrayed graphically in another poem from *The Plumstead Elegies*:

I am hounded by the songs of the birds in the bush,
the reed flutes floating across the water,
the lagoon, where the silt is dense,
and by my fright:
I am asked to fly, born of woman. Terrified
I try my wings, to leap into the unsayable, where
the things fall from me,
which made me at home in the secluded
coziness of everyday:
bridges, gates, wells, windows and towers.
I live in the suspension between now and then,
neither childhood nor future, condemned
to see things
in a frame which is not, insisting on what is.
(The ninth elegy)

Of all contemporary South African English poets, Horn is probably the most receptive to international poetic influences. Individual poems acknowledge their indebtedness to such poets as Su-Tung-Po (1036-1101), Po-Chui (772-840), Catullus, Bertolt Brecht and Rainer Maria Rilke. Thus although Horn addresses himself to local political conditions, he is not a parochial poet. Through his wide reading he has enriched and extended the tradition of resistance poetry in South Africa, giving it an international resonance.

The middle sections entitled *The Plumstead Elegies* and *The Civil War Cantos* represent, in my

Dirk Klopper

view, the crowning achievement of the collection. The first of these two sections embodies the introspective and confessional tendencies of Horn's poetry, while the second embodies the oratorical and exhortative tendencies.

The ten poems that comprise *The Plumstead Elegies* constitute a sustained meditation on the nature and function of poetry in a society riven by violence, injustice and exploitation. In these elegies, Horn re-examines the basis of his writing and re-commits himself to finding an appropriate poetic voice:

I will talk like the Chinese poet, who said
 'That the people are starving,
 is, because the rich grab too much;
 that is why they are hungry.'
 A voice speaking across centuries, remorseless,
 a voice pruned of all cushions and adjectives,
 speaking the only truth worth saying,
 as long as there is pain, famine, death, murder.
 (The first elegy)

Horn seldom, however, attains the simplicity and directness of the Chinese poet whom he invokes. In a way, his insistence on employing a style shorn of romantic excesses and complex tropes is simply a rhetorical device. For he cannot resist flights into lyricism, and these are invariably wrenching:

Men of this town, why are we winter sad?
 Have we not, like migrating birds,
 communicated our intention? In the lateness
 of this hour
 are we not prepared to take wing?
 To rise from the stagnant pools of white feathers?
 Do we not scent, long before we arrive,
 the rain-drenched
 flowering of our destination? What are riot vans
 and squad cars against our purpose?
 (The fourth elegy)

Characteristic of Horn's method in these elegies is to juxtapose, as in the above excerpt, the lyrical and the prosaic. This has the paradoxical effect of

heightening the lyrical element, even though the appropriateness of the lyrical response in the given political context is remorselessly questioned:

It is one thing to sing about love, the predawn
 flight
 of winged heartbeats, the tenderness of your hand
 in my hair,
 the music of silence. Something else
 to sing about the monotonous repetitive
 tightening of ever
 the same screw on the undercarriage of a car.
 (The third elegy)

Horn makes it explicit that the creation of a new poetic idiom goes hand in hand with the creation of a new political order. The poet is a marginal figure, a spectator, only inasmuch as he has defined himself as such by remaining within the confines of what Horn regards as an obsolete aesthetic. The poet has the choice to remain outside of history or to join in its making:

I: a spectator,
 turned towards you, try to order experience, but
 fragmented it collapses into dust.
 Until I realise: this is a new kind of reality,
 not to be contemplated, but to be made.
 (The eighth elegy)

The Civil War Cantos can be seen as a response to the dilemmas and questions posed in *The Plumstead Elegies*. Whereas the elegies are essentially private in tone and style, the cantos are public pieces employing a popularist voice (two of the cantos are identified as having been delivered at mass rallies at Athlone Stadium in the late eighties). It is in the cantos that Horn realises his intention of writing a fully politicised poetry.

The notable features of the cantos are their simplicity of expression, their attention to concrete detail, and their explicit conscientising purpose. 'Canto seven: One and Many', delivered at Athlone Stadium on 1st May 1987, begins by evoking a

migrant worker's arrival in town:

Remember: when you came to town?
In your ragged clothes with a little bundle
of precious possessions: a tin can, some tea
and some sugar,
a blanket against the cold and a plastic sheet
to keep out the rain. And there was no more to
carry.

The migrant worker is attacked by township thugs,
harrassed by police, and exploited by the factory
where he eventually finds employment. His help-
lessness ends when he realises that he is not alone
in his struggle for a better existence:

You were all alone until you understood
that you were not alone. Until you looked
and saw:
There are others alone like me, but together
we can lick them. Because we are many.
Because we are many, and we, many, are one,
we can win this war for freedom
we can win this war for a human existence.
Because we are many more than them,
we can win this war for food and housing
and comfort and knowledge and power.

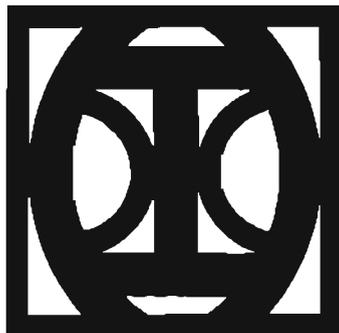
The Plumstead Elegies and *The Civil War Cantos*
will, I am convinced, reveal to posterity that we,
too, had our Neruda, our voice of conscience, in our
dark night of oppression.

The remaining poems in the collection rehearse
many of the concerns already touched on without
achieving the authority, vigour and poignancy of
the central sections. A cynical note creeps in and
undermines what is one of Horn's strongest traits in
the earlier poems, his uncompromising idealism.

However, readers of South African English po-
etry will appreciate the satirical wit of the conclud-
ing poem. Entitled 'The real South African veld and
vlei poem extract or Orpheus in the Great Karoo',
the poem purports to represent a summation of the
South African 'great tradition', and echoes Pringle,
Slater, Campbell and Butler, among others. The
poem offers itself, in fact, as the epitaph of this
tradition:

Having travelled a long way through the babble,
My ear filled with sweet nonsense, I return to find
Our kraal is desolate, our calabashes are dry.
Poetry, pale, wears a Stetson, eyes closed
by a penny,
Uncoffined, unknelled, to its grave it is sped,
Unwept, with irreverent haste. This paper book
Shall be a grave where those hopes buried lie.
And the darkness re-enters our soul:
Sick of the Present, I cling to the Past,
POETRY IS DISTANT, BUT BOREDOM
IS NEAR.

Perhaps time will prove that Horn's poetry is in-
deed, as it declares itself to be, a new beginning for
South African English poetry. 



Mary-Rose Hendrikse

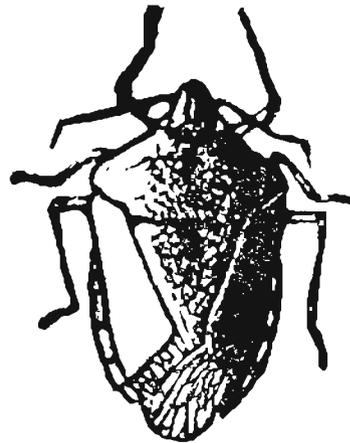
Two Poems

Almost Like a Woman

Almost like a woman
you thread words together like beads.
A pearl among the imperfect
you interweave with ease,
letting your thoughts linger
into the late hours
till they fold into dreams.

Almost like a woman
you thread strings of scarlet chillies:
an arc of sideways smiles
to hang on your walls and wither
till they fold and fall.
Like a woman
you take pride in them as decorations
and as a hot yet subtle flavour
for your lover's meals.

I watch and listen,
as you loop the loose ends of my being,
slipping a word in now and again
till at last we make a meal of each other.



As in a Dream

Displaced, unhoused, as in a dream,
I lose the oath;
the whole bush reels.
Dry grass squirms with unseen creatures
Rocks loom and double in the sun's glare.

Spring has come, un-dressed in innocence
The dry eyes of everlasting swell with brightness
each petal charged with life's seething riot.

Then I find him, at last, perched on a rock,
hands gloved in thick red heat,
fastening hooks to the unyielding rod.

As in a dream, one moment's relief
replaced by despair,
for my love wears the face of a pedator.

The Mankayi Sontonga Short Story Award 1992

The Congress of South African Writers invites submissions to the Annual Mankayi Sontonga Short Story Award. The stories can be in any indigenous language other than English or Afrikaans. The reason for this award is to ensure that the long neglected indigenous languages are promoted. Research shows that most literary awards, open to all South African languages, are dominated by English finalists and award recipients. This award is a step towards correcting this imbalance by encouraging the writing of new fiction in the indigenous languages.

All writers who have not yet had an own anthology of stories published are welcome to submit a maximum of two stories, each not exceeding 5 000 words.

A written statement declaring that the stories are the original work of the entrant and unpublished must accompany all submissions.

The writer of the story assessed to be the best by a panel of judges will receive a R1 000 award. The ten best stories listed by the judges will be considered for publication in an anthology by COSAW Publishers.

The deadline for submissions is 31 July 1992. Writers will be informed of the decision of the judges by 20 November 1992. The decision of the judges will be final.

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Congress of South African Writers
P.O. Box 421007, Fordsburg 2033

Although every care will be taken in the handling of submissions COSAW does not accept responsibility for lost entries. Entrants who wish to have their stories returned must include a stamped and self-addressed envelope.

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