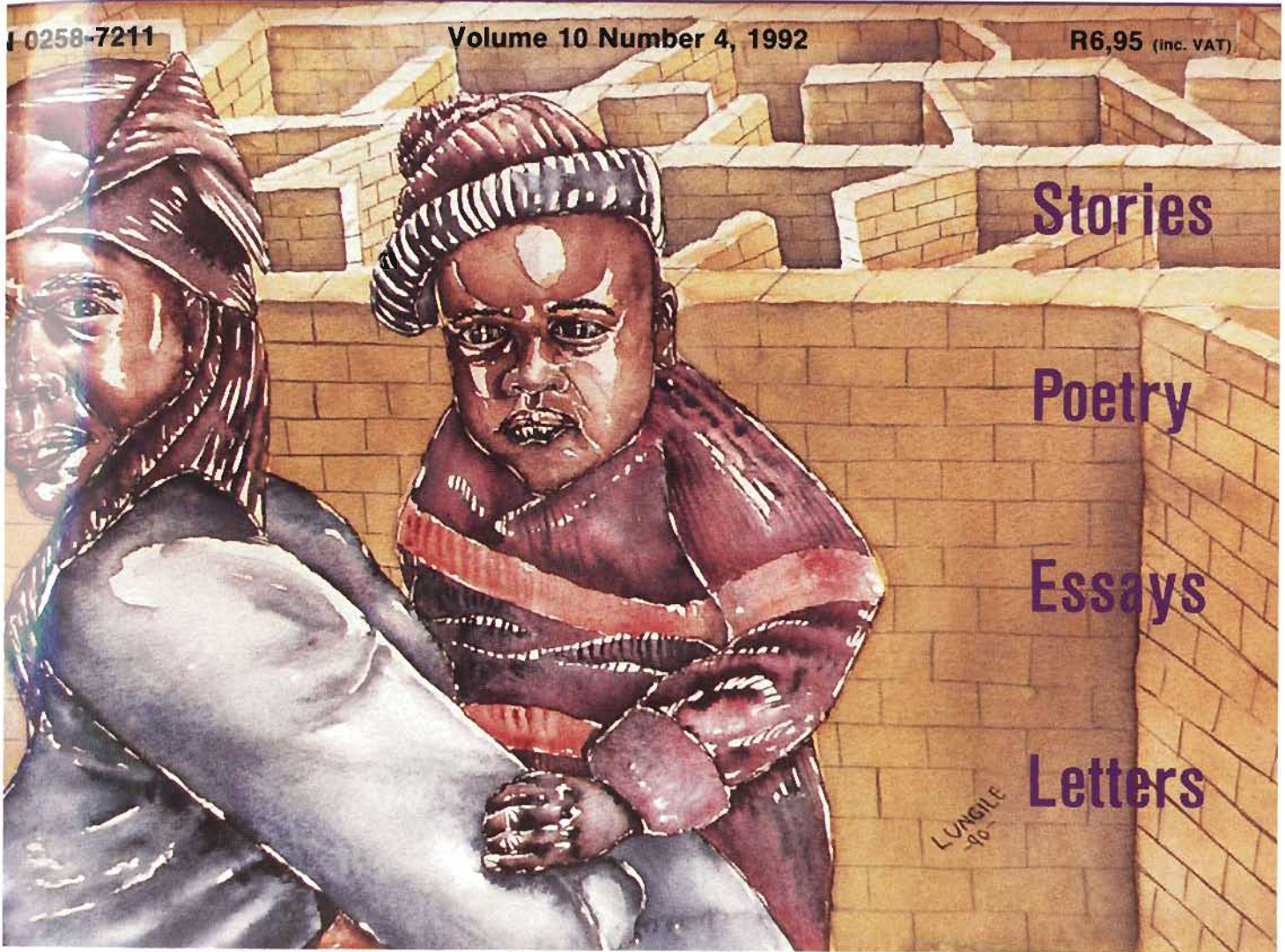


# Staffrider

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Stories

Poetry

Essays

Letters

LUNGILE  
-90-

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**Mongane Wally Serote: In Search of Light**  
**Keorapetse Kgositsile: Culture as a Site**  
**of Struggle**  
**Victor Matom: Sleeping with the Enemy**



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# COMMENT

Over the last four decades a significant shift has taken place in contemporary societies. Since the 1950s there has been a move away from the large concentration of workers within the manufacturing industries as more and more people were absorbed in the emerging information and communication networks. This led to the growth of what is currently referred to as the Information Society. Along with the growing automatization of manufacturing, underpinned by a vast network of information and knowledge, fewer people were able to produce more commodities. The computer is now the driving power, and information the fuel of social development and economic growth.

In societies where these developments are taking place it is accompanied by an increase in the level of education amongst the population as a whole to ensure that all individuals have equal access to the sources of information and the means of communication. Where older social formations were characterised by sharp class division flowing from the underlying agricultural or industrial relations of production in society, the new Information Society has seen the concentration of information in the hands of new electronic elites.

In South Africa with its long history of differential empowerment in education the scene is set for the continuation of inequality on a different level unless decisive interventions are made immediately. One is repeatedly struck with horror by the educational disaster apartheid education has inflicted on South African society. The damaging effects of Bantu Education have been commented on ad nauseam. At times the pity displayed by certain sectors of society towards the victims of this education are nothing more than thinly disguised pretexts for indulging in a sense of superiority. What has however escaped many commentators and analysts is the extent to which Christian National Education and white education in general ironically debilitated the privileged sector of South African so-

ciety. It isolated them from the vital strands of an emerging democratic culture and trapped them in a white supremacist laager where conservatives and liberals competed as to who is the most 'cultured', 'civilised' and 'refined' to rule over the rest of the population.

The implications of this is spelt out in Njabulo Ndebele's essay published in this edition of *Staffrider*. The current faltering process of change will, when the minimum objective of establishing a viable democracy is realised, be seen as a turning point in the history of this society. This, as I have said on other occasions, calls for a fundamental reassessment of literature and culture in South Africa. The time has come to place the shield of privilege and the clichés of supremacy under scrutiny.

Furthermore, while the long term growth and sustainable development in all spheres of life within the context of democracy is unthinkable without an effective education for all South Africans, the current government is engaged in an incomprehensible exercise of injecting further chaos into education. While hundreds of schools stand empty and more than fifty percent of the population is illiterate, teachers are made redundant and educational institutions are being closed. The method is madness.

The essays of Orenna Krut and Sandra Braude look at the role of basic information institutions such as publishers and libraries in education and the development of a literary culture. Two of South Africa's illustrious poets, Wally Serote and Keorapetse Kgositse, once again remind us of the cultural challenges confronting this society. There are stories and poetry and visual images to stimulate, provoke and delight.

This edition was compiled with the assistance of the Transvaal Editorial Collective. Thanks to everyone who contributed.

*Andries Walter Oliphant*





## Black Sabbath, White Christmas

Sansom Kodibona

And so the children of the African National Congress  
Gathered in multitudes  
To bury their slain  
To comfort their widows  
Like a swarm of locusts in search of new fields  
They filled the graveyards to lay the heroes to rest.  
Unlike locusts they were not in search of food  
But of solutions to escape the hunter's snare.  
AK 47, SPM Limpit mine and Mkhonto. Amandla  
Became a military salutation.

Medal and honour  
To those who had paid the ultimate price  
Laid side by side on a monumental structure.  
Their names could have stretched from the Limpopo  
Right down to the tip of South Africa.

This was the Black Sabbath.  
Written in the calendars by the blood of the martyrs  
Ground into history books  
By those who sought no personal glory,  
But a place under the sun for blacks.

Christmas carols filled the air.  
The smell of fillet and steak permeated white kitchens.  
Wine and beer overflowed from caskets  
Like a river after torrential rain.  
Symphony orchestras rendered heavenly music,  
Beautiful sounds that could have brought smiles to all  
And man nearer to God,  
But no saints came marching in.

It was a White Christmas, all right,  
With its traditional abundance of veneer holiness,  
Excessive merry-making, socialising and visitation —  
A Christmas not to celebrate the birth of Christ  
But the annihilation of the oppressed.

Whilst laughter like sonatas shattered the night  
And first crackers blazed multi-coloured sparks,  
Marking the birth of a prosperous new year,  
The ghettos licked their wounds and counted their dead.  
They had no reason to be happy, or for that matter,  
To be sorry for themselves.  
This was the price uhuru demanded.

They could not miss the festivities,  
Nor the shebeens their profits.  
Neither could they sing Christmas carols  
Nor welcome the new year  
What was there to celebrate?

GRAPHIC BY ANDREW LORD



**Ivan Vladislavić**

LEON  
TOLSTOY  
GOL  
D  
M  
A

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**BY**

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**MONUMENTS**

## 1 Grekov

**P**avel Grekov paused for a moment in the overheated lobby of the apartment block to turn up his coat collar and smooth down his hair. He glanced sceptically at his watch — five to two — and then at the pinched face of the city behind the glass. He would have to hurry, which he was not in the habit of doing, but at least a brisk walk would get the circulation going. He pulled on his gloves, jammed his fists into his pockets and shouldered through the door.

He walked with his head pulled down into his collar and his eyes fixed on the toes of his boots. He saw from above the tentative splay-footed gait foisted on him by an icy pavement, and was not amused by it. The streets were almost deserted. Did it get this cold in the Transvaal? he wondered. Did it snow? Probably not, it was too close to the Tropic of Capricorn. Then he pulled his right hand out of his pocket and pressed three fingers to his chest, where a letter from those unimaginable latitudes was stored in an inside pocket. He might have been taking the letter's temperature through the thick cloth, or trying to feel the patter of its heart above the pounding of his own. Get more exercise, Grekov! he lectured himself. Out from behind that desk!

Grekov was a junior translator in the Administration for Everyday Services, an English specialist. Slowly but surely over the years he had established an interdepartmental reputation for his command of a fractious and somewhat eccentric English vocabulary. In recent months he had discovered his forte: rendering broken English in indestructible Russian. In the departmental estimation this was a highly desirable skill, and there were rumours, none of which had made an impression on Grekov himself, that he would soon be transferred to Foreign Affairs. He would have leapt at the opportunity.

The fact is that Grekov was bored. In the course of nearly five years in the same position no more than a handful of interesting documents had crossed his desk, precious messages in bottles carried to him on a tide of mundane communiqués and news clippings. It goes

without saying that these rarities never originated in Everyday Services, but rather in the Ministry of Culture, or Foreign Affairs, or even Sport and Recreation, and they were so scarce that he was able to remember them all without effort.

He remembered them now, in chronological order, as he hurried through the snow-struck city. His career had started auspiciously with an exchange of telegrams about an inheritance and an itinerary issued by a travel agent in Kingston, which he could have sworn was in code — although this notion may have been put into his head by the security restriction stamped on the docket. In any event, this scoop had been followed by a dry spell of several years, until at last he was called upon by Culture to translate a menu for an official function. How many people could there be in Moscow who knew what a *madumbi* casserole was? Then another drought. More recently the tempo had started picking up: he'd done several love-letters full of *double entendres* and a set of instructions for assembling a Japanese exercise bicycle (and suspected that one of the love-letters and the bicycle were intimately connected). There had also been poems by a Malawian dissident and the lyrics of a song by a band called The Dead Kennedys. But nothing had gripped his imagination like the letter he now carried over his heart.

It had washed up in his in-tray a week ago, and its contents struck him as so unlikely that at first he thought someone higher up was pulling his leg — probably that Kulyabin character in Housing. Just the day before, Kulyabin had made faces at him in the men's room and told him to keep his pecker up.

But the letter proved to be genuine. The Chief confirmed it: the translation had been requisitioned by Foreign Economic Relations. Still Grekov wasn't convinced. He phoned the Ministry himself, on the pretext of finding out how urgently the translation was required, and got hold of a certain Christov, the aide whose signature was on a covering note pinned to the envelope. Christov was adamant: the letter had come all the way from the Republic of South Africa, signed, sealed, and delivered. He hadn't actually opened it with his own two

Ivan Vladislavić

hands, but he had seen it done with his own two eyes. Grekov knew where South Africa was, of course? Of course.

As he neared the river Grekov became anxious that he had somehow lost the letter, or left it at home, and he had to lean against the parapet and fumble it out of his pocket. The envelope was green and edged around with blue and orange chevrons, and it was grubby, as if it had been dropped on a dusty floor. In the top left-hand corner was a pale blue rectangle containing the phrases PER LUG-POS, BY AIRMAIL and PAR AVION in a tidy stack, and beside it, in a smaller orange window, some sort of winged mythological creature, a crude representation of Pegasus, perhaps, or a griffin with a human face. In the right-hand corner were three stamps, crookedly affixed: the largest, apparently the most valuable, depicted a pastoral scene, with herds of fatted sheep and cattle grazing on fertile steppes; the smallest symbolised energy and industrial progress in a collage of cooling towers, dynamos and pylons; the other was a portrait of a man — a politician, he assumed, or a king. All three were shackled together by a postmark that read PRETORIA — 6.01.92.

The address was in blue ball-point pen, in a hand that had something childishly precise about it. The letters were all flat-footed, as if the writer had ruled lines in pencil to guide him and rubbed them out afterwards. The wording itself suggested a touching faith in the reliability of the postal service. It read:

The Ministir of Foreign Affairs  
P.O. Kremlin  
Moscow  
Russia ('USSR')

If he hadn't been wearing gloves Grekov would probably have taken out the letter and read it for the hundredth time. Instead he held the envelope up to the light to see the rectangular silhouette of folded paper inside. He turned the envelope over. On the back, in pencil, he had jotted down Christov's telephone number. He had also taken down some directions given to him by an acquaintance in Roads and Pavements. He studied them now, plotting his course to the monument, and

suddenly regretted that he had spoilt the envelope by scribbling on it. He put the letter away with a sigh and went along the embankment towards Borovitskaya Square.

The people he passed were like himself, bundled up in their own thoughts, and he saw nothing out of the ordinary until he reached the end of Prospekt Marksa, where a dozen middle-aged men — tourists, to judge by the primary colours of their anoraks — were standing together in a frozen clump gazing at the outside of the Lenin Library. He was struck firstly by the fact that they were all men, and then by the more remarkable fact that every last one of them wore spectacles.

He went up Prospekt Kalinina, looking out for the park that was his landmark, and when he found it turned left into a side-street. He became aware of a high-pitched buzzing in the distance, like a dentist's drill, and felt reassured that he was going in the right direction. In the middle of the next block he came to an even narrower street, a cul-de-sac called Bulkin, and at the end of that was the nameless square that was his destination.

The square at the dead end of Bulkin Street was surrounded by apartment blocks. In the middle of the cobbled space, on an imposing pedestal, was a large stone head. Not just any old head — a head of Lenin. And not just any old head of Lenin either. According to Roads and Pavements it was the largest head of Lenin in the city of Moscow. If Roads and Pavements were correct on that score, Grekov speculated, why should this not be the largest head of Lenin in Russia, or the broken-down Union, or even the whole out-of-order world?

The eyes in the head of Lenin looked straight at Grekov.

On this particular afternoon, as expected, two workers in overalls were standing on Lenin's bald pate, one wielding a noisy pneumatic drill and the other a gigantic iron clamp. A ladder rested against the cliff of a cheek, and at its foot a third worker was lounging against the pedestal. A lorry surmounted by a crane and braced at each corner by a huge hydraulic leg with an orthopaedic boot on the end of it stood to one side. Grekov judged that he was in good time, and so he crossed to the opposite pavement, which had been shovelled more recently, slowed his steps and strolled on at a leisurely pace, his



usual one, enjoying the progressive revelation of detail.

Naturally, the stone head loomed larger the closer he got. The features, at first indistinct, now clarified themselves. The eyes were still looking straight at him, even though he had changed pavements. On a smaller scale this phenomenon might have qualified as a miracle; on this scale it was undoubtedly a question of perspective. They were kindly eyes, if not quite grandfatherly, then more than avuncular; but as the mouth came into focus, beneath the sculpted wings of the moustache, the whole face changed, it became severe and irritable, it took on the cross expression of a bachelor uncle who didn't like children. And then, quite unaccountably, as he came closer still, the face foreshortened into friendliness again.

The workers clambering about up there made the monument seem even more colossal than it was, and Grekov couldn't help but admire their gleeful daring and their lack of decorum. The one with the drill was skating around on the great man's icy dome like a seasoned performer; and even as Grekov watched, the skater's companion, the one with the clamp, slid audaciously down the curvature of the skull, unloosing a shower of scurfy snow from the fringe of hair, and found a foothold on one of the ears.

Along one side of the square stood a row of empty benches, five in all, and Grekov made his way there. With a characteristic sense of symmetry he chose the one in the middle, wiped the slush off it with his cuff and sat down, tucking his coat-tails underneath him. He gazed about the square. Two little boys had climbed up on the lorry and were using the crane as a jungle gym, dodging the snowballs thrown by their earth-bound companions. The yells of the children clanked like chains against the frozen façades overlooking the square. There were a few smudged faces at peep-holes in the misty windows, but apart from the workers, who presumably had no option, Grekov was the only grown-up who had ventured out to watch this monumental lump of history toppled from its pedestal. The workers themselves, in their oversized mufflers and mittens and boots, looked to him like children dressed up in their parents' cast-offs.

How soon people become bored with the making and unmaking of history, Grekov thought, remembering the hundreds of thousands who had taken to the streets to

watch the first monuments fall. Looking about at the empty square, becoming conscious of his singularity, he felt an uncomfortable sense of complicity with the overalled figures and their vandalising equipment.

The driller finished his trepanation and called for an eye. This turned out to be a huge metal loop with a threaded shaft. It was toted up the ladder by the lounge from below, and the same man brought down the drill. The man balancing on the ear secured the eye with the clamp and screwed it into place. Three similar eyes already protruded from the skull, and the fourth completed the all-seeing square. The man with the clamp now climbed down, leaving the driller alone on the summit with his hands on his hips and his nose in the air, like a hunter dwarfed by his trophy.

The clamp, lobbed carelessly onto the back of the lorry, woke up the crane operator, who had been dozing unseen in his cubicle. Under the clamper's directions the operator began to move the boom of the crane so that its dangling chains and hooks could be secured to the eyes.

The lounge, still carrying the drill, shooed the children away to the other side of the square and then came and sat on the bench next to Grekov, who at once tried to strike up a conversation.

'Another one bites the dust,' he said cheerfully.

'Seven this month,' came the gruff reply.

'You don't say! Where do you put them all?'

'Scrap-heap...of history.'

'No, seriously,' Grekov insisted, and demonstrated his good faith by taking off one glove and offering a cigarette, which was gladly accepted. 'What happens to them? I'm a student, you see. I'm making a study of monuments.'

'A man after my own heart,' said the worker, adopting a tone that was ingratiatingly earnest. 'Let's see now. First, the bronze ones. The bronze ones are melted down and reshaped into useful objects like door-knockers and railings. Then the ones of stone: those are crushed into gravel and scattered on the paths in our public parks so that the citizens don't come a cropper. Now for the marble ones — not too many of those — and the ones of display-quality granite: the beautiful ones are sliced up for tombstones and carved into monuments of the new heroes — only smaller, of course, to accommodate the

new noses and ears. But the ugly ones, like this one, have to be kept, or rather *preserved*, because they were made by famous artists long ago, whose names escape me for the moment, and they have to be cleaned up and put in museums. There's a heap of them at Vnukovo, behind the bus terminus.'

'At Vnukovo, you say.'

At that moment the crane's engines began to roar and drowned out the conversation.

The head wouldn't budge. The chains sang like rubber bands and the lorry rocked on its hydraulic legs, but the bone and sinew of that stubborn neck held fast. The pedestal shivered. Then there was a crack like a whiplash, a ruff of white dust burst from under the jawbone and the head tore loose and bobbed wildly at the end of the chains. It was so startling to see this gigantic object bouncing playfully on the air, like a child's ball, while the lorry swayed perilously on its legs, that Grekov recoiled in fright.

The head was lowered onto the lorry and secured with a multitude of cables. It was made to look backwards, but whether by accident or design Grekov could not tell. A fifth worker, who had been sleeping in the cab, now came to life and drove the lorry away down Bulkin Street. His comrades posed on the rigging around the head like revellers on a Mardi Gras float. One of them had his foot propped in a dilated nostril, another scratched his back on the tip of a moustache. But despite all these little distractions, these buzzing flies, the eyes gazed back unflinchingly, and there was such a forbidding set to the bottom lip that Grekov took his hands out of his pockets and stood up. The lorry turned right at the end of the street and at last the stony gaze was broken.

The children had gone indoors, the watchers had withdrawn from the windows and the peep-holes had misted over again. Grekov was alone. He went to the pedestal and walked around it in both directions. There was no inscription. A single thread of iron, a severed

spine twisting from the concrete, marked the spot where the head had stood. The head of Lenin. It was hard to imagine something else in its place. But that's the one certainty we have, he thought. There will be something in its place.

He sat down with his back against the pedestal and took the letter out of his pocket. He examined the winged beast again, and failed to identify it. Then he took off his gloves, opened the envelope and spread flat the sheet of white paper it contained. Although Grekov had almost forgotten the fact, this was not the original letter, but a version of it twice removed. He had dared to keep the envelope, but keeping the letter itself had been impossible. Instead he had made a copy of the letter in his own hand, and this was a carbon copy of that. The original English was there, word for word, but there were also notes of his own, in parentheses and footnotes — guesses at meanings, useful turns of phrase culled from memory and the dictionary, corrections of spelling mistakes. This was a translation method he had devised himself, in the absence of tape recorders and word processors, and although it was primitive he was proud of it.

There were also speculations — contained in a series of marginal notes and questions — that exceeded the bounds of his responsibilities as a translator and partly explained why the seat of his pants was stuck to the plinth of an empty pedestal in a public square on a Sunday afternoon: Who is this man Khumalo? Is he serious? What does he really want? Will he get it? Who will help him? Me (of all people)?

Grekov read the letter through again, although he practically knew it by heart. In a dimple in the middle of the sheet his eye came to a tight spring of black hair. It was in fact a hair from Boniface Khumalo's head, which Grekov's brisk walk had dislodged from a corner of the envelope and shaken into the folded sheet. But Grekov, understandably, failed to recognise it. He blew it into space in a cloud of steam.

## 2 Khumalo to the Ministir

(With selected notes by P. Grekov)

'Boniface Tavern'  
P.O. Box 7350  
Atteridgeville 0008  
Tvl [Transvaal — peruse map]  
5th Jan[uary] 1992

TO WHO[M] IT MAY CONCERN

Re: SURPLUS STATUES [in the matter of/concerning]

I am greeting you in the name of struggling masses of South Africa, comrades, freedom fighters, former journeymen to Moscow — you may know some ... [Never met a military trainee, but believe they existed.] Also in the name of boergious countrymen known up and down [business 'contacts'? class alliances?] here at home. I myself am very much struggle [struggling — infamous Apartheid].

My particular personality is illustrious. I am doing many things well: initially gardening assistance, packer O.K. Bazaars [so-called 'baas'], garage attendance, petroljoggie [prob. brand-name cf. Texaco], currently taverner and taxi-owner, 1 X Toyota Hi-Ace 2.2 GLX (1989) [Japanese motor vehicle] so far — 'See me now, see me no more'. But especially now I am going on as Proprietor (Limited) Boniface Tavern, address above-mentioned, soon revamped as V.I. Lenin Bar & Grill. This is my very serious plan. You must believe it!

Hence it is I am taking up space to search out whether spare statues of V.I. Lenin are made available to donate me or if necessary I would be obliged to purchase on the most favourable terms (lay-by). [In a nut-case: His overweening desire is to buy a statue of Lenin. One can't help but bravo.] Please state preference [one ], down payment, interest rates, postage, etc. etc.

Apartheid is crumbling as you know. Recently you visited a New South Africa to espy trade opportunities. [Trade Missionary to S.A. — check w. Grigoriev.] Here is one! I mean business! Fantastical benefits may amount to all of us. V.I. Lenin Bar & Grill is opening (1st May for publicity stunts) with unheard parties and festivities, free booze, braaid sheep [barbecued mutton], cows [beef], chipniks [prostitutes], members of the medias (TV 2 and 3, Mnet (!)), Lucky Dube [sweepstake?], Small Business Development Corporation (SDBC) [Grig?], wide-scale representatives from organisations (SACP, ANC, PAC, ACA, FAWU, MAWU, BAWU, etc. etc.). [Check] It will be a big splash [make a splash — attract much attention] for tourism and international relations.

As far as I'm concerned nothing can prevent my request to pass. I have pedestals galore and many other statues to compliment my favourite V.I. Lenin. Also recognition to be attached viz. [videlicet: namely] 'This Beautiful Monument was donated to Working People of Atteridgeville by Kind Masses of Russia, unveiled 1st May 1992 (Is there time?) by Jay Naidoo (for example).'

After three weeks and no reply has forthcome I'll write again, not meaning to plead to you.

Amandlal [*inerj*. Power! Usually A. ngawetu]

Yours faithfully,

Boniface Khumalo  
Proprietor (Ltd)

PS If you are not the right person please forward this letter to the same. Thank you.

PSS Toyota 10-seater is blood-red. MVM325T. Thanks.

### 3 Lunacharski and Lenin

(an off-cut)

66

*Lunacharski and Lenin*

and in 1918 *Proletkult* declared that the proletariat should assimilate existing bourgeois culture and 'recast the material in the crucible of its own class-consciousness'.<sup>7</sup> Lunacharski himself argued against gimmicky experimentation: 'The independence of proletarian art does not consist in artificial originality but presupposes an acquaintance with all the fruits of the preceding culture.'<sup>8</sup> We may assume that as Commissar of Enlightenment — he had become head of the People's Commissariat for Education and the Arts (NARKOMPROS) in 1917 — Lunacharski knew only too well that experimental work would be incomprehensible to the illiterate masses. In the coming years Lunacharski and Lenin would clash over the position of *Proletkult*, with Lenin trying to subordinate it to NARKOMPROS and the Party, and Lunacharski arguing for a measure of independence.

These differences notwithstanding, Lunacharski looked back on the immediate post-revolutionary years with some nostalgia. In 1933, the year of his death, he recalled Lenin's scheme for 'Propaganda by Monuments' and sought to revive it. His reminiscences tell us something about the complex relationship between the two men and the vexed question of the role of art in the revolution.

How did 'Propaganda by Monuments' come about? According to Lunacharski, the idea was sparked off by the frescoes in Campanella's *La Città del Sole* (*The City of the Sun*). In the utopian state depicted in this work, frescoes were used to educate the young. Lenin, mindful of the straitened circumstances in which many of the artists of Moscow and Petrograd found themselves (the latter would be renamed Leningrad only in 1924), but mindful too that frescoes would hardly suit the Russian climate, proposed that artists be commissioned to sculpt 'concise, trenchant inscriptions showing the more lasting, fundamental principles and slogans of Marxism'<sup>9</sup> on the city walls and on specially erected pediments, in place of advertisements and posters.

'Please don't think I have my heart set on marble, granite and gold lettering,' Lenin went on (in Lunacharski's reconstruction of their dialogue). 'We must be modest for the present. Let it be concrete with clear, legible inscriptions. I am not at the moment thinking of anything permanent or even long lasting. Let it even be of a temporary nature.'

'It's a wonderful idea,' Lunacharski said, 'but surely what you propose is work for a monumental mason. Our artists will become bored if they have to spend their days carving inscriptions. You know how they lust after novelty.'

'Well, it happens that I consider monuments even more important than inscriptions: I mean busts, full-length figures, perhaps — what do you call them? — bas-reliefs, groups. And let's not forget heads.'

Lenin proposed that a list of the forerunners of Socialism, revolutionists and other heroes of culture be drawn up, from which works in plaster and concrete could be commissioned.

It is important that these works should be intelligible to the masses, that they should catch the eye. It is also important that they should be designed to withstand our climate, at least to some extent, that they should not be easily marred by wind, rain and frost. Of course, inscriptions on the pedestals of monuments could be made — if such trifles are beneath your artists, perhaps the stonemasons will oblige us —



Lunacharski and Lenin

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explaining who the man was and so forth.

Particular attention should be paid to the ceremonies of unveiling such monuments. In this we ourselves and other Party members could help, perhaps also prominent specialists could be invited to speak on such occasions. Every such unveiling ceremony should be a little holiday and an occasion for propaganda. On anniversary dates mention of the given great man could be repeated, always, of course, showing his connection with our revolution and its problems.<sup>10</sup>

Lunacharski was consumed with the idea and immediately set about putting it into practice. Some inscriptions were set up on buildings, and quite a few monuments by sculptors in Moscow and Petrograd were erected. Not all the monuments were successful. Some of them broke. Perhaps the artists had misjudged the climate after all. A full figure of Marx by Matveyev cracked in half and was replaced by a less impressive bronze head. Other monuments were simply too ugly, and here the artists were definitely at fault. Moscow's statue of Marx and Lenin in 'some sort of basin'<sup>11</sup> was the most notorious failure. The citizens dubbed it 'the whiskered bathers' or 'Cyril and Methodius', because it made Marx and Lenin look like a pair of brotherly saints emerging from a bath-tub.

The modernists and futurists ran amok. Korolev's statue of Bakunin was so hideous that horses shied when they passed it, even though it was hidden behind boards. It proved to be 'of a temporary nature'. No sooner had the statue been unveiled than the anarchists, incensed by its depiction of their hero, smashed it to pieces.

But although the manufacture of monuments left much to be desired, 'the unveiling of monuments went on much better'.<sup>12</sup> Taking to heart Lenin's suggestion that 'we ourselves could help', Lunacharski himself unveiled a string of monuments.

A contest was organised to choose a design for a statue of Marx, and both Lunacharski and Lenin participated enthusiastically in the judging. A well-known sculptor proposed a statue of Marx standing somewhat acrobatically on four elephants, but it was rejected — after personal adjudication by Lenin — as inappropriate. In the end a rather splendid design by a collective, working under the guidance of Aleshin, was chosen. It showed Marx with his feet firmly on the ground and his hands behind his back. The group built a small model of the statue in Sverdlov Square in time for that year's May Day celebrations, and Lenin approved of it although he didn't think it a good likeness. The hair in particular was not very well done, and Lunacharski was asked to tell the artist to 'make the hair more nearly right'.<sup>13</sup> The torso was also too stout: Marx seemed about to burst the buttons of his coat, and some subtle tailoring was called for. Later Lenin officiated at a ceremony in the Square to 'place the podium'<sup>14</sup> and made a remarkable speech on Marx and his 'flaming spirit'<sup>15</sup> — but the statue was never erected.

Lenin was disappointed by the quality of the monuments erected in Moscow, and not reassured to hear from Lunacharski that those in Petrograd were better. 'Anatoli Vassilievich,' he said sadly, shaking his head, 'have the gifted ones all gathered in Petrograd and the hacks remained here with us?'

And so 'Propaganda by Monuments' petered out.

A decade later, when Lunacharski tried to revive the scheme, he used Lenin's own words (although he closed his ears to the echo):

I do not as yet expect marble and granite, gold lettering and bronze — so appropriate to socialist culture. It is too early as yet for this — but, it seems to me, a second wave of propaganda by monuments, more lasting and more mature, also more effective, could be instituted by

## 4 Christov to Khumalo

(translated and annotated by P. Grekov)

Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations  
32/34 Smolenskaya Sennaya  
Moscow 121200  
28 January 1992

My dear Mr B. Khumalo,

It is with rather a great deal of pleasure that I pen this missive, reactionary to yours of the 5th inst.

Some weeks may have passed, indeed, as your request flew from subtropical Pretoria, administrative capital of the Republic of South Africa, to our correspondent temperate urbanity, and henceforward overland to various ministries and departments, videlicet Foreign Affairs — to whom it had been addressed on the bottom line, so to speak — Trade, Tourism, Defence, and Foreign Economic Relations, where it still resides and from whence this missive now therefore emanates. I am a member of the same Ministry, sad to say in a somewhat subsidiary position (Protocol Department), but nevertheless by good fortune required to acknowledge the landing of your letter of the 5th inst. [I, contrarily, am a respected colleague of Everyday Services Department, City of Moscow, which we write 'Mockba'. — Tr.]

I am instructed to inform you that your letter is receiving considerate attention at many and various levels, local and national/international. Soon we will pen additional missives to impart the final decision-making process and details.

[Feeling overwhelmingly cocksure that your request re: SURPLUS STATUE will meet with a big okey-dokey fairly forthwith, I make bold to expand the range and scope of the instructions by informing, firstly, that the surplus statue videlicet 'Head of V.I. Lenin' which is in mind for dispatch to you is somewhat a national treasure. Materially it is stone. Proportionally it is large, without laying it on thick one says 'colossal', being by estimation 7 (seven) metres high, chin to crown, and 17 (seventeen) metres in circumference, at hat-brim level (but has no hat). Imperial equivalences for convenience: 23 feet by 56 feet approx. Will this serve? It will necessitate Herculean efforts in the transportation, but well worth it.

On a new thread. What is doing in the Transvaal? Do the cows and sheep graze on the veldt nearby free from harm? Much has been said and supposed *vis-à-vis* socio-political machinations of reformism in your motherland of which I am always an amateur or eager beaver as they say. But the horse's mouth is what you are. Your tidings have captivated me boots and all. Please correspond. — Tr.]

We look forward to hearing from you in the near future. [And who knows how long ago hence we may eat beefsteaks and drink vodkas — our patriotic highball — in V.I. Lenin Bar & Grill of Atteridgeville! — Tr. Tr. is for 'Translator', being me, Pavel Grekov, same as below.]

Yours faithfully,

A. Christov  
Tr: P. Grekov

Postscript: Please correspond to me personally at 63-20 Tischenko Str., Apt 93, Moscow 109172. No doubt it will suffice. Conclusively, do you question why the monuments, large and small, have no hats? The head of Lenin in history was fond of hats, precisely caps.

## 5 Khumalo

**B**oniface Khumalo put the letter in the cubby-hole along with the tub of Wet Ones. On second thoughts he took it out again and slipped it under the rubber mat on the passenger side. Then he caught his own furtive eye in the rear-view mirror, and asked himself why he was playing postman's knock. There was nothing compromising about the letter. The Total Onslaught was over, even if a stale scent of danger still wafted from the exotic landscapes of postage stamps and the unexpected angles of mirror-script print. He retrieved the envelope again and put it in the pocket of his jacket, which hung from a hook on the door-pillar behind his seat.

That everyday action dispelled the threat and left nothing in the air but the caramel tang of new imitation leather and the cloying lavender of the Wet Ones with which he had just wiped his hands. He checked that his fly was buttoned. He checked that his door was locked. Then he looked out of the window at the drab veld of the valley dipping away from the road, straddled by electricity pylons with their stubby arms akimbo, and dotted with huge, floppy-leaved aloes like extravagant bows of green ribbon. On the far slope of the valley was a sub-economic housing complex, a Monopoly-board arrangement of small, plastered houses with corrugated-iron roofs, all of them built to exactly the same design. The planners of Van Riebeecksvlei had sought to introduce some variety into the suburb by rotating the plan of each successive house through ninety degrees, with the result that there were now four basic elevations which repeated themselves in an unvarying sequence down the long, straight streets.

Khumalo had driven past Van Riebeecksvlei on his way to Pretoria a thousand times. But he was struck now, for the first time, by the fact that he could tell at a glance it was a white suburb, even though there wasn't a white face in sight. Was it because the walls of the houses were pastel plaster rather than raw face-brick? Or precisely because there was no one to be seen? Even at this

distance it looked like a ghost town. Where was everybody? He thought of the stream of people that flowed up 5th Street from the taxi-rank and cast his regulars up on his doorstep.

Khumalo buckled his safety-belt. He tweaked the ignition key and the engine sprang to life. He goaded all six cylinders with petrol, and then let them idle. The advertising was getting to him: he could almost hear the engine panting.

He gentled the car over the ruts at the edge of the tar and accelerated, watching the rev counter. It was a Sunday afternoon and there was not much traffic. He flew past a bakkie laden with crates of vegetables and a mini-bus called 'Many Rivers to Cross', one of Mazibuko's. The car practically drove itself, as he liked to tell his envious friends, just the way the tavern ran itself and the taxi paid for itself. One of these days I'll retire, he said, because there won't be anything left for me to do. Made redundant by progress.

The Boniface Tavern was Khumalo's pride and joy. He had started the shebeen ten years earlier in his garage, adding on a room here and a room there until it was larger than the house itself. The 'Tavern' of the title had been prompted by the medieval ring of his own first name — his late mother had named him for St Boniface, English missionary among the Germans, martyred in 755 at the ripe old age of eighty.

The Boniface Tavern had certainly been unusual in its day, but lately all licensed shebeens were being called taverns. 'I was ten years ahead of my time,' he would boast to his patrons, 'I was a taverner long before the Taverners' Association came along.' Secretly, the change made him unhappy. Now that every Tom, Dick and Harry had a tavern, the Boniface Tavern lost its special flavour. He began casting around for an alternative.

A new decade dawned. On the day Nelson Mandela walked from the shadows into the glare of daily news, Khumalo decided that his establishment needed more than a change of name to face the future in; it needed a change of clothes. It happened that the taxi he'd acquired a few months before was proving to be lucrative, and he

was confident that he would soon be in a position to finance the new wardrobe.

The style he settled on had a touch of the 'taverna' about it: he wanted red plush, wrought iron, vine leaves, lashings of white plaster and crowds of venerable statuary. He saw the very thing in Nero's Palace, a coffee shop in the Union Hotel, and that became the model. He made a few enquiries about Nero's décor, and one Saturday afternoon went out to Hyperplant in Benoni, a nursery that specialised in garden statues. It was expensive — a common or garden gnome would set you back R44 — but he came away with two disarmed goddesses, several cement amphorae with cherubim and seraphim in relief upon them, sufficient numbers of caryatids and atlantes to prop up a canvas awning over the courtyard, and a bench with mermaid armrests. He stockpiled his purchases in the backyard, where the elements could age them while his funds recuperated.

So far so good, except that the new name continued to elude him. He thought of exploiting the obvious political angle by honouring a popular leader. But in this capricious epoch how could you tell who would be popular in the new year? In any case, the old guard was getting on. The way of all flesh was fleeting, whereas décor had to last. He looked further afield: The Richelieu? Never mind The Napoleon! He was still undecided when a new possibility bobbed up unexpectedly in the pages of the *Pretoria News*.

One evening he read on page two that the Moscow City Council, in concrete expression of their commitment to the reforms sweeping through the Soviet Union, had decided to take down 62 of the 68 statues and other memorial structures in the capital devoted to V.I. Lenin. 'All Lenin memorials in schools and other institutions for children also will be removed,' the report concluded. What other institutions for children are there? he wondered. Orphanages? Hospitals? Reformatories? And then he thought further: What will become of all those statues? I could make good use of a couple myself, to string some coloured lights from.

That's probably as far as the fancy would have gone, had the editor not chosen to comment upon the statues in the editorial column of that same newspaper. Although the tone was mocking — the simple act of giving

'Vladimir Illyich' in full was a sure sign of satirical intent — the idea struck a chord with Khumalo.

#### SURPLUS STATUES

Calling all enterprising businessmen! The import opportunity of a lifetime presents itself. The Moscow City Council has decided to dismantle the hundreds of monuments to Vladimir Illyich Lenin which grace its crowded public buildings and empty market-places. Cities throughout the crumbling Soviet Union will follow suit. We ask you: Where else in the world is there a ready market for statues of Lenin but in South Africa? Jump right in before the local comrades snap them up for nothing.

Khumalo parked his car next to a building site in Prinsloo Street. An entire city block was being demolished, and all that remained of the high-rise buildings that had occupied the spot was one ruined single-storey façade with an incongruously shiny plate-glass window in it. It had once been Salon Chantelle, according to the sign. The departed proprietor had written a farewell message to her clients on the glass in shoe-white: We apologise to all our ladies for the inconvenience caused by demolition. Please phone 646-4224 for our new location. Thank you for your continued support. XXXXX. C.

Khumalo got out of the car. The building site looked as if it had been bombed, and the impression of a city under siege was borne out by the empty streets. He suddenly felt concerned for the welfare of his car. It only had 12 000 ks on the clock. Then he heard a metallic clang, and traced it to an old man with a wheelbarrow scrounging among the collapsed walls. Perfect. He could keep an eye on the car. Khumalo called out to him, in several languages, but was ignored. In the end he had to go closer himself, through the gaping doorway of Salon Chantelle, stepping carefully over the broken masonry in his brown loafers.

The old man was salvaging unbroken bricks and tiles from the rubble.



'Greetings, Father,' Khumalo said.  
The man glared at him suspiciously.  
'What are you collecting there?'

It was obvious. The old man spat with surprising vehemence and accuracy in the dust at Khumalo's feet, picked up a brick with three round holes through it, knocked a scab of cement off it against the side of the barrow and dropped it on the pile.

'Are you building your own place?'  
Another brick fell.

'Do you sell these things? I may have need of some building materials myself one of these days. Are you a builder?'

'This rubbish belongs to no one,' the old man finally said in a broken voice. 'It is just lying here. You can see it yourself.'

Khumalo gave him a R1 coin and asked him to watch the car. He pocketed the money non-committally, spat again with conviction, and went back to work. Feeling as if he had been dismissed, Khumalo walked up Prinsloo Street towards the State Theatre.

At the Church Street intersection he waited for the robot to change even though there was no traffic. He looked right, and left, and right again towards Strijdom Square, and caught a glimpse of the dome like a swollen canvas sail over the head of J.G. Strijdom.

When the Strijdom monument was first unveiled a story had gone around that its unconventional dome defied the laws of architecture, and therefore of nature. A group of city architects — the rivals whose tender had been rejected? — were so intrigued by it that they built a scale model in perfect detail out of chicken-wire and plaster of Paris. The model fell over. No matter how much they tinkered with it, it fell over.

The lights changed, and Khumalo crossed the street with the same jaunty stride as the little green man.

J.G. Strijdom had been leader of the National Party in the 1950s and Prime Minister of the Union from 1954 to 1958. He was one of the great builders of apartheid. The details were on the pedestal. But though he had passed the monument often, Khumalo had never bothered to read what was written there. All he knew about Strijdom he had gleaned from the words of a popular political song. 'Sutha sutha wena Strijdom!' the song

said. 'Give way, Strijdom! If you don't, this car, this car which has no wheels, will ride over you!' In Khumalo's mind Strijdom's face had never borne the serene, far-sighted expression he saw on it now, as the bronze head came into view over islands of greenery. Rather, it had a look of stupefied terror. It was the face of a slow-footed pedestrian, a moment away from impact and extinction, gaping at the juggernaut of history bearing down on him. *This Strijdom is that Strijdom*, Khumalo thought with a smile. As secure on his pedestal as a head on its shoulders.

In front of the monument, where one corner of the billowing dome was tacked to the ground, was a fountain: a thick white column rose from the middle of a pond and on top of it were four galloping horses, their hooves striking sparks from the air, their manes and tails flying. Usually jets of water spurted up from the pond and played against the column, but today they were still. Some crooked scaffolding leant against the yellowed stone, and the stench of stagnant water rose from the slimy moat at the column's base. Khumalo sat on the dry lip of the fountain and looked at the limp agapanthus and the grey river-stones embedded in cement on the bottom of the pond.

Then he looked at the head. His heart sank. According to his calculations, the head of V.I. Lenin promised to him in the letter from Grekov was at least three times larger than the head of J.G. Strijdom! The pedestal would hardly fit in his yard. Perhaps if he knocked down the outside toilet and the Zozo...but surely it would cost a fortune just to build a pedestal that size. And who would pay for the installation? What if he approached the SACP, or the Civic, or a consortium of local businessmen? Atteridgeville needs a tourist attraction, after all, something with historical value. I'll donate it to the community, he thought, they can put it up on that empty plot by the police station. My name can go on the plaque, I'll unveil the bloody thing myself!

Still, it would be a pity to give it away, when I've gone to the effort to get hold of it. Has he promised it to me? I think he has.... But who is this Grekov anyway? Can he be trusted? On whose behalf is he speaking? He doesn't sound like a very important person. Although he seems to know more than Christov, at any rate.

Ivan Vladislavić

Khumalo shrugged off his jacket and took out Grekov's letter. He didn't think of it as Christov's letter, it had been so ruthlessly invaded and occupied by the translator. The fingerprint in ink from the typewriter ribbon, which was clearly visible in the top left-hand corner of the page, may have settled the question of authorship once and for all, had Khumalo been able to check it against flesh and blood.


He read the letter again. It had been typed on an old typewriter and all the loops of the letters were closed, like winking eyes. There were things he didn't understand. Colossal? Please correspond? He put the letter back in the envelope. The Cyrillic postmark read: Mockba.

For a reason he couldn't put his finger on, Khumalo felt better. He jumped up and paced out the dimensions of the pedestal. He multiplied them by three in his head, and had to chuckle: the pedestal alone would be the size of a double garage! He studied the poetic verse inscribed on the salt-and-pepper stone but could not make head or tail of it. His Afrikaans had always been weak. He walked around the pedestal and at the back discovered two more inscriptions, twins, one in English and one in

Afrikaans. He read the English version out loud in a cracked impersonation of the old scavenger.

The monument had been unveiled by Mrs Susan Strijdom on Republic Day, 31st May 1972. The honourable B.J. Vorster, then Prime Minister, had made a speech at the unveiling ceremony. The sculptor of the Head of Strijdom was Coert Steynberg. The sculptor of the Freedom Symbol (the bolted horses) was Danie de Jager. With an admirable concern for fair play, the inscription went on to record the names of the architects of the unnatural dome (Hans Botha and Roelf Botha), the quantity surveyors (Grothaus and Du Plessis), the engineers (W.J.S. van Heerden and Partners, viz. Bruinette, Kruger, Stoffberg and Hugo), the electrical engineers (A. du Toit and Partners) and, with disappointing anonymity, the building contractors (Nasionale Groepsbou Corp).

The sun was shining through the finely veined bronze ears of Johannes Gerhardus Strijdom.

Khumalo went and stood at a distance, upwind of the stinking Freedom Symbol, with his eyes half-closed, squinting. And after a while he began to see how, but not necessarily why, the impossible came to pass. 



## AFRICAN NOVEL PROJECT

This project aims to encourage new forms of narrative writing in the indigenous languages. COSAW Publishing is searching for a new novel in any indigenous language, other than English or Afrikaans. This is a publications project and not a literary award. It aims to create publishing opportunities for new popular forms of literature in the indigenous languages that will assist in building an adult readership in the African languages.

The criteria for publication will be based on the following:

- It must be a novel for an adult readership.
- It should have a strong story line
- It should have a well-structured plot
- It must have rounded convincing characters
- It must be a highly readable story
- Preference will be given to an adventure story or a thriller
- It should appeal to a broad readership not necessarily interested in social protest and political relevance.

Manuscripts submitted will be evaluated by the COSAW Editorial Collective. All submissions must be accompanied by a letter indicating that it is an original and unpublished novel.

All manuscripts must be sent to: The African Novel Project, Congress of South African Writers, P.O. Box 421007, Fordsburg 2033. The closing date for submissions is 30 March 1993. For further information contact A.W. Oliphant at the above address.



*Uriel Abrahamse*

## Melba

the journey west  
is what u called it  
and  
we have been terrorised  
wherever we've been,  
u said

the journey and the terror  
brought to mind  
the exodus  
only,  
this time,  
without divine guidance

this time  
it is OUR journey  
even though  
— at times —  
we have had to limp  
broken under shackles  
walk with the step  
of an ox;  
we have learnt  
to dance  
to step light  
and skip joyfully  
— triumphantly —  
forward

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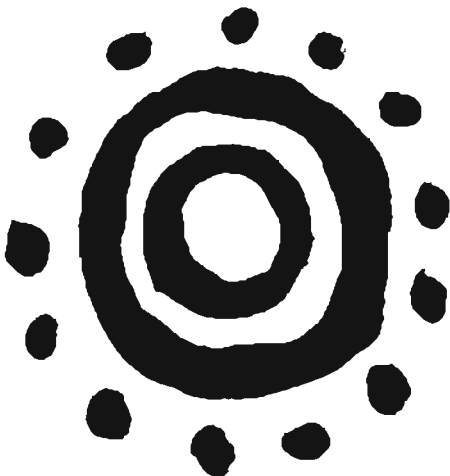
## *Mpho Nawa*

### *Two Poems*



## Over a Makeshift Morgue

Birds hovering far away  
Black birds circling a dense forest  
Birds of patience  
Birds of prey  
Darkening an orange sun  
Presenting a dark image  
Of the future that is gloom  
Yes it's true, soon the birds will  
Land down with their rasping wings  
With their sharp squeaky beaks  
To devour yet another victim of violence  
In a makeshift morgue that is our country



## Meaningless

Wheelbarrow bumping along  
The long rocky road to the well  
The solitary figure at the well  
Engages in a to and fro movement  
Of the artistic hand that  
Ensures water supply to the drums

Mirage forms abundance of water at the distance  
Three black and white figures come wobbling  
In the water. Unaware of the deep sea  
Engulfing them. Their hands form  
Extended caps protruding from their skulls  
Like chameleons  
They make their pace out of the water

School is out, infants cry out  
Mothers shout back. A boy passes  
Whistling a tune, a fragmented one,  
Happy to be on his way home  
A car screeches to a halt  
Melancholic bells toll  
The recipient is weary and ignores it  
Silence means negative, the bottlegger  
Slowly but surely passes on to the next delivery

Birds are singing as always  
There is a distant sound of music  
I am sweating. Everything is still  
The place is an uninviting landscape  
Soon to be filled with smoke

Life goes on. Everybody is content  
They are happy to be alive.

## Yvette Christianse

### Two Poems



### Spring, for Martha

i

Speak softly heart when you walk amongst stones,  
stones hear. They have nothing else to do.  
Stone upon stone. Can stone break a heart?  
Can a heart break like glass  
on which rain has fallen, rain that breaks  
like sweat, sweat like fear? The short life  
riding trains through how many dawns. Do poets sing  
these heavy dawns that sit on a woman's chest  
all day like a sunset that sits in her eyes  
and does not let her see where she is going  
until it is dark and there's just the water tap  
with the bucket queues, faces numb as hers?  
They call her name as she arrives, a name she remembers.  
It is like a swallow that comes once a year.

ii

These children. I give them my heart.  
Summer, winter, every season, every day  
my hands are their mother's hands,  
my voice their lullabies and sweet money.  
At the school gates I say to the other mothers,  
there, that one is mine, I iron her dress  
until it is a piece of blue sky with white clouds,  
I wash her blue ribbons and her plaits are kite tails.  
No other child will fly like her, my child.  
But, tssss.... This school of white faces....  
One day they will give her a certificate  
and a heart of stone.

iii

That train, that piece of paper — a hunk of squealing metal  
a small white square in a neat brown envelope,  
the loud official stamp she wears like a scar;  
that small white weightlessness  
could be burnt, torn; tears things as you say goodbye

and already the station is chugging with the homebound  
who blow on their hands in impatience.

Other children, other kitchens come to life  
and when the sun comes down and curtains close  
it is like the fine parting of connecting tissue  
that holds a limb in place, keeps a face alive.

That train crashes like a demon that spins houses  
with its tail; they jerk upright like a child in bed  
jerks out of a dream of blackness and spiders at her  
throat;

all the houses shoot upright like fresh faced policemen  
starched to the law; those houses shrink and thin  
like grey old gravestones that chink 'Martha, Martha'.

iv

A wide, white cloud shores up the sky. Somewhere  
else  
it will be rain. She never gave me pens, no books,  
not even a photograph remains. We bury our dead.  
And carry them — when they are faceless — forever.  
but swallows fall where they must, no law will hold  
them up  
or put them down. They find those fluid ribbons  
scrolling, looping around the world and from where  
they are,  
all houses must be very small, and policemen with  
their dogs  
just ants as the sweet warm melodies of continents  
hand low  
as warm breezes on summer days when there are trees  
alive  
and quadrangles to weave through, and children run  
laughing  
after those perfect wings.

## Heads You Win, Tails You Lose

Son to father, daughter to mother  
let us rewind the world and see  
if the tail keeps up with the head.  
But tails move slowly  
and holes dug once to sink a tank  
go on growing to sink the world instead.

Don't go there my son, Tokoloshe waits,  
with long thin nails — he'll scratch your laughter thin.  
But there, my mother, what is it  
that's already taken our smiles?  
Yes, tails in smoke coil sideways now  
under the houses, under the beds.

Mother to mother to daughter to son,  
father to father to husband to wife  
pick up the morning at the train's first stop,  
put down the day when it's finished with you.  
Children run laughing like rain on bright glass.  
Take-a de knife, cut-a de neck.

From the salt in old laughter,  
from the sand in old shoes,  
from songs and postcards  
the heartsick can't use,  
the sour heads drag their baggage of tongues  
and those slow cutting, low cutting armoured-tipped tails....  
Well, they're still not done.

*Yvette Christianse*



## No Man Will Ever Control Me Again

*Sizakele Nkosi*

No one will call me his little girl again  
On the streets I see very old men,  
Backs hunched, failing and fading  
to shadows of their former selves

You did your disappearing act  
before your calcium went bone-dry  
exploded inward  
before I could say: stay

The census tells all about men  
leaving superior woman-stock  
to go it alone  
A husband shortage is expected  
A father shortage, even more so.  
No wonder women fall for older men  
No one will call me  
his little girl again



*Fikile*

• Now the time has come, the  
mighty will fall. And the wind of  
change will blow sweetly like the  
morning breeze •

Pencil on paper

# SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONHOOD

South Africa is the one country where social and political contradictions are so stark that the influence of politics on other social activities, and vice versa, has been most easily observable. Many pious denials of the relationship have actually turned out to be proof of its existence. How often have we been told that sport and politics don't mix, when the distribution of sports opportunities in the country, as a result of deliberate political intervention, ensures that sport and politics do mix. The same has been for the relationship between the history of debate on literary standards on the one hand and, on the other hand, the social distribution of opportunities for artistic development.

If at some future date in South Africa the relationship between art and society becomes blurred, as it has in many western countries, due to the mediation of many complex effects of economic and technological development, the world will have lost, in this country, a very useful

teaching aid. That will happen when the relationship between a state of affairs and its origins can no longer be directly perceived. I want to suggest in my brief contribution this evening that the state of literature in South Africa also mirrors in a very fundamental way the larger historical imbalances in the country and that lasting answers to some of our literary problems are to be found in the manner in which the larger struggle for liberation is finally resolved.

Gloria Emerson, an author from the United States, made the following comment, back in 1985 at a writer's symposium at Northwestern University in Chicago: 'The trouble with the most brilliant people in America...is that things don't happen to them. They happen to other people, and then they discuss what has happened.' This seems to describe adequately for me that phenomenon known as 'South African Literature'. It is primarily a literature of 'what we have done to others,

how it has affected them, and how it may have affected us'. This is a literature emerging from a society that has perceived itself as history's primary agent in the South African context. Political agency ended with the first question: what have we done to them? We have conquered them, and now it is our task to build and shine the light of civilisation.

Since then, the human interest in the conquered 'Other' has not evolved significantly beyond the parameters

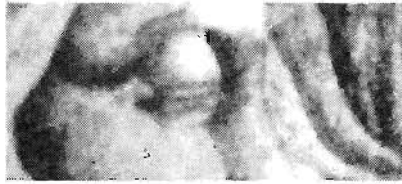
**Njabulo S. Ndebele**

of military objectives. Keep the conquered 'Other' at bay. For the State, the domination of the 'Other' posed no major moral problems, only military ones. This resulted in a State management culture, an aspect of which became preoccupied with its own methods and techniques of domination. This situation has spawned a profoundly insensitive society.

If art plays an adversary role in society, asking disturbing questions, revealing unsettling feelings, atti-



tudes, and experiences, then we will understand why it was writers who went further to ask the next two questions: 'How has what we have done to them affected them? How has it affected us?'. It will be immediately clear that the 'us' in the last question does not include the Other, for the writers are trapped in their own society. They were born within it; it sent them to well equipped schools; it provided them with publishing opportunities; it sanctified their language through legislation and language academies; it gave them theatres, museums, art galleries, concert halls, and libraries; it arranged for them special salary scales that ensured access to a range of cultural facilities as well as the ability to buy books and newspapers; it created literary awards to honour them; it also made possible for some of them to become critics and reviewers who influenced literary taste and declared standards; it protected them in law against the claims of the 'Other', by assuring them of the privacy of residential areas legally inaccessible to the 'Other', thus ensuring them that they are socialised among themselves; it gave them passports to travel, they could meet other writers internationally; it sought to make them take for granted the elevated status of their citizenship and its attractive resulting comforts. Since they were concerned about the 'Other' and the effects of the 'Other's' plight on their own humanity, theirs became a bi-polar existential reality of moral abhorrence accompanied by a physical inability to escape the conditions of that abhorrence. Even



when the system banned their books, I am certain that it entertained a grudging admiration for their worldwide acclaim. I am certain that South African diplomats, albeit embarrassed by the bannings, nevertheless shared in the international glory of their compatriots or, at worst, condescended towards their 'misguided' artists.

If thus far I have talked about 'writers' and the 'Other' in general terms, it is because I have steadfastly avoided the intellectually debilitating sign-posts all South Africans will habitually expect. I have chosen rather to imply the sign-posts. But now, the moment we have been waiting for: where does all this fit explicitly in the racial environment? Here we go. South African literature is 'white' South African writing expressing a limited range of concerns within a particular set of historical circumstances. It is a literature concerned with what happened to the 'Other' produced by writers who were existentially unable to experience what the 'Other' went through. Indeed, the best of it represents the artistic achievements of the era of apartheid. The fact that it stood in moral opposition to that era does not effect that objective historic reality. It owes its achievements to the special legitimising opportunities as well as to the agonies of the conscience that nurtured its growth. This

reality represents both the limitations of that literature as well as its lasting relevance.

From that edified position, this literature then became a standard against which other literatures could be measured. Thus came into being two literary phenomena. The first one was called 'writing in the indigenous languages', while the second became known as 'black South African literature' which implicitly did not include 'writing in the indigenous languages'. 'Black South African literature' because it was written in English or Afrikaans, qualified to be called literature, but was a special non-standard literature called 'black'. This setting apart of this literature confirmed its alien character. For some critics, this literature became the COSATU of literature: something with pretensions to literary status but essentially naive, crude, untutored, inexperienced, and ultimately incapable of defining a literary culture. Yet to others, it was the ANC of literature: personable, worthy of being understood, but often times quite frustrating.

We can say that within the structure of domination in South Africa this literature, as a sociological phenomenon, effectively oppressed other literatures. Of course, this was a situation not personally intended by writers, but was a result of the political sociology of 'white' South African literature as already characterised.

I am reminded at this point, of the significance of our participation in the Olympic games at Barcelona, which occasioned a lively debate in the evening phone-in programme of

Njabulo S. Ndebele

Radio Metro. Many callers declared that strictly speaking South Africa did not return to international sport, but that we were actually participating for the first time. They were making a distinction between South Africanism as a hoped for national attribute, universally distributed, as against South Africanism as a powerful concept of domination narrowly distributed and applicable to one moment in our history. The latter represents an appropriation of nationhood by a powerful racial group. In this connection, 'white' South African literature of the apartheid era should not be seen as a universally representative phenomenon, but as the manifestation of a dominant literary or intellectual trend running through a particular historical era.


Where does this all take us? I think I am attempting to highlight the ultimate impossibility of arriving at a timeless definition of South African literature. If the era of apartheid is part of South African history as that history paradoxically stretches into the future, then 'white' South African literature will represent a moment in the history of South African literature. From this perspective, South African literature will be seen to be made up of a variety of intellectual trends in history. It is not the definition that matters ultimately, but the understanding that informs it, and the social context from which that understanding emerges.

Now, I have had to learn very quickly since February 1990 that any attempt at a non-judgemental understanding of our history is

quickly interpreted by a large section of our population as letting them off the hook. They become comfortable and start to make arguments and demands that have the effect of reinforcing their privileged status. Unfortunately for them, sooner or later, 'white writing', to use J. M. Coetzee's expression, like apartheid, may become exhausted. With the 'Other' having attained their freedom, 'white writing' may run out of a central and sustaining philosophical and moral focus. Its concerns may become marginal. The irony is that the future of that phenomenon known as 'black' South African literature has been questioned for similar reasons. With the monster of apartheid gone, what will black writers write about? This question thus far has been thrown at black writing. 'White' writing has thus far not been able to recognise its own precarious position. It has been busking in the self-confidence of one who has a habitual right to ask questions of the 'Other'.

What we are likely to have in our hands is a general loss of focus. And there lies the crisis of culture in our country. Central to the resolution of that crisis is the achievement of a genuine democracy in our country. In practical terms it means the creation of a society that can throw up new creative problems for writers. It means that the possibilities for new writings are inseparable from the quest for a new society. It should be a society in which everyone is entitled to education for which the State must assume responsibility; in which there will be much co-

operation between the State, publishers and book distributors in order to ensure greater accessibility and affordability of books for a greatly increased reading public; in which literary awards are freed from the culture of 'white' writing; in which African languages are vigorously promoted; in which cultural institutions are more available and accessible; in which most people enjoy good health and decent housing. All this has got everything to do with literature and all the other arts. It has everything to do with a new sense of nationhood.

The transitional period, if it is too long, is likely to exacerbate the condition of cultural crisis, resulting in a blurred vision of liberation. It seems to be the intention of the Nationalist party to engineer and then take advantage of this situation in order to hang on to the dead end of 'white' history for as long as possible. This is a reflex response on their part, for they are incapable of acting any other way. This means if they cannot fall from the trees on their own, they need to be plucked from it. Whatever the case might be, the future of literature in our country is inseparable from the future of democracy and the difficult tasks of working towards it. Writers and artists of all kinds need to be centrally located in that struggle for democracy. The nurturing of their imaginations and new artistic skills will take place within that struggle and will be informed by it. 

*This paper was presented at the annual Weekly Mail Book Week, 6 September 1992.*

## ☆ An Old Man's Lament

*Richard J. Maseko*

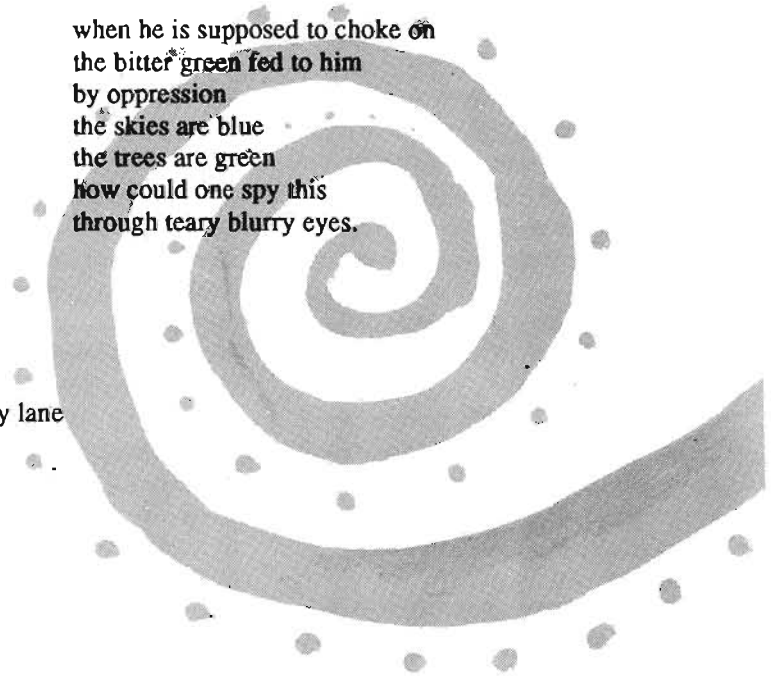
Maybe I was wrong  
to force myself to venture this far  
into African politics  
those old men sitting in a circle  
sour faced and intent  
stare at the speedy progress of time  
and the fierce rulers of the day  
they are tired of the carnage and  
the torture of the innocent  
all they can do is weep.

Here where they are confined  
beyond the barbed electric fence of memory lane  
they dream and scheme  
maybe they don't  
maybe they were just like Christ  
a sacred sacrifice  
their noble warrior blood  
to sooth the wounds of their  
heirs to come.

They bravely pay  
for crimes of the mind they did not commit  
maybe they too  
just like my Lord  
suffer from the hate and trivial wishes  
of the greedy  
**these hate and kill to halt progression**  
**the patriots waste and rot in gaols of the desperate**  
their place in society  
is in the people's thoughts and hearts.

The masses yearn and long  
yet in the wheel of social hierarchy  
they are abused  
they watch their beloved land  
hawked bit by painful bit  
they grieve  
who could in his right right mind  
clamp shut his mind

when he is supposed to choke on  
the bitter green fed to him  
by oppression  
the skies are blue  
the trees are green  
how could one spy this  
through teary blurry eyes.



## ☆ Madikana

*Sadiki Alex Naka*

Madikana  
Pudi e ya lela sakeng,  
Madikana  
E elea e bitsa modisa,  
Madikana  
E re modisa e tla o nkgolole,  
Madikana  
Nkgolole ke ye thabeng,  
Madikana  
Ke yo fula le tse dingwe

✧ **The Mystery of Love in Nature**

*David Phoshoko*

Motherhood — you are like the hammerhead's nest  
Like the old hunter now at rest in the cave  
Recollecting the great days of his prime  
When he met the spirit of Earth and Heaven in ecstasy

The mould that forever assembles and protects  
Yet took a sudden blow  
Aims to destroy the shrine  
Behold the harsh truth of nature  
Just like Ocean  
The womb of both life and destruction  
Whose wave shall never cease nor withdraw

Therefore if you are deep in trouble, oh man  
You shall not hate the night  
For you shall share its song with a peaceful Owl  
And the frogs in the reeds of the flowing stream  
Not until then will you know  
That death is our everlasting friend

Hatred is a never-ending chain  
Yet you can't hate the blessed hand — Death

✧ **Bra Danny's Treat**

*Richard J. Maseko*

Me and bra Danny were thick bras,  
in fact we were drinking buddies,  
Saturday we went to his funeral in Winterveldt;  
dressed to kill, Florsheim shoes and suits;  
the Molls were a thing to see;  
Maphephas and human hair exhibitions,  
tears and stories everywhere.  
Everyone seemed to know Ou Danny's biography.  
After the whole Wele-wele locomotion,  
we heaped him up,  
took our jackets,  
rushed to the nearest spot  
and got stinking drunk.  
That was what bra Danny would have  
prescribed if it was me:  
drink himself into a stupor.

## ☆ The Unlucky Time

*Roy Blumenthal*

The unlucky time comes  
to me while my eyes avert  
to carefully pretend a search of slums  
a guilt reaction dragging me alert

into biblical shadows of valleys  
of death while the unlucky time runs  
on pitter patter tiptoe, I dally  
in her cemetery and stare at tombs

stones rising in transparent wonder,  
psychic chimneys sucking clouds under  
the crisp ground where grassroots divert  
my stare and freeze it: stones inert

suckling on grass placenta wombs  
where this time is sprinkled for stillborn suns.

## ☆ Blues for Mama Afrika

Bright days are dead  
The sunshine, the green and black...  
Pale shadows of grief encompass us;  
Life is never affable  
When the tree of a nation stands  
Rootless on blood soaked soil  
There are mirages of love  
In the kingdom of hate...  
The raven's laughter over cries of a dove...

*Thokozani Mthiyane*

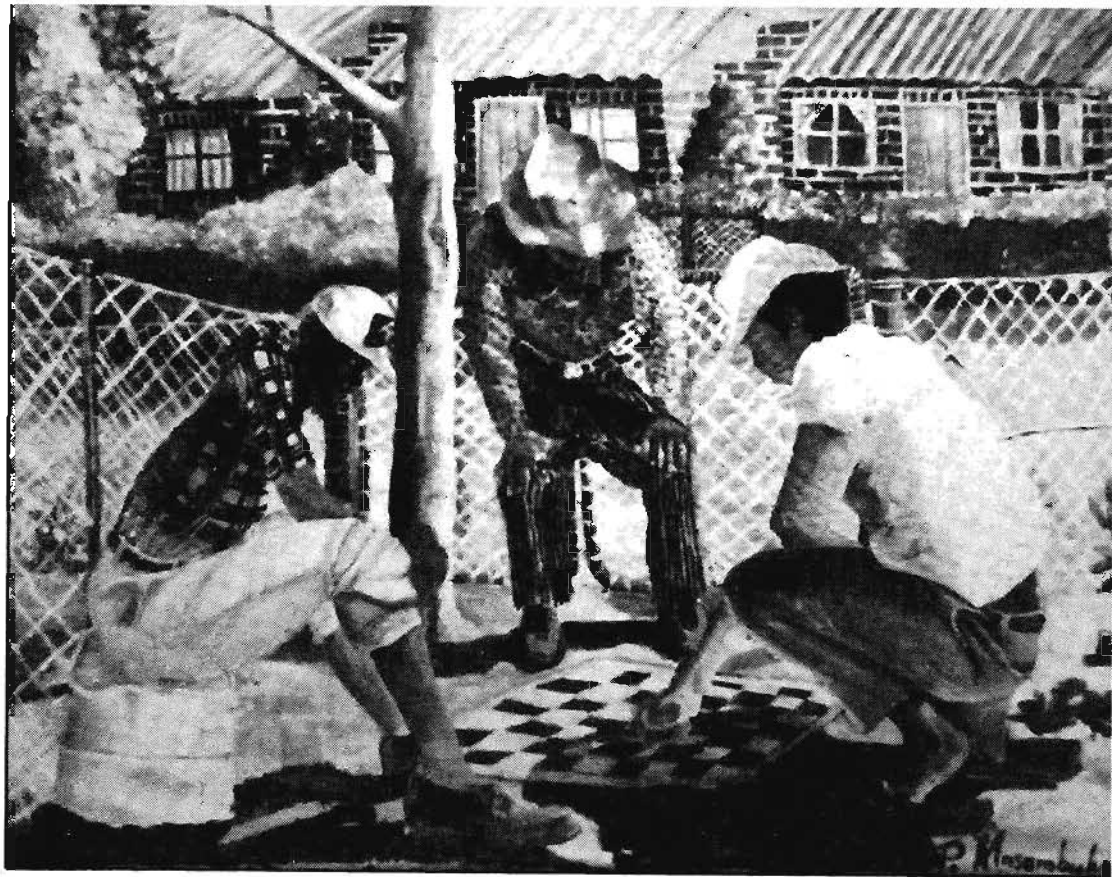
## ☆ The Entrepreneurial Spirit

*Kurt Donald*

Lazing in his lake of silver self-pity  
I see the pavement pauper,  
The wise man of the market place;  
Holding out his hand for all the wealth in the city.

From dream to fantasy to fantasy  
He trails his upside down smile.

From hope to hell he travels  
Always on the boundary of paradise  
Yet he will cry when he reaches heaven,  
And his Lucifer-snake frown unravels.



*Petrus Masombuko • Untitled • Oil on canvas*

# A MIN

## JIGGS

I first met Amin in 1973 when I became co-ordinator for the AMDA Bosmont Project. Shit was he difficult! The typical non-white civil servant in charge of the Community Centre, carrying out his duties according to the regulations, which if anything, stifled community development. For some reason the slaves always imitate their masters and Amin was full of shit. Amin was the caretaker of the centre, but was totally in charge after hours and on weekends when we operated. Sometimes

we would have to phone Dorothy, the social worker in charge or even get her to come down because he would not open the hall or a particular room. These fights went on for weeks and months. Every week the same scene with children and tutors waiting for a room to be opened and him refusing unless we had the appropriate authority.

Sometimes he would even be difficult to the point of holding everything up until I arrived with the excuse that 'the person in charge has not arrived yet'. After a while

he cooled down a bit, but always correct and very formal. If a group went on after five or we had a meeting or were a bit delayed in finishing off, trouble would start again. Didn't we realise that he also wanted to enjoy himself, that he also wanted time off, that as long as we were there he had to be on duty! I offered him a solution.

'Give us the keys, we will take full responsibility and when we are finished we will drop the keys at your cottage,' which was at the back of the centre.

He refused. I decided to go and see Dorothy and talk to her about it. Dorothy agreed as long as I took full responsibility. She was worried about Amin as he had a heart condition and tended to get over excited. I said it would make his life much easier and he wouldn't get so aggravated. The next week he reluctantly handed over the keys when I got there. For the first few weeks he was always waiting when I brought the keys. Always correct, always calling me 'Mr Smuts'. One evening he offered me a drink. I accepted. That started us going. He went to the kitchen and brought out a tray with a bottle of brandy, water and two glasses. I noticed the brandy was half-way. No wonder there was always the sound of a shuffle and pause when I knocked before the door was opened or he said, 'Come in'. Pretty soon he was telling me that he at first thought I was 'stuck up' like the other 'highbucks'. I told him I wasn't a 'highbuck', the term for a township bourgeois.

'Well, I mean like "educated people".'

I replied that I was not 'educated', I had only passed matric.

'But Mr Smuts...'

'Call me Jiggs,' I said.

'But Jiggs you are in charge, you seem so educated, you're in charge of all these teachers'.

'Well its more to do with ideas and responsibility,' I replied.

'But you're in charge of Mr Michaels, and Geoff and all those others,' he said.

'Yes, but that doesn't mean I have to be a "highbuck" or educated,' I replied.

'But you are a Smuts, whose your father?' he asked.

'Chairman,' I replied.

'Well then you are a "highbuck",' he responded.

We both laughed. I tried to explain why I didn't

consider myself a 'highbuck' or educated, but it was all to no avail.

After that we became regular friends and drinking partners for a couple of hours every Saturday evening. Amin was a tall man, although almost completely grey, he looked much younger than his age. Strapping, very fit, with glasses. A good looking chap, with his hat on all the time. I sometimes wanted to ask him if he slept with it on as well. His children were married and he was a grandfather. He was a robust character, energetic, with a great sense of humour, cigarette continuously hanging in his mouth. He became very supportive of the programme and would offer to assist us.

He would spend most of Saturday sitting with me at the table in the open from which I co-ordinated the programme. All the rooms of the community centre would be opened when we arrived and even if I or the teachers were late, he got to know which group started from which room and would direct the children to the appropriate rooms. He was very helpful and after the programme ended would assist us in clearing up. I would keep telling him to relax and he would say he was enjoying himself working with others and besides we were helping him getting the place ready for the religious and other groups that used the centre on Sundays. Occasionally he would suggest a 'dop' and I would say after the programme has closed. Now and then he would wander off to visit his son or a friend but always at the end of the day he was there for us to have a drink together. One night something went wrong with the electricity and him, Robbie and myself tried to fix it. It was hilarious, as all three of us were flying and we ended up with the hall switch lighting the kitchen, the kitchen switch lighting the office and the office switch lighting the hall, until we decided to give it up and Amin would call in an electrician.

And then my father died. I went back to the centre after the funeral. I was in a totally morbid, depressed state. Amin was very sympathetic. He noted that in over a year of running the programme this was the first Saturday that I had not been there. We drank and drank and drank. Three weeks later I resigned from my job and registered as a trainee teacher with the Bellville Training College in Cape Town. I had been engaged in a dispute with the director of the African Music and Drama

Jiggs

Association, over the fact that I didn't get the full time administrator's post of the organisation. I was unhappy with the allocation of resources and his neglect of the project. One of the problems I had was from parents paying for instruments, in this instance violins and not receiving them after many months, despite the fact that I paid in membership and instrument fees weekly to the head office. Together with the teachers we decided the previous August that we will not pay in the membership or instrumental fees, but open up a bank account from which we succeeded in purchasing all the instruments. It was also agreed that all of us would work voluntarily and if there were sufficient funds from the membership fees we would pay ourselves the honoraria due to us. However, this was not necessary as AMDA continued to send our cheques monthly despite the dispute. The day I left for Cape Town I closed the bank account and handed the money over to the director of AMDA. Did he mess me around. Anyway, on my way out of Johannesburg I had to go and say goodbye to Amin.

Three months later I was back in Johannesburg having been expelled from the teachers college for being 'subversive'! I had used up all my money and was flat broke. I had received one grant from the CADS of R300, of which, except for R36 in cash, the rest was deducted for fees and books. Before I left Cape Town I made it my business to return all the books. This did not help as the practise of the Coloured Affairs Department and all the ethnic educational bodies at the time and for a long time after was to throw the book at the 'subversives' and charge them for the entire three-year grant. They would often take the students to court and would end up with a court order requiring the student to repay the grant in full with costs. You were really punished for daring to question the system. Fortunately I had given addresses in Cape Town and Johannesburg at places I no longer stayed at. It is eighteen years since, and I am still receiving letters of demand from the CADS threatening to take me to court and adding on the costs of this over all these years!

In order to get back to Johannesburg I had to ask my mother to send me R100. That damn trip will cost R500 alone for petrol today. I was determined not to go back to Afgate, the steel works I had worked for, and where my

Dad had worked for over forty years, and my two brothers had worked for several years. After he died I realised I hated the firm, I felt that he who had started with the two owners had been exploited, they are both multimillionaires today and my Dad had been a worker all his life. Although when I used to speak to him about it, he felt that he had done alright and had brought all of us up on his wages in reasonable comfort. I had this idea of starting an educational programme using cultural disciplines for educational objectives. The other option was to become a journalist. The next two months I spent going around the various organisations from the Christian Institute to Black Community Programmes outlining my plan. I was also interviewed by Gavin Anderson of the *Rand Daily Mail*. He promised that if I got the job I would be one of the first black trainee journalists to do the 'cub-journalist course' a hitherto white prerogative. And then a friend told me about The Open School and Clive Neutelton who was the Director.

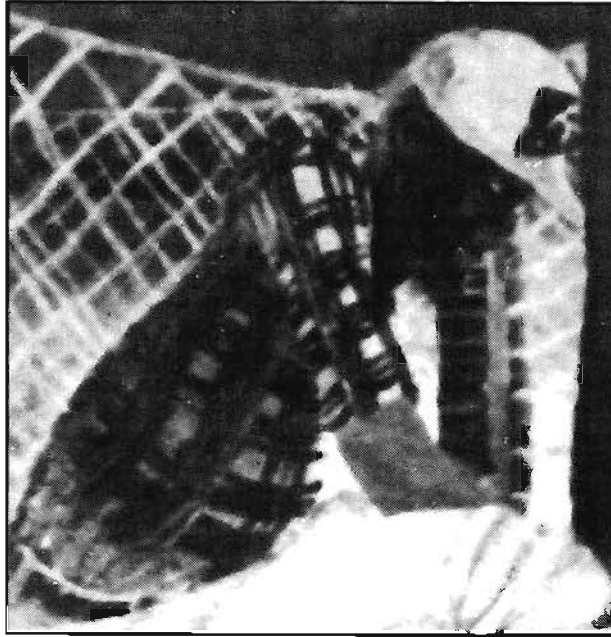
Meanwhile back at the ranch I was totally broke. But I was determined not to take any job until I had found what I wanted. Survival was tough. I lost a lot of friends. Whereas at the start I could ask to lend ten bucks. Now as I approached the response was, 'Hell Jiggs, I'm sorry I'm broke!' What amazed me was that people always offered one a drink, never a plate of food. Sometimes I would be so hungry I would get billious from the first drink, I would excuse myself and go to the toilet to puke. I would come out and get offered another drink. I was staying at St Ansgars on the West Rand. I had a little bungalow which cost twenty-five bucks a month. In fact some of the characters who didn't like me tried to get me out. It was only through knowing Dale White, that I managed to stay. So I had to find juice money, rent and food, not forgetting cigarette money. If I scored I would make it to my Mom's place in Troyeville where I got a decent meal and ten bucks. Mom would cry and say I'm becoming a bum. My younger brother would shit all over me and then give me ten bucks. But from my so called friends, besides the perennial booze, the average I would score was two bucks. This would mean one rand petrol and the other rand would go on a loaf of brown bread, a tin of pilchards or some bacon and of course cigarettes. The attitude of my buddies really fucked me up. I used



to be very gregarious, lots of buddies. Money never meant a thing to me, if I had a hundred bucks and nobody had anything I would blow the lot. No wonder I had so many friends! This exercise taught me two lessons, the value of bread and friendship. Needless to say, I lost, or shall I say dumped, a lot of friends once the period was over and I had paid back all my loans. However, one person stood out in all this and that was Amin.

Whenever I called he would insist that I have a meal, and a really slapped up meal. Sometimes he would even cook for me if there was no cooked food available. He would also open a bottle of brandy and always give me at least ten bucks, always offering more. He would allow me to use the Community Centre phone to call my wife in Cape Town and remind me at least once a week that I should phone her. I would feel quite guilty and if I could help it I would call on him once a week. However, at times I needed to get to an interview or was desperate for juice, food, rent or cigarette money, I would go and see him. He was always the same, welcoming me, just being so nice. Our rap had become extensive and would range from the struggle and the system to religion, marriage, children, music. Sometimes he would put on a record and show me his *lang arm* dance 'styles' and I show him mine which I had mainly learnt from my Dad and Mom who were great dancers. He would tell me about fasting, he was a born Muslim, but from what I gathered, not a practicing one. He would drink and eat and if he went out, he would put on his koffia and on the bus to 'lyk nugter and honger soos al die anner slumse want mense as hulle weet ek eet en drink sal hulle sê ek is a water slums!' He was generally critical of the clergy and what he called 'the higher ups'!

He was worried about his son as he felt, 'Hy drink te veel en hy hou van die cherries, ek dink hy het 'n jol bok



en daar's kak met sy vrou!' However, it turned out that in addition to his regular job his son was a drummer in a band and that of course meant late nights and admiring ladies over the weekends, not forgetting the booze and parties after dances!

It was obvious that his daughter was his favourite as he always spoke very affectionately of her. She had converted and married a christian priest. She and her husband had become politically involved, something that pleased him. He told me

about his involvement with the *New Age*, an ANC paper in the fifties that he distributed. When I pointed out to him that from what he had told me about himself when he was younger, it sounded as if his son was just like him, he totally denied it, stating that he was always responsible and did what was necessary and even if he had a 'jol bok' he was discreet about it, not the whole world knowing about it. And nobody knew him as a dronkie, he could hold his liquor! Believe it or not but during this period of hassling for bread, going hungry, drinking and puking, I even managed to get laid a couple of times, but that's another story!

After two months of this lifestyle two job offers finally came through. One was from the Open School and the other from the *Rand Daily Mail*. I had to think about which offer to take. The Open School was offering two hundred and fifty rands per month and the *Mail* three hundred bucks. I had been earning four hundred and thirty bucks at Afgate. My wife was pregnant. I made the decision. Writing and the idea of being a journalist interested me. However, at the Open School they were going to pay me for my ideas. The decision was not too difficult. As there was just under a month to go before I would start at The Open School I went along to Afgate and asked if they would employ me for a couple of weeks. Pleased to say they agreed to at my old salary. The weeks

## Jiggs

were spent sitting around attempting to look busy especially when management went by. Because of my experience the Afgate management had asked me to trouble shoot in some departments where they were having problems. However due to the culture in the organisation, the incumbent staff felt so threatened by my presence that they wouldn't co-operate. I really didn't want to get into any hassles with the guys as I was to be there for such a short while and told them that they better overcome the problems as they knew the management. If things didn't improve they would simply fire them. When asked for reports I told management things were improving and the chaps were doing a good job. For the rest of the time I sat on the phone talking to friends in Cape Town. What thrilled me was that I had a job offer in which I was really interested and that I only had a couple of weeks at Afgate. This feeling gave me a positive high!

With the Afgate cheque in my pocket and starting at The Open School, I began getting myself organised in my bungalow, with decent food and household goodies. I started paying off all the many loans I had made. Suffice to say that once I had completed paying some of these so-called friends, I have since hardly ever seen them again. The thing that really pissed me off is that all this time they were either never listening to me or simply did not believe in me or my ideas! Maybe they just liked my company and thought I was a great bullshitter!

I continued to see Amin at least once a week. However his generosity never ceased. At least now I could turn up with a bottle or we would go to a shebeen and I would insist I pay. He totally refused to take back any of the money he had given me. I had notes on every penny I had received from everyone. We reached a compromise that we would alternate the payments for drinks whenever we met. As he was so well-known in the shebeens in Bosmont, whenever we went drinking we would get a special place in the kitchen or some nook away from the other boozers. One Sunday after an all night party, a friend of mine and three females, we ended up with not a drop to drink, a cigarette to smoke or any bread amongst us. Fortunately there were a couple of cans of food and some bread to eat. Off to Amin we went. After hearing of our 'plight' he promptly organised a bottle, dash and

cigarettes. Amin got into the party spirit and was in no time chatting up the third and unattached women, whom he had no problem identifying.

Eventually she said, 'Jiggs, Jiggs asseblief sê vir die Oupa hy moet ophou, ek hou nie van ou toppies nie!' To which Amin replied, 'My Dear don't get confused with my grey hair, I'm the same age as Jiggs, it's just that with the grey hair I look older!' To which we all killed ourselves laughing.

A few months later I arrived at the Centre and Amin comes out of his house, hat and glasses on, holding his cigarette, as was his custom, with thumb and index finger with the three other fingers over the cigarette and says, 'Let's go to the shebok, I want to tell you something!' On our way he says 'Ou Jiggs, ou Jiggs ek gat ook a pa vis, net soos jy!'

God this news hit like a thunderbolt! It turns out that in July his wife had gone overseas with his daughter and son in law. He had started having an affair with this woman, who was in her late thirties and that he had since divorced his wife and married this younger woman who was now pregnant! After the shebeen we went back to his house and I met his new wife. I had not noticed the absence of his wife during my many calls at his place as besides being aware that she was overseas in July, both his son and daughter lived next door to each other further up in Bosmont and very often she would be there. The old rascal, I was with him so often and all this was going on and he kept it all to himself!

During the next two years we kept seeing each other at least once a week, drinking, rapping and just *gaating* on. One day I turned up and he was gone. There was a new caretaker. Amin had been retired and had moved to Coronationville. Just like Amin and the new wife, he had never said a word!

And then '76 happened. And Jesus things just got so busy, there was no time to socialise, what with seven hundred kids on the plant, kids on the run, having to find safe houses for them. Kids leaving the country, it was just chaotic! I hardly ever saw Amin again. The total upheaval with the students just went on and on and being involved meant that one was all over the place, twenty-five hours a day, eight days a week! Amin died in 1981. He was seventy-eight years old.

## ☆ How Many More

Steven Brimelow

07h45, Arkwright Avenue  
 Alexandra.  
 We were on the beat,  
 The pool said Alex was quiet  
 but we went in anyway.  
 SKY NEWS looking for pictures.  
 We saw a Casspir and a crowd of people.  
 Wet tyres squeaking on dirty ground  
 we jumped out and ran to the scene.  
 A collapsed shack glowing embers  
 smoking and hissing at the rain.  
 The smell of cooked meal, and thick smoke.  
 The smell of burnt flesh.

I couldn't make it out at first,  
 nobody told me it was a charred body,  
 it was just like,  
 I knew.  
 It looked like a roasted lamb,  
 yellow bone sticking out of burnt meat,  
 and the intestines, still pink  
 like strung sausages hanging out.  
 It was when I saw the skull, white ash  
 and bared teeth, it was then  
 that I turned away.  
 And somebody said  
 in the cold rain and smoke  
 'How many more'.  
 And then the morgue van came  
 and they lifted the body into  
 a stainless steel stretcher,  
 it seemed to flop  
 almost as if it wasn't charred to stone.

A man came and told us  
 to look at his house,  
 He said they came at 7 the night before  
 they'd shot his dog  
 and left two puppies  
 to frolick around it,  
 they'd put six bullets  
 through his window  
 and I found some  
 cartridge shells  
 AK47, others found  
 R1, R4 and 9mm shells.

6 people killed in that  
 little attack,  
 The charred body,  
 the wife of a husband  
 who was shot and killed.

I didn't hear about it on the news,  
 certainly didn't see it on SABC  
 How many more times.

## ✧ Promotion

*Thembe Peter Zwane*

Bababulele Bababulele...  
Balubeka uju emehlweni abo.  
Ubumnandi nokunambitheka koju.  
Nampo sebencinda iminwe  
Destroyed is the nation.

They sit in camera  
Private conversations,  
— Discussions.  
He whispered, who is the culprit.  
If you tell me — I will keep it a secret.  
That's between us.  
Yes! boss I'll keep an eye.

Boss, but...  
What now, there's no problem,  
You tell me the instigator.  
I give you two things,  
Money and promotion.  
A fish line and a hook — poor soul.  
Yes, yes, yes boss I will tell.

Oh! you are promised promotion,  
Not in black and white.  
You are hooked to destroy  
— your leaders, your own child.  
Remember no more ten cents bread.  
Your son is striving  
For his rights and future.

How hard it is to have an obstacle  
Obstacle being your father  
Obstacle being your mother.  
Oh! it's worse when it's Judas.  
They do all this because of your promotion.  
Maemo, Maemo.

Dear parents, brothers and sister,  
Judas and you too....  
Bear this in mind:  
Classification is not similar to Respect.  
Classification is apartheid  
— breaks love and faith.  
Yes respect your job,  
As well as other's.

How hard and painful it is,  
To watch your parents hooked.  
Stand up and fight for your rights.  
Do you wish your son to suffer like you.  
No! a big NO I say.  
Watch out for promotion,  
Watch out for unfulfilled promises.

## ✧ Munna

*Sadiki Alex Naka*

Madala tshakhuma,  
Tshakhuma muhali,  
Muhali ndi vhuswa,  
Vhuswa vhu a liwa,  
Vhu si na tshigôlo,  
Nna ni vhona ni,

Munna muyeni,  
Muyeni madzhafitha,  
Madzhafitha khwali,  
Khwali ya fhufha,  
Mavhala a sola,  
A sola mugeni,  
A vo ri dzi-da.

ERIKKA

HIBBERT





• *Hold On and Pretend* • Pencil on paper •



• *Untitled* • Pencil on paper •



• *History Has Landed On My Lap* • Pencil on paper •



## ✧ No Peace in South Africa

### *A Song of War*

*Linda C. Saunders*

When heads have been battered  
 And lives have been shattered,  
 Families scattered  
 As if nothing mattered,  
 Do you still wonder  
 That streets are blood-splattered?  
 That weapons are clashing?  
 That pangas are gashing?  
 Assegais flashing?  
 Bricks and bombs crashing?

How can you knock now when you've kicked down the door?  
 Tell us to make peace, when you started the war?  
 The weapons we laid down and handed to you,  
 You pass to our brothers, so they'll kill us too.  
 You banned us, imprisoned us, slandered our name;  
 Then, when forced to release us, you get the acclaim  
 And the world pats your back, shakes you by the hand,  
 You can fly on the Concorde, eat a Big Mac,  
 Join the Olympics, run on the world track.

Now all the world's smiling and welcoming you,  
 You, who had all the pie, now get the cake too —

But our hearts have been battered  
 Our livelihood shattered  
 Our nationhood scattered  
 Oh, we never mattered....

It'll be years before bones which you've broken can heal,  
 Years before nerves you've cocained can feel.

Oh ja, sure, we have much now we've not had before —  
 (thank you)  
 But we'll never forget that you started the war.

# IN SEARCH OF



# A

s South Africans we can claim two things about history: we have contributed the word 'apartheid' to human culture and civilisation. Like the middle passage and the holocaust, apartheid has left a blot of blood on civilisation. South Africans are unique in this contribution. That is one way in which we will from now on, relate to history. The other way is that as a people, we did in time live the day to day life of the slogan: 'Freedom or Death'. Like millions of other people in history and in the world we have had to claim life by being contemptuous of death, and now we will become part of civilisation. We will not be forgotten in the backyard of time, and also, it is now known that we will not let this happen.

In my country there exist two cultures. There is the culture of the oppressed, who are in the majority. There is the culture of the oppressors, who are in the minority. It is not so long ago, in fact it is yesterday, when the culture of the oppressor in its defence coined the slogan: 'Total Onslaught', and that of the oppressed

# LIGHT

NONOANE WULY

said: 'Freedom or Death'.

In search of light, from where the electricity does not reach, from where poverty is not only seen or smelt but can be touched, from where there were deliberate and conscious efforts to deny education, from where life was made cheap by crime, police brutality and disease, in the townships and rural areas of South Africa, the oppressed evolved a culture to claim humanity, not only for themselves but for all South Africans. 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white....', we said in 1955 in Kliptown.

It is against this historical background that the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) of the African National Congress (ANC), searches for the links, relationships and connectedness of the life of all South Africans. Culture, which expresses history, is informed by and informs life. Culture is dynamic in a society organised for democratic expression, or is pregnant and waiting birth in a society organised for oppression.

For forty years the Nationalist Party and Government did everything in their power to entrench oppression. At the one end of the apartheid spectrum, apartheid articulated itself by punishing a black and a white for kissing and sought its courts to define whether the kissing was platonic or passionate. On the other hand of the spectrum the apartheid system mobilised and nationalised

the resources of the country to maintain this domination, as it also trained its police, army and security forces to repress blacks and to defend whites. A culture evolved then, which permeated every aspect of South African life. This culture is intrinsically, and inherently violent, intolerant, racist and seeks to express the best ways and methods of dividing the South African nation to the minutest detail. That is what 'Total Onslaught' sought to defend and to protect. It was a culture expressing total intolerance to life. It neglected and ignored the fact that life will always express the close relatedness of peoples. By propagating white domination, the Nationalist Party and Government denied life for forty years in our country.

The onus was on the oppressed to undo this, to reject an absurd life and to claim civilisation for all the people of South Africa. It is eighty years now, that through lobbying, delegations, boycotts, sanctions, armed struggle and mass action, we not only brought the best methods of claiming freedom for all, but life for black and white South Africans. This struggle for the life of the South African people, has in 1992, exploded and laid bare the reality to its people, pulling them out of the dark ages and locating them into the eve of the twenty-first century. Our country is non-racial, it is multi-lingual, it has a diversity of cultures, from Africa, Europe and Asia. The struggle for freedom as expressed by the Freedom Charter, has claimed the right of all, to express their culture and who they are, to the best of their

ability. It also says that all must defend the right of others to express themselves. The Freedom Charter was the source of freedom for South Africa, and since then the ANC is committed to the Bill of Rights, and we were inspired by what humanity has achieved in this regard.

In its international relations, and when it sought support from the international community...for the just course of the oppressed by associating itself with the UN, the OAU, the Non-Aligned Movement, the ANC was not only claiming freedom, or locating our country into civilisation, but as a people, we were reconfirming the fundamental rule of life, that change is constant to life.

May I report to this important gathering that we are deeply concerned by the fact that white South Africans seem to be oblivious of this extremely important fact. They still want to cling to the backward culture of dictatorship, discrimination, repression and oppression. They want to cling to the past. They refuse to accept that history will always unfold new elements to inform the future. They are unable to come to terms with the fact that one other role of history is to allow all people to learn from the past, so that they can learn from previous mistakes and progress.

I am here indicting De Klerk for scuttling what the South African people have achieved: CODESA. The nation had put on the agenda for itself, through struggle, that South Africa must change.

In 1992, as we meet here, the deadly culture of apartheid — vio-

**Previous page:**

*Dumisane Khumalo*

**Painful Hands • Acrylic on paper**

lence — has reached full blown expression in our country. Daily there are reports of massacres on trains, buses, in townships and villages. Innocent and unarmed men, women and children are butchered either because they belong to the ANC or to create an atmosphere where free political activity cannot take place.

The South African media, which is either owned by the government, or by white business, whether TV, radio or newspapers, accustomed to excluding seventy-five percent of the population and being blind and deaf to its plight, is still steeped in apartheid culture, and articulates it eloquently. It calls this violence either 'black-on-black violence' or a war between the Zulus and Xhosas, or between the ANC and Inkatha. By stubbornly clinging to apartheid, and refusing to see black people as people, and not Xhosas or Zulus, or refusing to come to terms with the fact that although the majority of supporters of the ANC are black people, and that is because historically, blacks are oppressed because they are black, the ANC is claiming freedom for all the people of South Africa, black and white.

The reporters and journalists, the editors and sub-editors of the white dominated South African media, are unable, three decades and a half later into the history of struggle, to hear and see the truth. They are deaf and blind to reality. They are unable to think objectively through the fact and reality that the violence which is now devastating life in our country is expressing apartheid culture. They are unable to read the writing on the

wall, that as this violence did spill out of Natal, into other areas of the country, if it is not curbed by all South Africans, it will overflow into and engulf all South Africans, not Xhosas and Zulus only, or the ANC and Inkatha only, but black and white South Africans.

Therefore, the onus is once more on the oppressed. History repeats itself. Through their organisations: the unions, youth and women's organisations, civic, religious, cultural and sport organisations and many other formations of struggle, the black oppressed majority must once more put change on the agenda of the South African nation. The ANC shall return to mass action.

In this way we shall weaken and destroy apartheid culture, but also so that we can once more claim civilisation for all the people of South Africa. We did so thirty-seven years ago. In the early seventies and late eighties, black people made it clear to our white compatriots that we are no longer prepared to be ruled under apartheid. In the nineties, having learnt the lesson of history that freedom fought for must be defended, we will ensure that when we once more sit as South Africans to negotiate, it will be about the right of the individual, black or white, and the right of all to a livable life.

In the near future, we shall come back to our fellow human beings in the international community, having, through our music, writings, paintings, in short, through arts and culture captured the reality of our country to share it with you. We will contribute to the belief that people

will always need each other. This is what world culture articulates over and over. We shall bring to the world, through democratic practice, and by having set in motion the processes which will eliminate all forms of discrimination, and build on the diversity, complexity and vibrancy of our nation.

Our music, the guitar, the saxophones and voices of singers, will articulate, as they have done so eloquently in the past, the state of the South African nation. South African music, like literature, sculpture and paintings, have forged a South African voice in the world. The music and theatre performance of the Amandla Cultural Ensemble, which for over two decades traversed the international community, has two elements in it: it wails about oppression, but as it does so it is brave and courageous in its search for a voice of a united South African nation. The South African Nobel Laureate, Nadine Gordimer, in her writing, has continuously searched for the thread which binds the South African people as people. She is today, a writer of the world.

Mbogeni Ngema, through *Sarafina*, a musical which is uncompromising in slating apartheid as a crime against humanity, has also, eloquently articulated the joy of life in our country, through song and dance. Before the painter and sculptor, Dumile Feni, died recently, he expressed the morbidity of apartheid in a manner which left us asking — how did we allow ourselves to live so that we are portrayed in a perpetual frenzy of relentlessly tearing life

apart? However, inherent in his work, besides humour, is resilience of the human spirit.

This is the tip of the iceberg of our life. I promise that soon we shall enter the world as only South Africans can. I told you about our unique contribution to civilisation. It is not only us who must never forget the terrible nightmare of apartheid. That nightmare must make the

human race rededicate itself to be totally intolerant of the middle passage and the holocaust. I have also told you how history has relentlessly taught all of us that freedom belongs to all. Soon as a people, we will join the world to defend and protect this truth. **S**

*Stockholm, 01.07.92*

## ✧ Mike Hamlyn

*Uriel Abrahamse*

We joked  
about you  
getting your arse  
shot full of buck-shot

We did not  
imagine what  
it would be like  
seeing your body  
carried away in a plastic bag

Neither did we  
imagine  
the pool of violent crimson blood on the floor

When that sight did come  
on a cold winter's morning  
we  
were  
so  
unprepared for it  
that  
we  
couldn't even cry

*06.01.85*



## ✧ askus

*Seithamo Motsapi*

i sd life  
& u didn't listen  
i sd sphinx  
& u smote mah cheek

& while sankore sprouted me  
flowing muses/sage ebonics  
u caved yr horizon  
into a prehisteric blob

for whetha scar or scum  
still the moon wd spear/spew u  
to yr dank hole  
dense with the clamour of fangs  
while so slowly  
                    ever so slowly  
u fell to the purple scythes  
of obduracy  
                    the disease of elephants

gore on  
clank yourself the rust  
of the ovens  
i'll ride the sun

## fayam

*the plowers plowed upon my back  
they made long their furrows  
Psalm 129:3*

the skies were belligerent  
when we slid across  
the bleeding belly of the limpopo

overhead metal formations  
cast their geometric shadows  
on the scraggy battlefields

on the ground  
geography knotted our defences  
into maluti & sprawling shrub

six miles out  
vorster's nine-headed dogs  
kept their noises down

snuff-sniff  
sniff-snuff

& the orange eye  
of the tower beckoned

was it light  
— we asked — to new life  
or was it fight perhaps  
quickfire stutter skirmish  
& raining lead

so we blurred thru rhodesia  
the dozing flags of monomotapa  
cankered in their bellies

farther out  
the talking drums of tanganyika  
were opening up ancestral sanctuaries  
for david motsamai

for our lord  
is a man of law

i write  
from beneath the foot  
of time's perforated intestines  
& as these scrawls or scrolls  
hasten into their air or earth  
the skies are once more cluttered  
— this time the rusting steel  
of knee-bending dialectics  
piling slaves beyond the sun  
& the promised bread  
straggeling to her sixfifty mouldy six feet rest

....

because now our spears  
call for surer rends  
i send you chitepo  
his fire singing other roars  
beside handshake

what temptest the cadres  
in the seething red  
just beyond hell of township  
chanting new storms

an i for an i  
an h for an h  
an ass for an ass  
a t for a t

have we come home to this  
a bruise in the heart  
cap in the hand  
hole in the head

& for them to botha us  
into dungeon forever  
like this?

*Seithamo Motsapi*

## ✧ Sedikwa-Ke-Ntswapedi

*Menge Lehoke*

Ba rie Sedikwa ke ntswa pedi ga se thata  
Ba e opa lonakeng  
Ngwana wa ga mantsho a suthelela  
A suthelela naga e e boferezere le boatla

A filha kgotleng a e fuduwa  
A e fuduwa ya tlolatlola le naga  
kgosi tau a kgaotswa go puruma ke mmutla  
Mmutla a sa bolo go gatelelwa

Mmalo nna we! koma ya bagale e monate jang  
kana e sa le ke efeletsa tala...  
Thiboga! wena ke ope — ope ka leoto  
Re gaufi le go tsaya mmu wa rona  
Aferika e ne e kile ebile e tla nna gape

Kana badimo ba ka re sotla fa re sa lwe  
Ba kare 'Ra tsala, Ra tsala magatlapa!  
Kopano ya rona ke tholo  
Magatlapa a godimo matlung a dinonyane  
Fa e le nna le bomiandela re egaka

Isaya mogala o leletse mapatshe  
Tihalosa ka bothaga gore magokonyana a kotsine  
Sediba sa botlhale jwa bona setshele  
Kuduo le lenyora di jetse mme le ngwana  
Bodimo ba ja batho ba rudile  
Moswang o ile borwa jwa Aferika  
Kelengketla! go fela tshipi ya kgololesego  
Tswitswi! nonyane tsa loapi di a paka  
Morubisi ga o bone  
O tla bona kamoso  
Re tshwere kgololesego

## ✧ Shriek

*Lumkile Mqhayi*

We plant and nourish consciously  
like a cat that cherishes and begets  
with the scent of love  
Yet we kill and destroy unconsciously

We love and nurture patiently  
like the serene air that conducts the  
rhythm of trees  
Yet we hate and squander hastily

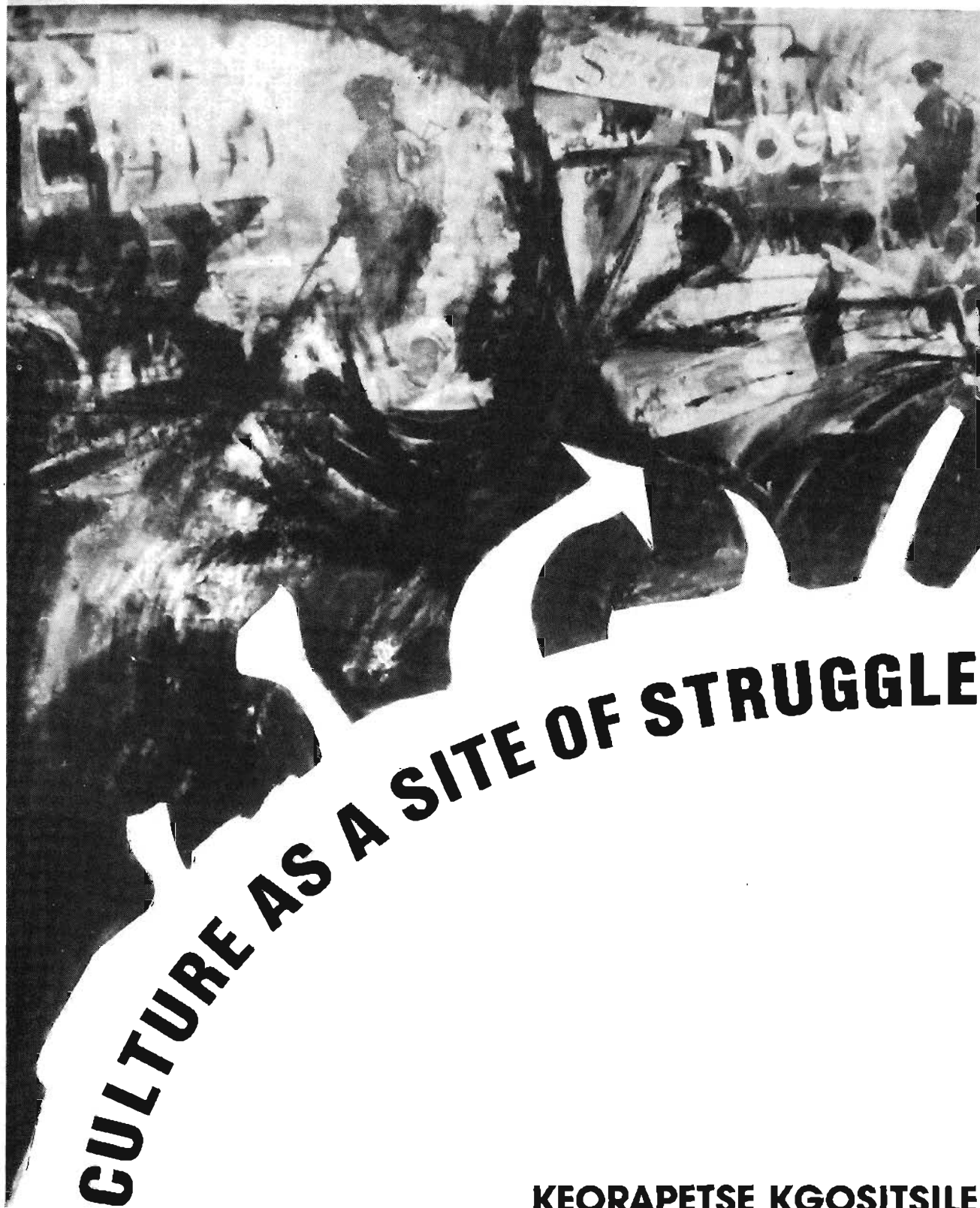
We pregnantly reach out and counterbalance  
like the current that goes through  
the people  
Yet we are unobserving

We see and touch  
like an unprogrammed fly that  
persue life on the edge  
Yet we blindly concede to nostomania

## ✧ Epigram Two

Love is up for sale  
we are raising the flag of Eve  
I came upon a bevy of girls  
chanting  
Ten years ago or more  
I fell in Love and now  
I fall out of love  
Like a child born into a dustbin.

*Phedi Tlhobolo*



**CULTURE AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE**

**KEORAPETSE KGOSITSILE**



**W**ithin the Movement — and here I'm talking about the ANC, in whose defense and protection I am not about to hesitate to sacrifice my very life, if need be, any day (and if you think I'm a fanatic you know where you can go, for all I care), there is an annoying, criminal backwardness about culture, generally, and its role in society at any given time. This is a backwardness on the part of my leadership — the exceptions are too few to be of any significance to be discussed here — and creators of our culture. A seemingly weird contradiction, I have to admit. If this is clearly understood then one should not have any problems understanding why it took the ANC until 1982, a period of seventy years, to establish the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC); and that was after the unarguable success of the historic Culture and Resistance festival earlier that year.

But, even then, it was a kind of compromise; for some years it remained a sub-department of the Department of Education. And after moving back into the country last year, the leadership wasted time debating whether there was still a need for this department to exist as a department. Thanks to Steve Tshwete for fighting relentlessly to save this vital limb of the Movement from amputation. Even now, as I'm writing this, the DAC remains somewhat like a tolerated, mischievous stepchild of the Movement, though in our various indigenous traditions and

customs we have no concept of a stepchild and we have no indigenous language that even today carries such a social aberration.

This backwardness becomes even more perplexing, at times very infuriating, when you consider that Sol Plaatje, the first Secretary General of the ANC, was a leading writer, translator, publicist, editor, capable singer, and so forth; in short, not only was he an outstanding figure in the top leadership of the ANC, he was also a leading artist and cultural worker with a keen sense of social responsibility. He was the first African to publish a novel in English. *Mhudi* is a classic that continues to attract the attention of literature students, knowledgeable literary scholars and critics alike.

The Communist Party, on the other hand, cannot be accused of such a lack of understanding. Yet the Party, with its understanding, is doing nothing to help us get out of this national morass and, finally, sabotage. Comrades, this is serious and, if you see it as an accusation, you are correct and, unapologetically, as Thami Mnyele might have put it, I say it with bitterness. We have to develop to understand, and this includes our leadership *jikelele*, that, as Jeremy Cronin has tried to clarify:

the very existence of the ANC, the very existence of the SACP and COSATU, is an act of culture; it is an opposition to the existence of the racist, exploitative culture which we have known and continue to suffer

and resist. Their very existence proposes an alternative culture.

Likewise, in the production of literature, whether you are conscious of it or not, when you write you oppose, propose or affirm certain values and thereby you define yourself and your national, group or class values, essential interests and allegiance.

In the production of literature, talent is not enough. In order to write anything of relevance, the writer must be informed; the writer must be knowledgeable. For instance, in the case of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the validity of ideas and principles cannot be measured by the errors or blunders committed in any attempt to put them into practice. A writer has to be knowledgeable enough to examine or show whether the errors were, from the very beginning, an integral part of those ideas or a consequence of the paths of action taken by those trying to put them into practice, to implement them. Because of not being sufficiently informed some of our writers and critics — even among those who would want to be seen as progressive — there are those who readily run

## n the production of

their ignorant mouths about Gorbachev's perestroika fiasco as proof that socialism cannot work.

Writing, in all its seriousness — and it should be as demanding of the

reader as it is of the writer and the critic — must be deeply steeped in reality, in life as it is actually lived now, as at any conceivable time, its unarguable point of departure for any hardnosed imaginative search or exploration. Writers, we insist on our right to demand that you render unto us the raw, ripening or ripe fruit of that labour. After all, when you publish what you have scribbled, whether you realise it or not, you are telling us to stop doing whatever else we might have preferred to be doing for the length of time it would take us to go through your work — making love, playing with the children, visiting a friend or a relative, hanging out just to relax, or whatever — because you want to share something with us, even if it be no more than entertaining us. You are making it public; you are making it ours. If not, why don't you leave it to the 'gnawing criticism of rats' in the chambers of your diary or notebook?

So I insist literature is not, was not, never has been, should never be allowed to degenerate into being, no more than a mirror reflection of life. If anything is worth that label it must offer us much more than what we

the people with the help of the boers; that the De Klerk regime has not brought about any change; that De Klerk and his ilk are more interested in the sanctions being lifted than they are in South Africa being transformed into the true Home of all South Africans — none of that black-and-white together limp-minded nonsense liberals, black and white, hide behind as they sedately consider their bulky bank balances; that we seem to have abandoned even our revolutionary language, like, when did you last hear anything about seizure of power, and so on. At best you have become a poor would-be newspaper reporter; no critic should honour your toilet-bound nonsense by accusing you of being a writer. Literature is not a mirror reflection of life. Mirrors are passive. There is a dialectical relationship between literary art and life. And a poem is neither a condensed form of, nor an excuse for, anything else. The poem will stubbornly expose what does not belong to it, what is not intrinsic to it — in spite of the intentions, no matter how noble, of its creator. A poem is not a guerrilla warfare manual either; it would be more worth your

level.

For literary art to be, and remain, of relevance, it must capture and, in moving images, render some gesture, some movement of life; the gesture beneath the fact; the spirit, if you will, that informs fact, that imbues it with meaning or pertinent question.

So then, finally, at the risk of stepping on the toes of some of our goiterous, self-proclaimed literary critics, twiddling thumbs in their decadent, petty-bourgeois, proverbial ivory or ebony towers, I will make no secret of some observations I have made regarding the bankruptcy of our literary criticism. We have more than plenty of irrelevant book reviewers who can get away with their limp-minded 'reviews' because there is no serious canon of criticism that would have challenged their claim to relevance, artistically or socially, by no more than its very existence. Also, you see, these obscurantists masquerading as literary critics/book reviewers, can get away with the poison they continue to spread because they wish to undermine democratic institutions or bodies like DAC, COSAW, COSATU

Cultural Desk, PAWE, and several other cultural formations. The presence of critics and literary scholars like Mbulelo Mzamane, Lewis Nkosi, Njabulo Ndebele, Ampie

Coetzee, Jeremy Cronin, Andries Oliphant, Peter Horn — whose sensibility is deeply rooted in German culture — and an insignificantly few others, does not alter the bleak state

## literature, talent is not enough

see, and go through; that is the business of reportage. If, as a supposed writer, as a producer of literary art, you cannot tell us any more than that Inkatha is terrorising and massacring

while to see your prospective military instructor about that. Nor is poetry the poet's diplomatic passport for trouble-free travel away from social responsibility at the practical

of our literary criticism any more than a few survivors of a disaster. (I have not included Bra Zeke here — aka E'skia Mphahlele now — because it would take a whole book-length essay to deal with him, and James Moilwa, whose admirably sharp focus is on the producers of literature in Setswana literature, like the literatures in our other indigenous languages, is not known.)

Further, I make no secret of the fact that, although I have done nothing about it, I have had this concern for quite some time. For instance, almost two decades ago, I suggested to Alex la Guma, Wally Serote, Mandla Langa, Ronnie Kasrils, Barry Feinberg, and perhaps a few other writers in the Movement, that we, as cadres of the Movement who are writers — as distinct from writers who happen to be in the Movement, and you better believe me, there is a serious distinction here — should put together an anthology on literature and literary criticism. Such an anthology, hopefully, would force our critics, even those worthies, our petty-bourgeois gentlemen, and ladies, of letters, to do some serious work which their vocation should demand; and also, hopefully, that it would give the novice some essential grounding and guidance — at least a hardnosed, no monkey-business, materialist point of departure. Remember, no matter what the obscurantist or idealist, or the willful junior would be fascist masquerading as literary scholar or critic might want to say, the study of literature, which is a prerequisite for any would-be writer or literary critic, is a science. **S**

*This paper was presented by Keorapetse Kgositsile at the African-Asian Writers Conference in Osaka, Japan, 29 October, 4 November 1992.*

*Gillian Solomon • Untitled •  
Oil on canvas*



✧ Stay For the Reject Moment

*Roy Blumenthal*

Stay for the reject moment  
and press your ear to the edge  
of your hand and feel  
the sighs sliding up the bannister.  
Ballast.  
Take me to a different corner  
and make me face the other way  
oh alarm I hear the car  
is being taken away  
and let me yes yes let me  
shout out in my own rightful rage  
aah! cascade from my face  
oh turn your eyes  
do not watch me in this werewolf tide  
my sobbing is diminished  
aah! mephistopheles.  
Take me awake to a new corner  
let me watch a bloodshed  
let my lips move as I read.  
Who is it dreads my presence?  
Go! GO!!

✧ My Letter to You

*Menzi Ndaba*

My letter to you is pregnant  
With lillies, daisies, daffodils  
Expressive explosive  
Volcanic earthquake  
It's mountains high  
Rivers long  
Oceans deep  
It's Romeo and Juliet  
Defiant, revolutionary  
Yes it's tranquil, comforting  
It's a rose on a soldier's helmet  
Ties the knot  
It's wedding bells  
It's hot, fire  
Mini-skirts, emotional  
Sweat dripping in ecstasy  
Its tongue full of honey

✧ riot in the ghetto's

*Johnny Rasta Mash*

who would have thought  
that it could happen?  
but what does one expect  
from a smouldering volcano.

the fact that lies  
beyond the fact,  
the act —  
beyond the act.

fire on water,  
has to hiss  
one time  
or another.

the mind won't  
take on for long,  
what the body  
can endure.

bloodshed, violence,  
rampage!  
revenge, poverty,  
needs!

who is to blame,  
me —  
you.  
white —  
black;  
or simply a personal matter?



*N. F. Ledimo •*  
**Venus Revisited •**  
Charcoal and  
pastel on paper

# IN HAPPINES AND IN SORROW

## *Kaizer Nyatumba*

**I**t all seemed like a nasty dream at first, and I kept thinking I would wake up to find that it was not real. How could I believe that it had all come to that, and that one swift and apparently ill-thought move would send my world crushing down like an egg on the floor? How could I believe that the world to which I had woken was radically different from the one I had left behind when I went to bed the night before?

It was all so utterly incredible that I pinched myself on the face just to make sure I was not

dreaming. The pinching hurt, alright; so I was not dreaming. And there in front of me lay the piece of paper which had brought my misery. On it the message stood: 'I have finally come to the painful conclusion that I must leave you and the children so that Jabulani and I can see each other openly. Just as I once loved you, so do I love him.'

Those words! Oh, how much they hurt me. How much they pierced through my heart again and again. How much I cried.

And I am not a cry-baby. Neither do I have a penchant for exaggerating things. For me a spade is a spade and not just a garden tool. That's me. If you have heard a story from me, then you should know it is true and that it has been told to you in the most accurate manner possible.

You will believe me, then, when I tell you I felt like dying that Saturday morning. Although this happened two years ago, it all seems like yesterday. I have only to shut my eyes and the day's drama will unfold again in front of me, with me one of the principle actors in it.

This is how it happened.

It was around eight on a Saturday morning when I woke up. By all accounts I had had a good night. It was a very cold morning in the middle of June, and so I instinctively and drowsily turned over to the other side and fumbled with my hands for my husband, Fetsi. There was nobody there. I took my head out of the blankets and looked at the side of the bed where Fetsi liked to sleep. Nothing. The wintry cold bit into me like a million needles, and I quickly covered my face again.

Where could Fetsi be on a morning like this? And he normally woke up much later than me on Saturdays and



Sundays. I remembered that he was still not home when I and the children finally went to bed the previous evening, after we had waited for him until late at night. Had he come to bed at all? I was confused. I thought I had felt him stealthily sneaking into the sheets next to me hours after I had gone to bed, reeking of liquor. I even seemed to remember us making love that night.

Or, was I dreaming? It was quite possible that I was. For one thing, Fetsi had not made love to me for many months then. I had even forgotten how it felt like to be touched and loved. He had given himself to liquor and spent every minute of his time with his friend, Jabulani.

Oh, how it hurt! How it rent my heart into pieces and ached worse than a scorpion's sting. I would lock myself in the bedroom and masturbate. I would lie awake in bed next to my husband at night and imagine other men possessing me. And on those nights when I was bold enough to tell Fetsi what I wanted, he would simply brush me off and go on to sleep.

But I don't want to bore you with my problems here. From now I will stick to my story just like a postage stamp does to an envelope; that I promise you.

Where was I? I was still telling you about that fateful Saturday morning. As I was saying, the cold drove me back under the blankets, but my thoughts soon turned to Fetsi again. Where was he? Could it be...could it be that something had happened to him before he got home last night? Like other townships on the Reef, Katlchong was dangerous at night. Our once quiet and tranquil township was in the grip of the violence which had been going on in the country. For some strange reason which I never knew, the month of June was always likely to be marred by violence, and this had gone on from the time I was a high school student way back in 1976. I had to find my husband.

I got out of bed, dressed in something warm and went to the lounge. There was nobody there. I proceeded to the kitchen, and again there was nobody. In the small bedroom the children were still asleep. Not wanting to wake them up, I retraced my steps to our bedroom. And there it was, on the edge of the bed on the side where



Fetsi usually slept. An unfolded piece of paper. How did I miss it when I woke up? At least he has left a note, I thought, relieved.

I did not read it immediately. I put it aside and got into bed again. As you would expect, the blankets were warm and welcoming. Once under them, I felt like I was in Fetsi's big arms. Oh, how I used to enjoy it when he drew me closer to him and squeezed me. His hands...they were so soft and gentle. I remembered the early days of our marriage. We were young, we were innocent, and we were in love. As I rubbed my thighs against each other under the blankets, I imagined myself in Fetsi's arms. I thought of the hours we spent frolicking in bed on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

Tut-tut! There I go again with my digressions. By all means do call me to order, dear reader, when I get over-sentimental and divert from my story. Between you and me, I will admit that I do get carried away with my emotions, fears and insecurities sometimes. Only sometimes. Otherwise, I am a well-balanced adult who regards facts as sacrosanct. I am a perfectly *compos mentis* person for whom the saying *Reps ipsa loquitur* has a special meaning and significance.

And so back to my story.

Although the blankets were warm and I was quite comfortable under them, I could not sleep again. My mind was not at rest, and I kept thinking about Fetsi. What had he written in his note? I thought of the possible things he could have written. 'Darling, I have had to go to the depot this morning. See you soon,' was one of them. 'Sweets, I have had to take Jabulani somewhere this morning. I love you,' was another possibility. There were so many things he could have said, and I was not in a hurry to find out. It did not matter much where he was, as long as he was safe.

Nothing could have prepared me for what I saw when I finally read the note. Leave us? What did he mean by that? 'I have finally come to the painful conclusion that I must leave you and the children so that Jabulani and I can see each other openly. Just as I once loved you, so do I love him,' he had written.



I could not understand what I had just read. Like mathematics when I was still at school, it was all Greek to me. Nevertheless, my hand became limp and the piece of paper fell on the pillow where Fetsi normally slept. I tried to think, but my faculties took leave of me. Everything became impenetrably dark. Even in that state, I then noticed for the first time that our wedding picture which normally hung on the wall in the bedroom was missing.

So, too, were a few other things, including Fetsi's possessions. Dazed, I got out of bed and went to his wardrobe at the corner of the room. It was empty. Not even an underwear had been left behind.

The reality hit me squarely on the face: Fetsi was gone. My beloved husband and father of my two children had walked out on me. Just like that. I sat on the bed and cried. Why Lord, I kept asking. Why would Fetsi do this to me and the children?

I thought about his valedictory note, and the more I thought about it the more I found it confusing. What did he mean he wanted to be able to see Jabulani openly? Not once had I tried to come between their friendship. Indeed, given their closeness as friends, I had come to accept Jabulani as part of our family, and I did not complain when he and Fetsi spent all their time together.

The last sentence of Fetsi's note bothered me. How could he compare our love and marriage to his friendship with Jabulani? It struck me as odd that he could say he loved Jabulani in the same way as he loved me.

Now, let me tell you about Jabulani. I had known him for as long as I had known Fetsi. Wherever Fetsi was, there, too, was he. In fact, they were together when Fetsi and I first met those many years ago. He had always



struck me as an effeminate and somewhat odd man. To start with, he had pierced his ears and sometimes wore earrings like women did. When he spoke — which he was fond of doing — he inflected his high-pitched voice and, to make a point, often bent his hands at the wrists as though he were handicapped. And he would laugh that girlish, seductive laugh of his which my husband found rather cute. To tell the truth, it *was* a cute, infectious laugh, and I sometimes secretly wished I could laugh like him.

You see, I am one of those women with the rare and embarrassing gift of laughing aloud. I have known people to close their ears with their fingers to keep out my laughter. My husband Fetsi used to get embarrassed whenever this happened, and he would look far away to give the impression that he was not with me and that he did not know me. One day he even told me I laughed like a *hoermeid*. *Me a hoermeid?* You can imagine how angry I was, and I did not talk to him for a full week. Neither would I sleep with him.

But that was a long time ago. Although I envied Jabulani his educated laugh, I went on laughing the way I was born to laugh. If something was funny, I laughed until I cried. Fetsi had to get used to this, and he eventually did.

Just as Fetsi finally got used to the way I laughed, so, too, did I get used to Jabulani's weird behaviour, and, as my husband's friend, I accepted him the way he was and still is. He soon proved to be a good family friend, and he was always there for Fetsi and me even long before we got married. It bothered me, though, that while he was always there for us, he never gave us an opportunity to be there for him. In fact, he did not seem to need help at all.

Whenever Fetsi and I quarrelled, Jabulani would play the indefatigable peacemaker. He, on the other hand, seemed to be in control of his life. He changed girlfriends like he changed underwears, but not once did he appear unhappy or need us to help him get over a failed relationship. Not once, I say. It seemed that his world revolved around us, and for as long as he had us as friends he was content.

Throughout this period, he had not got married. Marriage, in fact, was one of the very few words which

did not feature in his otherwise impressive vocabulary. He lived alone in a flat in Johannesburg, where my husband often visited him. And he simply doted on our children, six-year-old Nonhle and eight-year-old Mangaliso. He often brought them sweets, gifts, clothes and toys. Since he was a close family friend, we had no objection to his doing these things for the children. Our children, he often said, were also his children.

He was Fetsi's bestman at our wedding about a decade ago. That day! It was so very special to me. There we were, in front of the priest, our friends, and relatives in the church, exchanging wedding vows. My heart beat faster when Reverent Motha asked me if I took Fetsi Gumede to be my lawfully wedded husband. But it skipped a beat when, in response to the same question about me, Fetsi, in his baritone voice, said 'I do'. Oh, that was music to my ears. And how handsome he looked that day! He and Jabulani looked like brothers.

And then we took the wedding vow: '....to hold and to keep, in sickness and in health, in happiness and in sorrow, until death us do part'. As I took the vow, I cast a quick glance at my former boyfriend Zakes at the end of the church hall. He had been pestering me right up to the eve of the wedding, asking me to reconsider my decision. I quickly looked away from him when he winked at me.

*In happiness and in sorrow* — that is the part of the vow I liked most. It was to prove very helpful in years to come. Whenever Fetsi and I fought, and at times even came close to separating, I would think of those words and be recharged anew. Then the two of us would work hard to make our marriage work. We were going to stick together in happiness and in sorrow — until death parted us indeed.

And I was a good wife, too. Throughout all those years of our marriage, my world revolved around Fetsi and my children. I lived for their happiness. I always made sure that whenever Fetsi returned home from work he found warm food waiting for him — and we did not have a microwave-oven until two years ago.

I must say some of my friends and my family were not entirely happy about my decision to marry Fetsi. You see, I was more educated than he was, and my salary was higher than his. My friends warned ominously that the

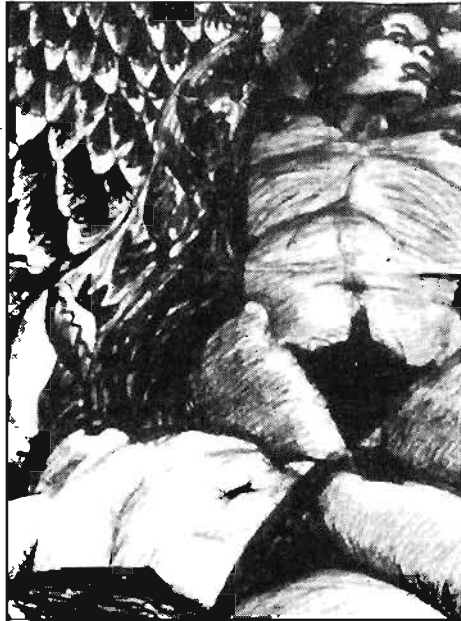
African man who would live with that situation was not yet born. But I loved him deeply, and would therefore not let such trifles worry me. Admittedly, I was a high school teacher and he was a Putco bus driver. I had registered for, and obtained, a Bachelor of Arts degree through correspondence with the University of South Africa after I had finished my Secondary Teacher's Diploma at the Soweto College of Education. He, on the other hand, had only matric.

But what did all that matter? The man was intelligent and very knowledgeable about many things, and his command of the English language was, I admit grudgingly, much better than mine. When he spoke, you would swear he was a graduate of one of our finest universities. Although he was a bus-driver, he read newspapers and books more voraciously than most graduates I knew of, and no one could tell him anything about politics.

I also made things easy for him: I did not let the fact that I was more educated than he was, and that I earned more money than he did, go to my head. We didn't even talk about it. We discussed how, and on what, we spent *our* money. And when we went out — which we did not often do — *he* paid and it didn't matter whose money he used.

Despite my education, I am an old-fashioned African woman. I accept unreservedly that a man must be the head of the family. Women's liberation, as I often tell my friends, is fine at the workplace but not at home. At work I am equal to any of my male colleagues, and would like to be treated as such. I believe firmly that women should have the same rights as men, and be paid the same salaries as men with the same education and experience. At home, however, I am a wife and a mother.

As I remember now, only once has my education been an issue in this marriage, and that was last year. It was on a Saturday evening and Fetsi, Jabulani and I were sitting



in the lounge. The children were already in bed. Fetsi and Jabulani were excitedly discussing a march which had been held by the Gays' and Lesbians' Organisation of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg during the day, and I was sewing. They went on and on about the march, and it soon became obvious to me that they had been part of it.

'Did you two participate in the march?' I asked, putting aside the shirt I was sewing. The two men looked at each other, but neither responded.

'Did you, Fetsi?' I asked again.

'Participate? Er...no, not really. I wouldn't say we participated,' he replied at last.

'What do you mean "not really"?' Did you or did you not participate in the march?' I asked again, slowly getting angry.

'Well, Felicia darling, we merely stood on the pavement and watched as the marchers passed by. We also shouted one or two slogans in solidarity with them. I don't know whether you would call that *participating* in the march?'

I was flabbergasted. *My* husband had participated in a march by homosexuals! What the hell was happening? Was he, perhaps, also homosexual? The thought sounded so crazy. But when I thought of the day I found him caressing Jabulani in the car the thought sounded less and less crazy. Although Fetsi later told me he was merely comforting Jabulani who had had a fight with his girlfriend, the incident never completely faded out of my mind. Often I found myself thinking about it and asking myself questions, especially since Fetsi stopped making love to me. Could it be...? I couldn't bear to think of it.

I must confess to you, dear reader, that nothing in our marriage hurt me more than Fetsi's refusal to make love to me. It blasted my pride as a woman into smithereens. Could it be that he no longer found me desirable, I asked myself. Was he, perhaps, seeing somebody else? I tried all the tricks I knew of: I would send the children to bed

early, dress provocatively, spruce myself up and even try to seduce him — all to no avail. He showed absolutely no interest in me as a woman. On those rare occasions when he did respond, he would merely thrust half-heartedly once, twice or thrice before turning over to sleep. For months and months this went on.

My heart would bleed as he snored next to me. I would think of my principal at school and wonder whether I had been wrong not to sleep with him. The man had been hankering after me for a long time now, and often told me he would recommend my appointment as Head of Department if I went out with him. Only a few days earlier I had even allowed him to fondle and kiss me in his office. He had already undressed me and was about to take me when I stopped him. Should I have allowed him to make love to me, I wondered as I lay next to my snoring husband, feeling rejected.

In the mornings I would spend hours in front of the wardrobe mirror, looking at myself. Was I, perhaps, less attractive now? Had the birth of Mangaliso and Nonhle those many years ago left me disfigured and undesirable? Were there any wrinkles on my face and my stomach? These and other questions raced through my mind as I looked at myself in the mirror, wondering what to wear.

There I go complaining again. I was still telling you about my fight with Fetsi and his friend last year. He had just told me he had participated in a homosexuals' march. What, I wondered, would my friends and colleagues say if they knew my husband had marched with homosexuals? What if they saw him with homosexuals in a picture in a newspaper or on television? The more I thought about it the angrier I became.

'You shouted one or two slogans, you say?' I asked.

'Yes, Felicia. In solidarity with the....'

'To hell with solidarity, you hear me, Fetsi? To hell with solidarity.'

'Felicia darling, listen,' Fetsi said calmly and coolly, 'you may not agree with homosexuals and their sexual orientations, but they, too, have rights, you know.'

'Such as confusing our children, changing things from the way God wanted them to be, and getting you to shout their slogans in....'

'Such as getting married, adopting children and not being regarded as less than human just because they are

different, Felicia. A person with your education should know that.'

'Leave my education out of this, you hear me, Fetsi? Leave my education out of this.'

'The point I was trying to make is that one expects educated people to be more sensitive to others' rights. These people want to make sure that their rights are protected and respected in the new South Africa,' he said.

'And you? How do you get mixed up with them?' I asked, looking him in the eyes.

'My dear Felicia,' he said calmly again, 'you don't understand. The phrase "none is free until we are all free" is more than just a slogan. It is a truism. For as long as we discriminate against those who are different from us, and allow their rights to be violated and arrogantly trampled upon, then we have no cause to complain when whites discriminate against us because we are black, or when women are discriminated against for no reason other than that they are women. Don't you understand?'

'But what they are doing is not normal, Fetsi. They want men to sleep with other men, and women with other women. That is indefensible. It is unchristian. How can you sit here with a straight face and say what you have just said unblushingly? Unlike blacks and women, these people are just a minority which is an aberration to society. They are...*expatant*,' I said, thinking of the French word I had recently chanced upon in a book I had been reading.

'It is not a question of numbers, my dear,' Fetsi said, as cool as a cucumber. 'It is not a question of who are in the majority and who are in the minority. Groups, no matter how small — and, indeed, individuals as well — should be free to do as they please and live their lives the way they want, as long as they don't interfere with others' rights. That, in essence, is what democracy is about. An educated person like you should understand that....'

'I said leave my education out of this discussion, please. I never stopped you from going to school. Don't keep reminding me of my education, and wanting to make me feel guilty for it.'

I was angry then, and I spat these words with all the venom I could muster. Fetsi, pained by what I had said,

bit his lower lip but said nothing. As was the case whenever he was angry, his eyes became small and he winked involuntarily repeatedly. I became ashamed of myself and regretted what I had said. I had not meant to hurt him.

We looked at each other, but neither of us said anything. Pain was written all over our respective faces. Embarrassed, I looked away, and my eyes fell on Jabulani. He was sitting on the edge of the sofa on my right-hand side. He had been quiet throughout our quarrel, and I had even forgotten he was there.

'Er, I think I will go now,' he said, standing up.

Fetsi and I remained sitting. Jabulani, who looked both angry and hurt, walked between us towards the door leading to the kitchen. Once there, he turned to look at us, before leaving without saying anything. From that day onwards, he was to be very scarce indeed at our home. When he did come he did not stay long. However, he remained friendly to us all — myself and the children included. It was now Fetsi who often visited him, and I did not ask him any questions.

Until, of course, I found his note that Saturday morning.

After what seemed to be ages, I picked that piece of paper from the pillow and read it again. Yes, I had read it correctly. Nothing had changed, alright. The same message which had splintered my world into a million pieces earlier on was still there. Suddenly I felt giddy, and sat at the foot of the bed, looking at the sideboard mirror in front of me.

I sat there, sobbing uncontrollably. All I could think of was that my husband had walked out on me — and for another man! What would my friends and colleagues say when they came to hear of this? Indeed, what would the world say? How was I going to tell the children?

Slowly I raised my head and looked at myself in the mirror. My face was swollen and covered with tears. And for the first time I saw wrinkles on my face. Were they real or imaginary? I could not tell. My nose seemed to be much bigger and out of proportion with my other facial features. I looked much older than I really was. Was I ugly? I did not know any longer. How would I know? Apart from the principal at school and the many verminous men who pestered me on the streets, nobody told me

I was beautiful. My husband stopped telling me that a few years ago.

'Mommy, what is it?'

It was Mangaliso's voice behind me. He had probably heard me sobbing. I turned and looked at him. He was with his little sister, Nonhle.

'Nothing, children. Go back to bed; it is cold,' I said, trying to control myself. The children came closer. They would not go away. I pointed at the note on the bed. As Mangaliso read it, I broke down and cried uncontrollably.

'Where has Daddy gone to, Mommy?' Mangaliso asked.

'I...I...cannot tell you, children. P-please leave me alone and go to sleep,' I said between sobbing.

'What is it, Mangaliso? What is written on that paper?' asked Nonhle.

'Daddy says he is leaving Mommy and us because he loves Jabulani,' Mangaliso replied.

'But doesn't he also love us like he loves his friend Jabulani, Mommy?' Nonhle asked me.

'When is he coming back, Mommy?' Mangaliso asked immediately after Nonhle.

I was confused, and I did not know what to say. I pulled the children closer and took them into my arms. Together we all cried. How was I going to tell them their father was...er...gay, and that after all these years he was leaving us so that he could freely love another man?

I squeezed them closer to me, and whispered: 'H-he is gone — for ever — children. He won't — come — back — again. He does not love us any longer. It is only Jabulani he loves.'

And tears flowed from my eyes. S



## Walter Kefuoe Chakela

### Two Poems

#### Troubadour



Did  
They ask why  
You traverse the streets  
Oh! troubadour  
Did  
They even look at your face  
Or ask your name

How  
Did you respond  
To the blankness  
Of their eyes  
Troubadour  
Their language  
Of guns  
Knuckles  
And boots

Or  
Did you still  
Stubbornly hope  
The poetics of humanity  
Will permeate  
The desert  
Of their inhumanity  
Wrought by years  
Of a cruel white winter

Troubadour  
They  
Might have emptied  
Your pockets  
But  
At least  
They left  
The poetry  
In you

#### Can We Have a Witness

Was there  
Any sign in the air  
Which presaged  
The fateful night  
Was there  
Any warning  
In the glow of the sun  
Or  
The face of the moon  
Which prepared them  
For the gruesome slaughter  
Could  
This cup have passed them  
Had they been more vigilant  
Did any dark cloud  
Float over the camp  
Signifying an impending evil?

There was no sign in the air  
Or on the face of the moon  
Nothing to make the night  
Different from the one before

The sun  
Made its golden entrance in the East  
Beamed ploddingly across the sky  
Into the starry embrace of the West  
The North and the South  
Watched with cardinal indifference  
There was  
Nothing in the morning

Poetry

Nothing in the day  
Nothing in the evening  
To make the residents  
Fight the allure of sleep  
the blanket of poverty

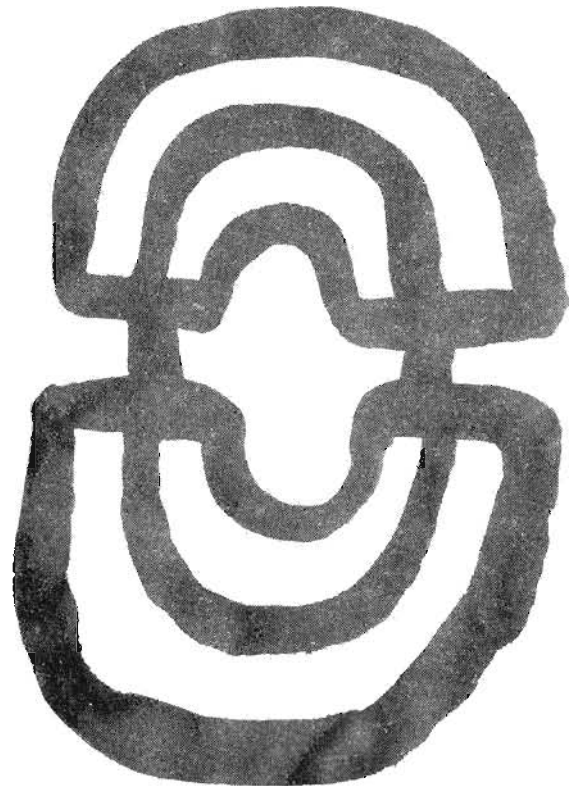
When  
The creatures of the night  
Descended on the slumbering squatters  
Propelled in their mindless rage  
By the bile in their hearts  
Brandishing their tools of death  
Like prized trophies  
Did the moon Witness  
Their furtive approach?

Maybe  
A jittery meteor  
High in the heavens  
Spotted the ominous band  
Did it shoot earth-wards  
And land with a bang  
On a shack  
To alert  
The men  
Women  
And children  
Or was the crashing noise  
That pierced the night  
That of a cracking skull  
Did the moon  
And the stars  
Grimace  
When an assegai  
Made another trip  
Through the guts  
Of a woman  
And the heart  
Of her unborn child?

The air  
Is thick with death  
In the camp

The busted doors  
And the wasted lives  
Creep with paralysis  
On the mind  
The camp dwellers  
Gnashing their teeth  
In grief and rage  
The guilty are cloistered  
Behind polished doors  
Relishing the carnage  
Wrought by the predators

There was no sign in the air  
Or in the glow of the sun  
Maybe  
The commission should talk  
To the moon and the stars



## *Ike Mboneni Wangu Muila*

### *Three Poems*



### **In Memory of N.P. Muila**

Rangani u thetshelisa mafuka divha  
 Vha muvhuya phedza dza nga  
 Tshikwatamba tsha luranga  
 ponze i fa yo nambatela mulivho  
 la tavha ni li ore  
 Muoki wa lo  
 ni si luvhe nga mufyhetano

Musi wa lo phalalani  
 tsengela tsiwana  
 fhasi dzi thavhani  
 vhu ima mbidi na khongoni  
 Muila matavhelo  
 buka li sa ori divha  
 Muthannga musekene  
 Mutamba na vhokunaho

Muthannga a sa li vhutete  
 nga u shavha  
 u ttemela  
 Wa thumbu  
 i no pangwa  
 mutavha yaxa  
 Muila thende ya lufheto  
 a sa li phinimini  
 Muila tshivhindi tsha nguluvhe

16/01/1992

### **Mavhele a Vhathu**

For no reason  
 Nga mutshekwa  
 to uncle Shangoni boy

For no reason  
 Nga Mutshekwa  
 to my grandmother girl

For no reason  
 Nga Mutshekwa  
 to my mother girl

For no reason  
 Mavhele a vhathu

For no reason  
 o liwa nga mini

For no reason  
 o liwa nga pfene

for no reason  
 pfene ndi nnyi

For no reason  
 pfene ndi nne

Melting pot of love  
 bring to light people who hurt others  
 For their next meal and pleasures  
 Muri u vhavhaho u bva tsindeni

Father, now that you are home  
 the question of who deserves the crust  
 or the crumbs of bread  
 leaves much to be desired

Poetry

## Bloomer

Bloomer Madala  
Ek is ou Texan Terries  
Binne in die toene  
Change deurdane op en af

Bloomer Madala  
Jy is 'n ou nguluvhe spy tamtasie  
Ek ken jou haba weight Madala  
Haba stalavisto niks ou medulla oblongata  
Bloomer MADALA

Bloomer Madala  
Ek spin in die toene eke  
Jy sal never nie skaf kry nie  
Check calaza hierso by my kant  
Ek vang hulfe is net dresh

Die een is 'n ou madryseni  
Die ander een is 'n ou malala  
Die laaste een is 'n ou mavuka

Jy moet onthou  
Skaf is 'n process  
Whereby cigarettes passes  
From the owner to the parasite  
Bloomer Madala



Valley Maponya

## My Mother's Heart

From the time of my being not yet hatched,  
My mother's heart has been  
My charitable friend.  
In my mother's womb it sang  
A lulling companionable humming song  
A necessity in view of the expulsion of my boredom.  
This formed the basement of the inseparability between  
Myself and my mother.  
This formed the basement of my being soothed by sounds  
When I was still rocked to sleep in a cradle.

I grew up like a hibiscus flower in the garden  
So lovely as a jade jewel.  
I still can remember  
How I could enjoy  
Comforting songs of the grown-ups  
Comforting songs of the butterflies in summer  
Comforting songs of frogs also in summer  
When pupae danced for the summer  
So I did  
When the toading tadpole wadged its tail feebly like  
A bullterrier  
I lifted up my right foot  
Soon I could start tumbling and dancing in reaction  
Meanwhile my mother acted as an activator  
She could commence clapping hands and chanting  
The song I never heard all along.





## Silence and the Beggar

Arja Salafranca

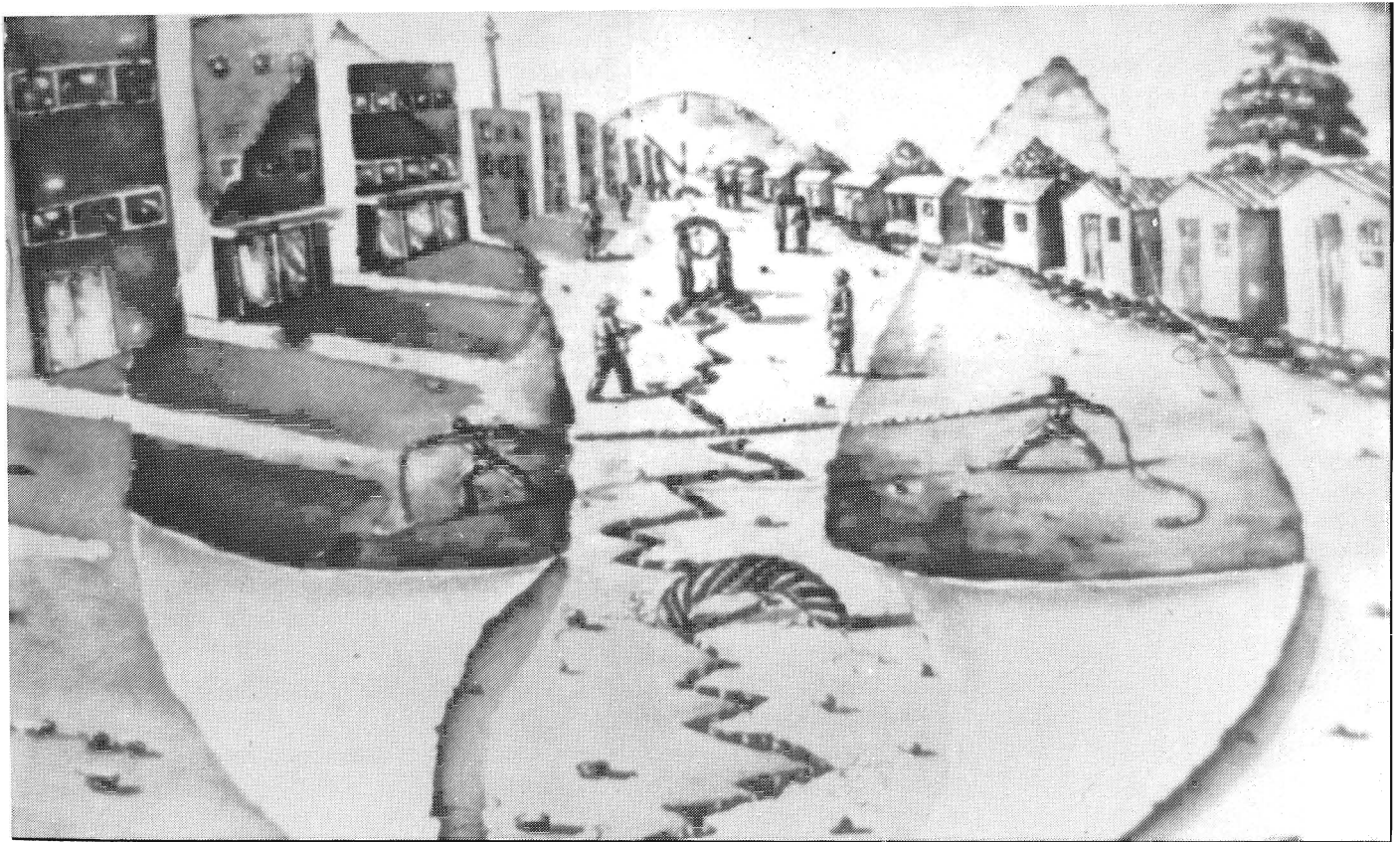
What's chilling, and frightening,  
 is the way he chooses to do it.  
 It's a polystyrene fragment, moulded to cup money  
 thrust into your face.  
 A few dirty copper cents —  
 he can't do much with them.  
 You fight it, you resist raising your eyes,  
 but he shakes it for so long,  
 you're forced to look up,  
 confront his resentful eyes.  
 The polystyrene jiggles again,  
 forced to shake your head,  
 to affirm that No, you're not going to give him anything.  
 And down the bench he goes,  
 forcing every head to rock from side to side —  
 No one says a word.

He does not ask out loud.  
 His begging consists of silence;  
 it rattles those at the busstop.  
 And when he leaves,  
 drunkenly bumping into you,  
 he leaves behind a silence,  
 a shifting guilty silence,  
 that echoes from the closed mouths.  
 And it says, I'm not a bad person,  
 but enough is enough.  
 He should be taken somewhere,  
 a shelter perhaps...?  
 And no one moves.

Then he turns again,  
 the muddied eyes throw a glance  
 that doesn't drive up and down your body,  
 but stays rooted to your own eyes,  
 Trying to pull out your sympathy,  
 he extracts your revulsion.  
 The diseased eyes are against him,  
 the lost arm, the visible stump,  
 the blackened teeth, the odour of despair.  
 You recoil.  
 Knowingly, he leans closer.

He leers away, checking his meagre fortune,  
 you turn around,  
 Breaking the silence:  
 'He should get a job,' — You both agree.  
 But starting after the tired clothes  
 and used-up body,  
 the package of decay and wreckage,  
 the time for his employment is long gone,  
 And so, the silence comes again.  
 That famous declaration.

Opposite page:  
*Lungile Phambo*  
 • It's About Time •  
 Watercolour on paper



# The Politics of Publishing in South Africa and What it Means for Writers

**Orlando Kuro**

Through writing, the writer transforms a personal thought or set of ideas into a form which can be shared and communicated. For that reason, many writers focus their hopes on having their work published. Publication offers the prospect of communicating to an audience far wider than the circle of friends or family who might be interested in reading the writer's unpublished work.

In many writers' organ-

isations, including those in South Africa, young writers feel tremendous frustration when work they submit is rejected by publishers. Writers feel that simply writing is somehow not enough for them — that writing is an unfinished process that must be completed by publication.

Considering how important writers consider publishing to be, it is useful for them to be aware of some of the issues publishers face. Writers can challenge publishers to change poor practices, but they can also help to support and strengthen the publishing industry.

In this paper, I will try to address the politics of publishing. What power do publishers have? What are the limits to their power? Through providing a few brief answers to these questions, I hope to share some ideas which may help writers to better understand and change their situation.

In looking at the limits to publishers' power, I will address some of the difficulties which publishers face. In so doing, I may appear to be rather too sympathetic to publishers who, after all, are in a considerably better position than most in South Africa, and who have often played a very destructive role through upholding a fundamentally unjust social system. This paper is not meant to let publishers off the hook — but a separate paper is needed to address their responsibilities and roles in the context in which they work.

### What is Publishing?

To publish means to make public. Publishers take information, ideas or images and make them available to the public. They put the information in a form which can be distributed — a newspaper, pamphlet, magazine, book — and then sell it. If a publisher prints 10 000 copies of a novel and leaves them locked in a warehouse, that is not publishing. It is only when the novel is distributed that it can be said to be published.

Publishers choose whether or not to make a work available to the public. This is where publishers' power lies. They can determine what information or ideas become avail-

able to society. Of course, other agencies also affect what is published — governments and censorship boards, for example. But the publishing industry does have significant power over the spread of information, knowledge, opinions and ideas.

To understand this power, it's useful to imagine what would happen if publishers stopped publishing. Imagine, for example, if every publisher in the world refused to publish newspapers. How would people know what is happening around them, or in other parts of the world?

Or imagine if every publisher in the world refused to publish the *Bible*. What would the consequences be for Christianity? Imagine no novels, no dictionaries, no books of traffic regulations, no textbooks...

Publishers are political actors. They choose which ideas to spread, which information to expose, what to hide. They can choose whether to publish progressive ideas or right-wing reactionary beliefs. And since most publishing houses in South Africa are owned and staffed by white, middle class, educated people, publishing houses tend to reflect the interests of that grouping. By making choices, publishers affect what people know and what opinions they hold.

For many writers, the publishing industry has historically been almost closed. With some important exceptions, the industry has simply not published black and working class writers. And writers are rightfully insisting that this has to change,

and that the writers whose work has been absent from anthologies, journals and bookshop shelves have a right to be heard at last.

Unfortunately for both writers and publishers, though, publishers are not entirely free to publish what they like. For despite the enormous power they wield, in other ways publishers' power is also very limited by the context in which they operate.

### The Context of South African Publishing

Publishing is a business. Publishers make a product, sell it and make either a profit or a loss. In South Africa, the business of publishing is weighted down by social and economic difficulties which are the legacy of years of unjust, racist rule.

## or many writers, the publishing industry

Here we look at some of the features of our society which undermine the viability of a strong, indigenous and representative publishing industry.

### Publishers Need Readers

The publishing industry sells its products to people who can use them — that is, people who can read. In South Africa, some nine million adults cannot read or write. Research suggests that at least forty percent of black children never start school, and a quarter of those who enter Grade One never read Grade Two.

These millions of illiterate children will swell the future figures of adult illiteracy, and are being added to by more and more out-of-school children.

The illiteracy rate is clearly a major problem for publishers as it limits their potential markets. It is significant that the giant Argus newspaper company is so concerned about who will read (and so buy) its newspapers in the future, that it is investigating running a major educational programme in its various papers to ensure that ten years from now, enough people will still be buying newspapers.

### The Language Question

Those people who are literate are literate in different languages. Thus the potential market for a book is not just the literate population, but the

## has historically been closed

population literate in a particular language. South Africans speak several languages, and different languages dominate different regions of the country.

For various well-known reasons English is politically and economically dominant, despite the fact that it is only the fourth most widely spoken language in the country. Publishers have to face the political challenge of publishing in African languages. Until now, African language book publishing has been almost exclusively confined to textbooks. Extending African language pub-

lishing is part of social reconstruction, of building a genuinely equitable and non-racial society. Yet the financial truth, according to publishers both progressive and conservative, is that if a publisher publishes the same book (translated) in English and in an African language, the English version sells more copies — including to people whose first language is that African language and for whom English is a second or third language.

Most publishers can't afford to publish books that will sell in low numbers to small markets. The fewer copies of a book one prints, the more expensive each copy is, so that if one prints for a very small readership the readers will have to pay much higher costs for the same size book than they would have to pay if the publisher could print more.

This affects the publisher's ability to publish in some of the less widely spoken languages of this country.

A further difficulty is that because English and Afrikaans were selected as the 'official' languages of this African country, and because of the general neglect or undermining of African culture, African languages have been underdeveloped in South Africa. There is little writing, reading or publishing in African languages, and government education policies governing language acquisition and use in schools have

made it exceptionally difficult for African-language learners to achieve written proficiency in either the 'official' languages or their home languages.

These different aspects of the language question add to the difficulties of developing a broad-based readership for whom publishers could publish.

### Publishing For Poor People

Publishers need people to buy the books they publish.

The majority of South Africa's people live in extreme poverty. Millions are unemployed, and most who do work are badly paid and have to share their money with other dependents. Books are not high on the shopping list of most South Africans. When money is scarce, people will buy food, clothes and shelter long before they'll buy a book. And while fundamental political change may not, we hope, be too far away, it is likely to be a long time before economic conditions change substantially for the majority of people in this country.

### Library Provision

Libraries should be a market for publishers, and should provide access to books for poor and rich. In South Africa, however, the library system reflects the same racial injustice that underpins all the other factors cited here. The vast majority of the libraries are located in white areas and their stocks tend to cater for the interests, languages and con-



cerns of white readers.

What this means is that libraries don't provide much of a market for alternative publishers — including those who might wish to make the voice of new young writers heard. And since libraries tend not to cater for the majority of the population, having a book in a library does not guarantee that one reaches the audience one wants to reach.

### Monopolies and High Book Prices

The book publishing-related industries in South Africa are dominated by monopolies. Bookshop chains, the paper industry and even the printing and ink industries are in large part monopolised. The effect of this monopolisation is that publishers are forced to pay high prices for goods and services and to give huge discounts to retail outlets. In the end, readers pay more because publish-

ers can't keep costs — and therefore prices — low.

Because poverty is so extreme, and because books are not necessities, high prices can be as damaging to the publisher as they are to the reader.

### What This Means For Local Publishers

If publishing is a business, it's not a very healthy one in South Africa today. Where people are poor and levels of literacy are low, where publishing-related industries are monopolised and the education system is in shambles, local publishers are bound to struggle.

Five minutes in a bookshop will show you that with the exception of textbooks, we are reading the books of overseas publishers most of the time.

### The Role of Writers

What can writers do about this situation? Is there a way writers can help support good, local publishing in South Africa? Can creative writers improve their own situation — can they help themselves to be published? The answer is yes.

This paper began by noting that writing is the first step towards communicating. But a published work is not necessarily the same as a work that is read. If writers want to communicate, if they want to be read, their goals have to extend way beyond seeing their names in print.

Writers have the responsibility and practical motivation to encour-

age reading in their communities. Persuading friends and family to read is one small step. But the real changes will come through programmes which operate on a mass scale and according to democratic principles.

The facts suggest that the crucial campaigns are those which:

- advance literacy
- build a culture of learning
- build a culture of reading
- extend library services to all
- provide free and compulsory education for all.

At the broadest level, writers should aim to give people the ability to read, access to books and the desire to read.

For these reasons, writers in this country have an important role as social activists.

Of course, this does not mean that writers should simply focus on community needs and ignore the publishers. The mainstream publishers in this country have tended to support, actively or passively, an apartheid society, and have much to answer for. Certainly, writers must continue to challenge the publishers and pressurise them to change their publishing practices.

But to achieve real, lasting change, we will have to deal with the problem at its roots. We will have to change the conditions under which books and other media get made, sold, distributed and read. **S**

*This paper is based on a discussion paper presented to the Congress of South African Writers.*

## Anne Marie Grindrod

### Two Poems



### For Nawal el Saadawi

I wish I could explain  
to you  
what it means  
to be a woman  
trying to find myself in  
literature  
writing out my heart  
expressing all that i am  
too hesitant to  
pour out to you.  
I can never stem the tide  
of words which  
I'd like to flow in your  
direction  
cooling between your toes  
bringing fragrant flowers upon the water  
to inspire you  
slaking your thirsts.  
I wish I could explain  
to you  
what it means  
to be a woman....

### My Goddesses Return

I've sought self expression  
words silenced,  
I asked my body to speak for me  
Then that too was silenced.  
its messages shouted down,  
its audiences turned away  
My body has always spoken to me  
And I have fought her, argued back.  
Now i've learnt to listen  
to me, and slowly the words are coming back:  
My Body is my Muse  
and, once mute,  
My Goddesses return.



### Ruminations of the Wretched

Sean O'Toole

Wafting wordlessly distant  
in an azure painted sky,  
a swallow is a speck  
of black rhythm  
wonderously imitating  
that distant word  
constructed.

Wandering unseen  
across this world's blue page,  
subtle as it is silent  
the swallow mimes  
a thought  
that is slain on a page  
by this bloody ink.

## Passover Seder

Jesus of Nazareth  
looked at his followers  
across the brimming kiddush-cup  
and made the blessing  
on the crimson wine.  
Then, raising up the Matzo,  
spoke  
in measured  
and in sing-song voice  
about affliction.

'We once were slaves'  
he said  
'in Egypt.'

Outside,  
the Roman soldiers  
tramped and swore.

'This night—  
Passover night—  
we are free men!'

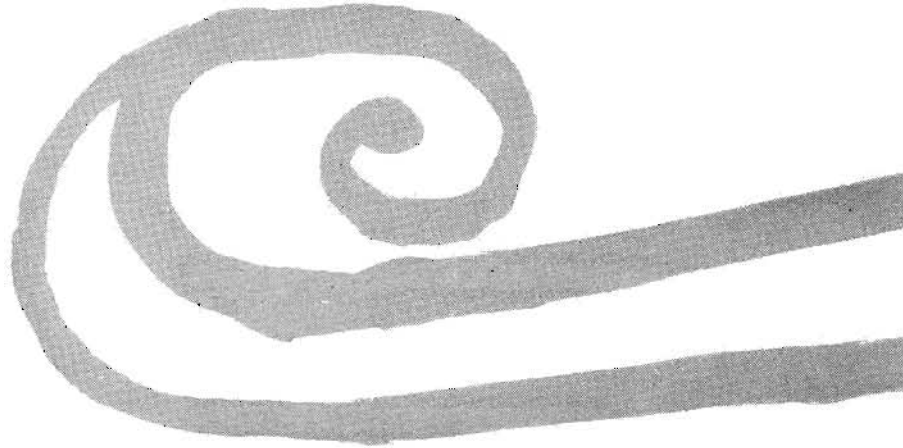
The passion  
in his eyes  
betrayed  
his serious intent—  
a vision  
of high freedom.

'Let all those  
who are hungry  
come and eat.'

Of all those men  
around the table,  
Judas alone  
toyed with his food.

## Sandra Braude

### Two Poems



## Tom

He teaches how to live,  
this one.

A brawny torso fills  
the narrow cot,  
bruise-blackened biceps  
rest against the sides,  
a blatant scar  
divides his massive chest.  
'they got me  
when I left my work',  
he smiles,  
'they grabbed the gun  
I carry in my belt.  
I tried to get it back  
and hardly felt the shot.'  
It tore inside  
and lodged  
against the spine.  
'If I had only got the swine!'

A nurse checks  
underneath the blanket  
where useless limbs are stretched,  
and cleans the flushing tube.  
'Watch for my girl',  
he warns and laughs,  
a mournful sound,  
then 'With a bit of rehab and a chair  
I should be fine.'  
One acid-blinded eye opaquely shines,  
the other shrewdly glints  
and hints of fight still there.

A battle scarred and bloody tom  
still hungers for the life to come.

**Brian Walter**

*Two Poems*



**Violence**

With their heads slashed off  
the aloes stood dumb, yet every flower  
still bleeding, each red  
tipped wound was a tongue

telling, from the angle of cut,  
the whip of a stick, the flick  
of wrist, the tight glee of  
destruction, a greed  
of selfhood, a pride of power.

The lopped aloes headlined  
a wanton veld violence

carving down beauty,  
slashing the seed.

**The Victoria Hall, Alice**

The choir was august.

the conductor's hands drawing  
out, muting bass and tenor  
in Xhosa song, English folk, the Blues.

The singers, in semi-circle, stood  
on dusty stage and low benches,  
dressed in black and formal white:

till five young choristers from Mdantsane bust  
rank, toyi-toyied  
to the centre, dancing out a song:

treading, treading,  
in tuxedoed shoes,

African dust.



## ✧ The Holy Land

*Matthew Krouse*

Look at me jewboy I'm understanding your case right now  
 I know you're tired from all those thousand  
 Wandering years. It's me your great aunt speaking from the grave  
 I know your sins best of all. I watch you in your sleep.  
 You didn't always wander through the northern suburbs  
 Your soul was once clean and capable  
 The old walking sticks were kind and poor  
 Their souls were cleaner than the city of Kuwait.  
 And I bathed in the harbours of zion  
 There were pearls I tell you. I paid for a pilgrimage  
 To my Mecca. I saw real bombers from home dressed in mud  
 These were other old ladies like the ones you know  
 Normal old goats on tour eating out of tin cans  
 Eating Israel paying huge South African sums  
 To the Holy Land. They planted trees donated millions.  
 Can you imagine the sad dream that's died.  
 They were old people who got out of the camps alright.  
 They still had those numbers tattooed to their wrists.  
 I think they know how the Arabs felt. Yet they were running  
 From the far hills to tell them in so many words  
 That camps are camps and refugees are refugees  
 Hunger is hunger and the soul is the soul.

Me, I can't fight anymore. I've given. I'm spent.  
 I am spent. Yet even so Saddam was good for us.  
 At last there was really an Arab devil. I know.  
 I gave my last clothes as he bombed us. It's a curse.  
 We invested in Israel and I'm backing my horse. I'm  
 Sharing my hopes on my Mount of Olives. And now  
 Now I want to drink from my god's hand.  
 I'll be there for the resurrection. That's why I've given  
 To that diet of rest and product. Here's to the afterlife.  
 I know. I'm only here for this one stint then it's kaput.  
 So I'm asking the Lord. Here I'm standing Lord  
 Alone in my puddle of light. I'm terrified. I'm sick.  
 I've lost my mother and I can't find my father.  
 I came to my people, a blade to my foreskin, a noose around my neck.  
 I ate christian crap in the name of the Son. Rasputin bled me like an ox  
 I saw the inquisition with a candle up my arse.  
 But I made good. Now I can't fight anymore.  
 I can't fight anymore. I spent my last penny on Saddam.  
 And so I'm late now. I'm late for the famine.  
 I must go now. I don't want to see my true feelings  
 As the real plastic palestinian babies begin to die.

*Karen Press*  
*Two Poems*

**Welcome**

soldiers and stockbrokers  
shake hands:  
there are no sides anymore

bananas are growing on the pear tree  
Pik's moustache extends and curls  
a satisfied cat flicks its tail  
in the cream

three black hairs float there

volcanic sunsets bleed over toasting lovers  
the ice-cream man collects used condoms  
the cars drive straight upward  
on the mountain sliding into the sea  
the speaking totem pole in the sky  
is called Nelson

bananas are growing on the pear tree  
a yellow bag full of pink notes  
sails down the cableway  
little hands open and close like venus flytraps  
black ones

there's snow everywhere  
the roads are melting  
welcome home, exiles and entertainers  
you get three shares in a pear tree  
a bullet and a banana  
to help you settle in: shake hands

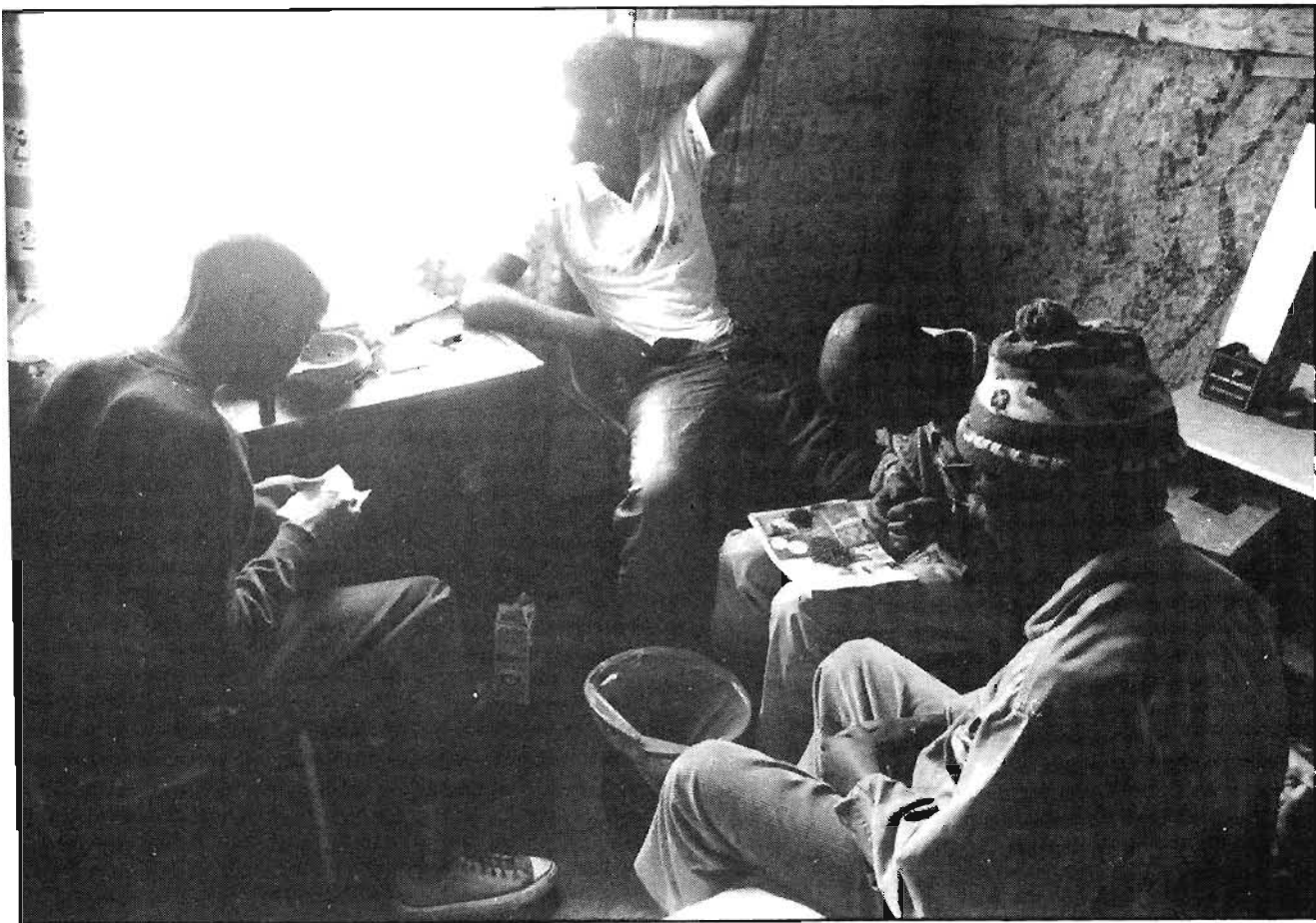
**Summertime**

The new South Africa's two years old  
and more's been lost than we've been told.  
No jobs, no rain, no foreign aid,  
no hopes, no dreams, no victory parade.  
But one commodity's still around:  
the summertime white boys turning brown.

In blaring cars with surfboard racks,  
with designer T-shirts on their backs,  
they come as they've done for twenty years  
untouched by doubt or political fears.  
They're perennial holiday season flowers,  
these summertime white boys turning brown.

Despite the drought and the ozone hole  
they find enough beer and suntan oil  
to keep them bearing B. Comm fruit  
and growing to fit the manager's suit  
in every business in every town,  
the summertime white boys turning brown.

There's still enough time for them to buy  
the meat they need for the last beach braai,  
and the unit trusts and Kruger rands  
and investment stakes in distant lands  
that they'll take with them on the autumn flight  
as the nation fills up with brown boys turning white.



• Preparations for CODESA non-stop •

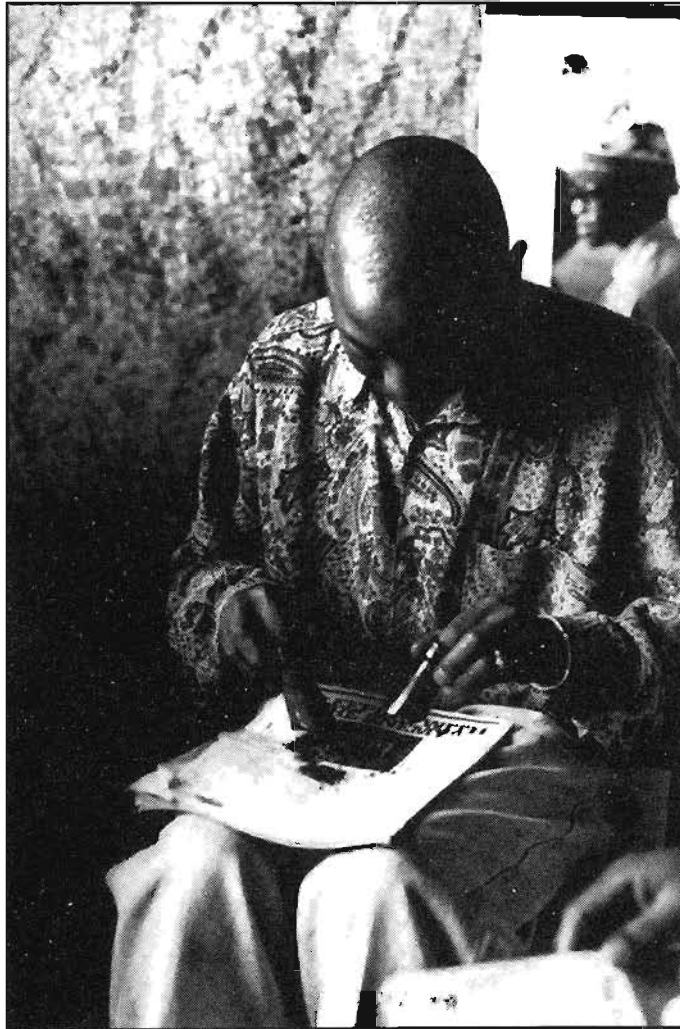
# SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY

Photographs by Victor Matom

Text by  
Jacqueline  
Masiza

Under our noses, 'n kgontje in London, the jolly good times can be sucked from a bottelkop. Up in a puff goes the worries, depressions and oppressions. Laities come in touch with the weed when in custody, or on the run, even at school. The only scamto when these Codesa members get together is Tula. Die tjaroes are in even number and the series of pictures depict what is called a Codesa non-stop.

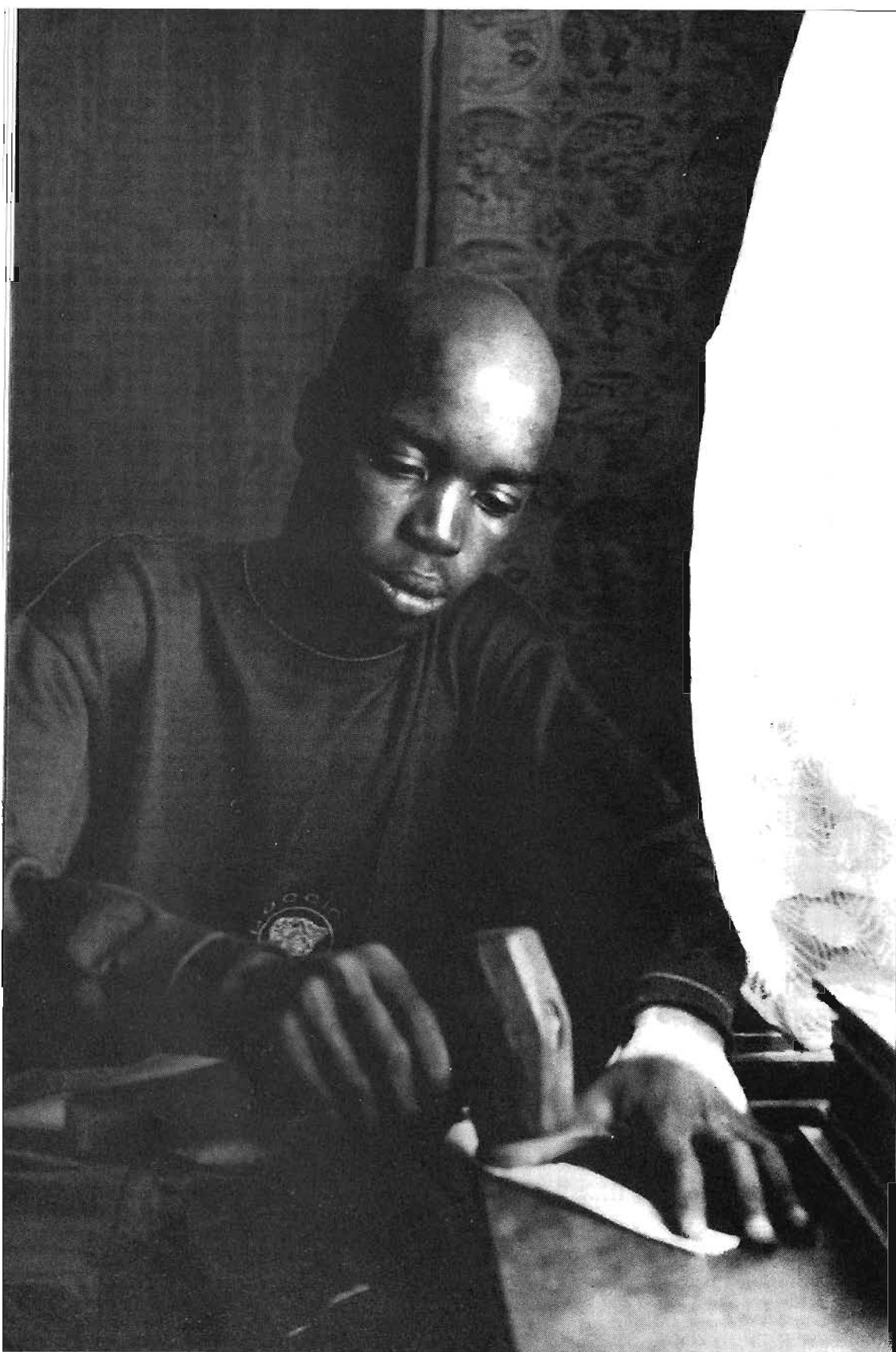
These guys are proud of themselves. Their minds are made up and they can't be stopped. Like the real Codesa, every tool has been prepared and set: a hammer, to tula or crush, spoegbucket, tarras with vika, bottelkop and mageu to dampen their



dry throats after smoking. Their waist belts are loosened so that they are comfortable when pulling and skyfing. The bottelkop is circulated and every member is given the opportunity to show his skills in pulling as the bottelkop is circulated.

Tula comes in all sorts of makes: there is German, Golf, Lizard, No-name Capsule and so forth. They cost between ten and twenty rand. Most of the tjaroes are unemployed, some are scholars who are given money for school but for whom tula comes first. Some even sell their clothes for one tula. When their funds have dried up they rob people in

the neighbourhood. They get caught and end up in prison which sets them on a spiral of ever increasing crimes. S

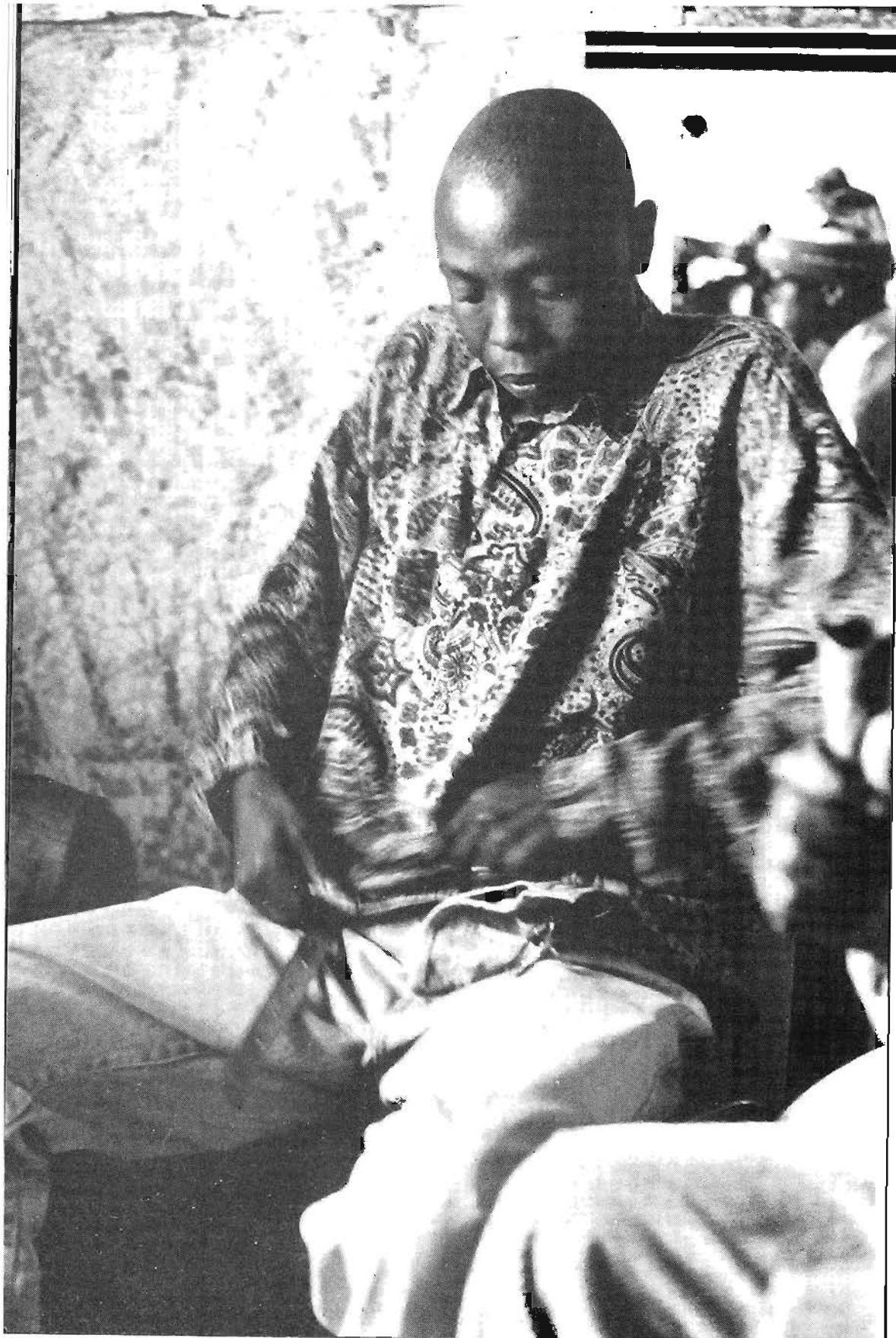


• The judge  
sentenced the  
pill 'tula' to be  
crushed •

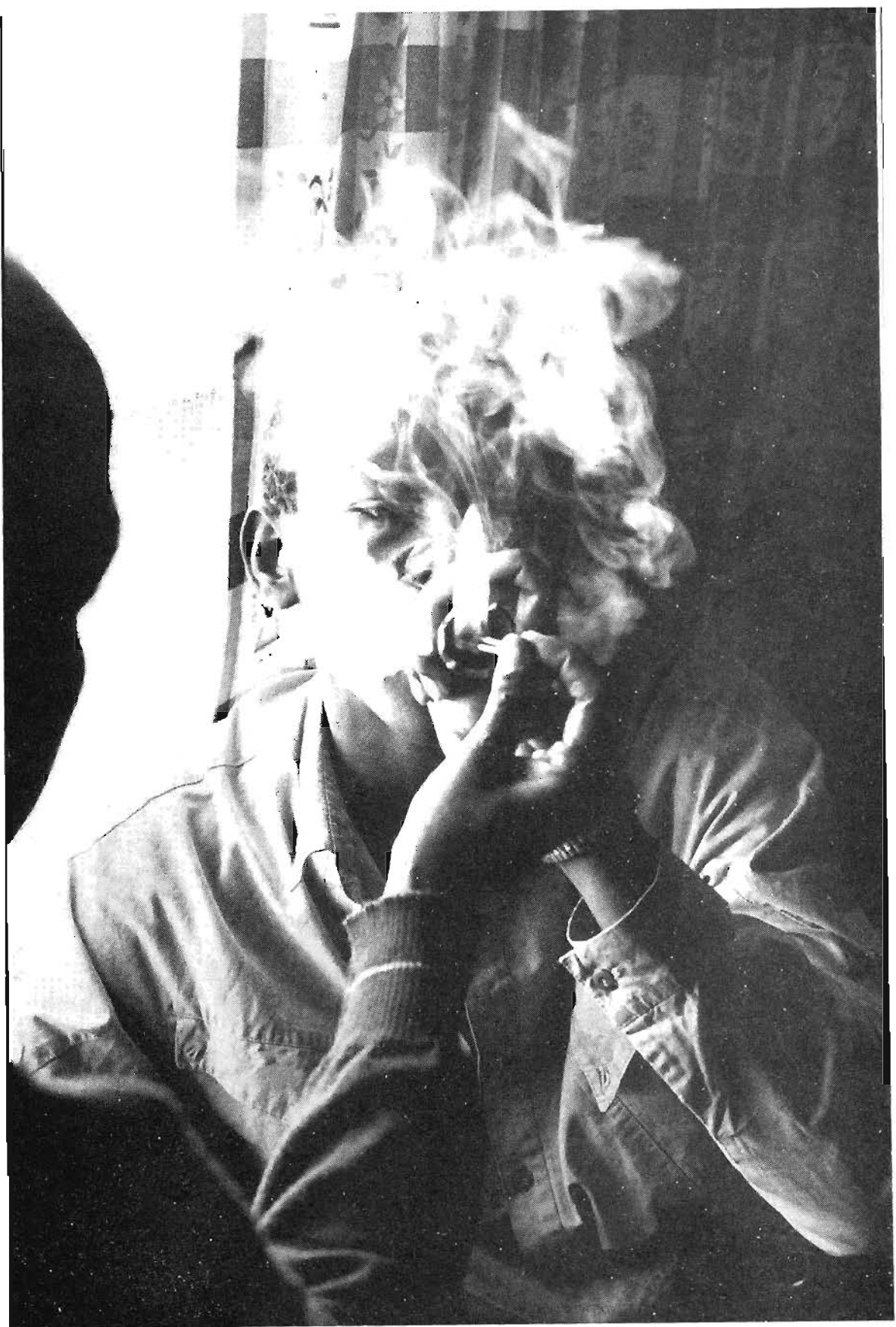


• Amongst the  
tjaroos sharing  
is common •





• Undoing the  
safety belt •



• Two sticks to  
destroy •



## Allan Kolski Horwitz

### Two Poems



### Swan of Lisbon

To the blue swan once black  
as the depth of diamond/coal

another song of Africa  
where the howling wind  
cannot yet douse the drum  
and the tambourine; the lips  
of African women remain  
full of love, full of pleasure

And you swan with neck bent  
and wings clipped —  
have you lost your gliding magic?

SAY NO SAY NO SAY NO say

the blues are just a cloud  
floating momentarily  
for nothing is ever  
over is ever complete  
is ever total is ever  
recognisable from the outside,  
O swan

so swim from your White City  
cross the oceans to Brazil and Angola  
(you swan with your wings and your oared feet  
splaying, splashing and driving forward)

and greet my songster  
battered and desolate but still  
seeking the rare air, the sweetest  
are sweetest; (I sing still though  
a furnace burns my days to ash

and ice puts my lips to chattering  
and the hollow arm of friendship  
corrupts even as I gush my soul)

Come swan, whom I met gracing a cathedral  
in the cool of day under a vaulted arch  
while divine music played and the light  
was of timelessness

(later at dusk gliding in a black canal  
past a fort ribboning a hill  
I left my white canary  
to sing for you while I was gone  
to Africa)

now

I will sing another song of Africa  
to you who would leave as each revolution  
hoists its flag over a burning, seething city

to you who would leave as the busyness  
of living and building gets underway  
(as the business of buying and selling  
begins)

to you who sang to me of armour  
arrayed for Holy Battle

in your White City  
you sang to me and as you did  
we stood lips momentarily  
lips brushing  
(I could feel the warmth  
of a fire I would never fully feel;  
I would never hold you  
in the depth of night as one

Poetry

never face the free beating of your wings  
again)

so from Africa  
I send my other birds  
over the desert and the ocean  
to enfold you

for I am still lit  
by your kiss; your glittering grail

## Empty Bellies Tremble

Bellies tremble and  
with hungering fingers

take out knives (such hope  
-lessness); waiting for night,  
for cloud, for quiet and sleeping sentries —  
we wait to fill ourselves  
a little.

May the night of sleeping dogs  
ignore our pad.

This night which covers sentries  
whose cocked revolvers wake to jam us  
at the windows — thin frames too thick  
for larceny.

We walk

filling shack-towns, new planets,  
with our loot, our staples, our dream-machines;  
we, shack-dwellers of the end-zones,

we take the last bus to  
zones of plenty; of green;  
of sharp-fanged dogs.

Warmer than tin shacks.



Passing trees and flower-beds;  
deep-freezers stocked with meat  
and vegetables; passing the walls  
of these mansions of those wise  
and worthy who still howl though  
enclosed with healthy children —

passing all these things,

we, who have  
next to nothing,

except(ing)

the throttled air  
of hungering,

we take out our knives (such hope  
-lessness).



## ✧ Mmbwa Dza Muvhuso

*Naledzani Bernard Rasila*

Mmbwa dza muvhuso  
 Ndi mmbwa dza muvhuso  
 Ndi mmbwa dza matula  
 Ndi matula nama ndi matula khombo  
 Matarelwa, mmbwa dza tshituhu

A vha humbuli vha tou humbulelwa  
 Vha shuma nga ndaela, naho dzi tshi knonda  
 A vha lali, a vha edeli  
 Vha tshi linda muthu  
 Na luphumo lwawe

Sedzani matsimbi e vha hwala  
 Ni sedze mikumbu ye vha beba  
 Vho tsireledza dziho  
 Ngeno vha tshiya ulwa na vhahali,  
 Vhahali vha si na zwithavhane

Dzi huvha nwedzi, nge dza vhenga tshedza  
 Dzi luma matombo, nge dza runwa u luma  
 Dzi pandamedza muya, nge ngoho dza shaya  
 Dzi shuma nga ndaela, naho dzi tshi konda  
 Ndi mmbwa dza muvhuso, ndi mmbwas dza matula

Vha ya he vha si rambiwe  
 U khakhisa mulalo na u tshinya vhudziki  
 A vha humbeli, vha sokou amba  
 Tshavho ndi u kombetshedza  
 Uri vha kondou rwa vha vhulahe  
 Vhunga maanda vho newa vho ingwa  
 Huno zwi khou fhela zwi khou dzama

## ✧ Awaiting Birth

*Ethelwyn Rebelo*

It seems each mental asylum morning  
 he stirs  
 to a crypt.  
 Then, highly-dosed saliva dripping,  
 limping rhythmically,  
 stooping,  
 he treads the blind hospital paths towards,  
 but never reaching,  
 the erect, red-pointed aloes  
 and fleshy flowers  
 of the surrounding, open veld.  
 'I need money to get married,' he smiles.  
 'Would you like to buy some fudge, sister?'  
 'Morning, doctor,  
 shall I wash your car today?'  
 He returns later to the tomb where  
 other bodies dream of dead days.  
 Foetus-like, awaiting birth,  
 he curls on a sofa to wait for the new,  
 red-haired,  
 fleshy-mouthed,  
 open-faced assistant nurse.

Opposite page:  
*Barney Nkosi • Untitled •*  
 Oil on board

# Sandra Braude



# THE SCHOOL LIBRARY IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA

## Introduction

South Africa is currently undergoing significant and inexorable change. It is widely recognised that some of the strains and tensions presently being experienced are related to the country's educational system. Effective social change in South Africa must of necessity involve ef-

fective educational change.

The strength of any society depends on the quality of the individuals living in that society and this is, to a large extent, inherent in their education. Effective education in turn depends on access to books.

The Beswicks point out the importance of the contemporary school library in the educational process:

'Much education in the past has concentrated on the memorising of factual knowledge; education today and tomorrow can, and must, concentrate on developing the ability to think for oneself, critically assess the mass of information, communication

and persuasion which surrounds us constantly, and the skills of enquiry and research. The school library, as a media centre, will be a crucial element in such work. We can, at last, concentrate on education rather than instruction. In this way, our pupils will be better prepared for a lifetime in a world of uncertainty, unpredictability and headlong change.<sup>1</sup>

In the 19th century Matthew Arnold commented that 'a power of reading, well trained and well guided, is perhaps the best among the gifts which it is the business of our elementary schools to bestow'.<sup>2</sup>

Arnold's sentiments remain pertinent to this day. The major function of the primary (or elementary school) is to enlighten children, and what better way than to expose them to the written word — to a 'power of reading'? Books are crucial to the educational development of children, and it is desirable that they should have contact with books in their daily lives — in the home, in the classroom and in the library, whether school or public. It is in the library particularly that children can move beyond the confines of both classroom teaching and their own experiences; it is in the library that they can discover worlds of fantasy and acquaint themselves with facts about the environment. And this does not stop with the elementary school: the secondary school serves as an extension of this process.

Development of the individual is

a major educational aim in all societies. It should not be forgotten however that individuals are inevitably a part of the community, from which neither they nor their education can be divorced. Rupert acknowledges this fact when he says:

'The organised education of the youth of a community is part and parcel of the culture of the community....

When one talks of education, therefore, one is also inevitably talking of community culture and cultural communities.'<sup>3</sup>

By the 1930s the importance of the school library in the education of the child had begun to be clearly recognised. In America, the Education Policies Commission, with its goals of self-realisation, human relationships, economic efficiency and civic responsibility, described the value of the school library:

'(Education) ... encompasses the whole life of the child and implies continuity of development towards democratic citizenship. It demands the fusion of all school activities into a complete pattern of social and learning experiences, wherein the library as one integral part shares these objectives and assumes responsibility for their achievement on an equal basis with the rest of the school.'<sup>4</sup>

The book has been the predominant

medium through which knowledge has been passed down. The 20th century has seen both a massive information explosion and development in technology. Although the book has not been superseded by the new media it has become necessary for the seeker of knowledge to have access to a wide and varying range of information-bearing resources. With this in mind, UNESCO, in 1980, formulated its School Library Media Service Manifesto, with the following objectives:

'Effective school library media service is essential both to the achievement of the educational programme of the school and as a necessary component of total library service. An effective school library media service will:

- give continuing support to the teaching and learning programme and provide impetus to educational change;
- ensure maximum access to the widest possible range of resources and services;
- equip students with the basic skills to obtain and use a wide range of resources and services;
- lead them towards a lifetime use of libraries for recreation, information and continuing education.'<sup>5</sup>

### The South African School Library

The importance of school libraries

Sandra Braude

has been recognised in South Africa since 1896, when Sir Thomas Muir, Superintendent General of Education in the Cape Colony, wrote in his annual report that 'the lowest ideal to be aimed at must be no school without a suitable library, and teachers and inspectors are counselled to keep such an ideal steadily in mind'.<sup>6</sup>

In 1919 the Transvaal, with the exclusion of Johannesburg, decided to pool resources for school libraries. This was co-ordinated by the Germiston Public Library, while the Johannesburg Public Library assumed responsibility for schools within the Johannesburg municipal area. This approach, supported by the Transvaal Education Department, remained the most comprehensive in South Africa until the 1930s.<sup>7</sup>

In 1939 the Interdepartmental Committee concluded that 'it has already been emphasized that the work of libraries should take the form of a campaign and that the principle field for this lies among the younger members of the community. It is a truism that the reading habit, once acquired in youth, is treasured ever afterwards as an inestimable blessing.... For this important work there are two principal agencies available, namely school libraries and public libraries'.<sup>8</sup>

The Committee further decided that the school libraries of each province should be co-ordinated by an organiser, and that teachers should be instructed in library usage. Herein lay the introduction to integration of the library in the school. It was

only however after World War II that school libraries in South Africa really began to progress.

The picture of school libraries in South Africa cannot however be seen at this stage as a totality. Parliamentary legislation under Nationalist rule served to fragment the schooling system in terms of racial classification. As a result children went to school, not *per se*, but to schools allocated to the groups to which they 'belonged' in terms of law, i.e. 'white', 'black', 'Indian' or 'coloured'. Control of schools in each of these sectors was exerted by differing and separate Educational Departments and, to date, this control persists. There was often little parity between the services or finances offered by the different Departments. This affected *inter alia* school libraries, where a disproportionate development took place in white schools.

### Libraries in White Schools

By 1951 the Transvaal had taken the lead over the other provinces and established a fully functional school library service, divided between School and College Organisations and a Departmental Library. Up to 1966 the service developed considerably in the following ways:

- each government school was given a library, which was integrated into the curriculum;
- centralised services for the selection, processing, information retrieval, accommo-

dation and guidance programmes were established in Pretoria;

- training courses were established for school librarians, and advisors began to visit the schools to assist in library administration;
- a Book Guide was published as an aid in the selection of books departments of Librarianship were established at the colleges of education;
- an Education Library was set up in Pretoria, in order to provide professional service to all departmental officials;
- a Model School Library, containing a copy of each book approved by the Department was set up in Pretoria.

In 1968 Groenewald's manual *The School Library in Educational Perspective* appeared.<sup>9</sup> At the same time both specialisation courses in school librarianship, at the colleges of education, and a central cataloguing service, in Pretoria, were initiated. Schools with over 400 pupils were granted full-time teacher-librarians, and an audiovisual service was inaugurated.

The 1970s saw the introduction of differentiation and subject specialisation, both of which imposed increased demands on the school libraries.

In 1978 there was a major development with the establishment of the Education Library and Ancillary Audiovisual Service, and provision for the conversion of school libraries

into media centres. The Transvaal, over and above all the other provinces, had taken a big step forward into the technology age.

Libraries in white schools in the other provinces followed a similar, if not identical, course of development. The Transvaal Education Department may perhaps have been in the lead in this area, but Education Departments of the Cape, Natal and Orange Free State paid good attention to the needs of white children, and libraries were both integrated into the schools and reasonably well used.

Because however of the split in the various Education Departments in the country, as determined by different Acts of Parliament, there were (and still are) differences in the application of both education and the implementation of the school library in relation to various sectors of the community. The concept of 'Own Affairs' extended (and still does) to virtually every aspect of living. There is no denying that both ideology and economics functioned to the advantage of the white sector; as a result, children coming from other sectors were severely deprived of the benefits of both education and well-functioning school libraries. Social unrest contributed to this deprivation: not only were school library facilities limited, but what was there was often subject to destruction.

### Black School Library Services

Despite the fact that South Africa is rapidly moving towards a new dispensation, separate Education Departments persist. The Department

of Education and Training is responsible for library services in black schools within the Republic. It undertakes a central programme for the purchase of books, and publishes a list of approved books for this purpose. In 1980 a substantial amount of money was set aside for the purpose of developing accommodation in this area, and in the same year 125 primary schools received books to the value of R1,000. At the same time 30 secondary schools each received an allocation of R10,000, and the seven black teacher's training colleges received books to the value of R2,500. There has recently been talk of significant sums of money being directed towards the supply of books for black schools. The effects of this remain to be seen.

The Department of Education and Training offers advice and guidance to school libraries through a visiting inspector. Teachers' training colleges offer specialisation training, and in-service courses are offered to teachers. Further guidance is offered by the manual, *The School Librarian*.<sup>10</sup>

In the final analysis however it must be acknowledged that there is no parity between the library services offered in black and white schools, and that much needs to be done in this area.

### READ

An interesting and highly successful programme to black scholars is offered by the READ (Read, Education and Develop) organisation. Inaugurated in 1967 by Johannesburg

librarians, this programme now operates throughout the country. A private organisation, well subsidised, it has already established numerous libraries in black schools, and provided many services to them.<sup>11</sup>

READ describes itself as follows:

It is an independent, non-racial, professional organisation funded by the private sector, which aims to help the people of Southern Africa to read, write and speak with greater competence.

It was established in Johannesburg 10 years ago and, since expanding its activities to the rest of South Africa in 1983, has worked with more than 1 400 institutions, trained over 36 000 delegates during courses and workshops, distributed over half a million books and reached over 3,5 million students.

In 1986 READ held the Festival of Books and the Kalula Reading Competition. It also organises conferences on literacy and librarianship and is setting up career guidance sections. Extremely successful, even in these times of stress, READ would appear to have rendered innovative and valuable services in the sphere of black enlightenment.

### Evaluation of Some Aspects of School Libraries in South Africa

On 17 September 1986 Professor Dr P.G.J. Overduin, in his address to the SAILIS Conference, presented a

comprehensive overview of the functioning of school libraries in South Africa. In so doing he took into account the results of a research project conducted under his leadership, the report of which was published in October 1986, and which describes the school library situation relative to each Department involved.<sup>12</sup> Several of Professor Overduin's findings are set out below.

An effective and active central educational library service, which has the necessary initiative, professional advice and underlying assistance services is an important factor in the effective functioning of school libraries. To date the Transvaal Education Department is the only department in the land that co-ordinates all library and audio-visual services.

The average number of books per student in the various departments varies considerably:

*Average number of books per student*

<i>Department</i>	<i>No. of books</i>
O.F.S. (white)	10.4
Transvaal "	8.9
Natal "	12.8
Cape "	10.3
Indian	5.5
Coloured	2.5
Black	2.4

In Natal and the Indian schools no limitations are placed on the choice of books, but schools in the Transvaal and Cape must obtain approval before obtaining books. 'Coloured' schools must submit lists of books for approval, and black schools and those in the Orange Free State rely on

their own Departments for an allocation of books. This is in some respects inimical to the rationale behind libraries. Although it is accepted that the book stock in South African schools is on the whole excellent, the system places limitations on both pupil and teacher. The advantages lie mainly in the outlying areas, where libraries are assured of an allocation of books of quality. The disadvantages appear to be two-fold:

- teacher-librarians do not get practice in the critical selection of books, and are not encouraged to do so, and in certain areas, particularly, controversial material is likely to be absent.
- The difference in the number of books borrowed per capita in the various departments is manifest:

*Number of books borrowed by pupils over a year*

<i>Department</i>	<i>No. of books</i>
O.F.S. (white)	10
Transvaal "	5
Natal "	16
Cape "	10
Indian	13
Coloured	4
Black	1

It is interesting to note that the Transvaal, with its excellent school-library services for whites, indicates a relatively low figure of borrowing, and the figures for coloured and black schools are particularly worrying.

### School Library Usage

A large number of school libraries limit use during school hours to curricular media use and lessons in book

education. Many school libraries offer borrowing facilities only after normal school-hours, for a limited period. In the high schools emphasis is placed on formal study, and priority is given to examination-related subjects, e.g. history, where much reading is required for matriculation purposes.

Often book-education lessons concentrate on such areas as the nature and parts of a book, or use of the Dewey system. Integration with the curriculum is given pre-eminence. Beswick agrees that the thoroughness applied to the factual side of user education is unquestionable, but considers that more individual exploration and use of the library tends not to be encouraged.<sup>13</sup> In other words, despite an intensive integrated use, the school library would appear not to be a significant part of the child's education in other ways.

### Conclusions

The school library has to be seen in educational perspective. It is a *sine qua non* that the child should be assisted towards his full development, and all aspects of his education should contribute to this process.

The question arises as to how effective the school library is in contemporary South Africa? Full effectiveness would seem to require a happier educational situation than is currently present in the country, where social flux is so clearly demonstrated in the schooling situation, and where so many children are presently either not getting a meaningful education, or any education at all.



The true and committed educationist must hope for and work towards a more equitable situation, and must consider each child as an individual, entitled to the same rights to personal development, irrespective of background, culture or colour.

Such a utopian concept is not beyond our reach. There are however basic problems that will have to be overcome. Sectors of the community can be seen as promoting deeply rooted and often opposing and irreconcilable educational ideologies. Until a balance has been struck between such antithetical ideologies, South African education will continue to suffer. And this is where the importance of the school library comes in.

The school library can be seen as a stable factor in times of change. Books and other resources remain constant in their form and content, and the library can represent an island of stability in a sea of flux. We have fortunately not reached that Orwellian stage in which Winston Smiths spend their time restructuring records of human history. A written volume remains a permanent artefact, and one whose value should not be underestimated.

The school library offers the child access to human records, both written and in other format. It offers contact with the best of human thought, and a sense of history. The school library should be seen as an essential component in the entire educational situation, and not simply as a link in the curriculum.<sup>14</sup>

As with education generally in

South Africa there are problems relating to school libraries that need to be overcome. It is to be hoped that in the foreseeable future responsible educationists will acknowledge that children, and not ideologies, are important.

It is clear that in certain schools, the black in particular, sufficient use is not being made of the school library. READ would appear to be playing a significant part in the promotion of involvement with books, and attention will have to be paid to development in this area.

The fact that, as things stand in South Africa at present, not all educationists are prepared to recognise the full significance of the school library, should not detract from its value. Those who do should take it upon themselves to protect, nay, cherish the school library, and promote an understanding of its value amongst their colleagues. By doing so they will be working towards a perpetuation of democratic and lasting values in South African society.

Let us hope that all those sincerely interested in the children and the future of South Africa will take up the challenge. To repeat the words of Sir Thomas Muir: 'The lowest ideal to be aimed at must be no school without a suitable library.'

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*Essop Patel*  
*Three Poems*



**Amber Ceres Raindrops**

*(Three haiku)*

1.  
soft raindrops falling —  
a farmer's daughter singing  
under the shower
2.  
Soft ceres pink dusk  
shadows behind the curtains  
foreplay on a screen
3.  
soft amber glowing —  
she curves like a guava  
in sexual ecstasy



**The Poem is a Temporary Shelter**

*For Priscilla and Amory Houghton*

*Mary Ferrari*

The poem is a temporary shelter  
Far from home — not far  
From people being shot  
And thrown from trains  
On the way to work  
They cannot afford to stop.

Close to home the innocent are thrust  
Under the heading of 'Unrest'.  
Friends spend weekends attending funerals;  
Sudden mournings become unfathomable;  
Funerals beget funerals;  
Necklaces that burn have lost their value,  
As have people  
Unsheltered in this temporary home.

**Lambda, Delta, Omega: Erotica**

*Entre en la gruta de las amatistas*  
— Pablo Neruda

a poet's pen  
is a

*lambda*

dipping in an ink well

*delta*

drawing your legs  
around mine  
like a  
broken  
ring  
an

*omega*

**Pine Needles Sliding**

*(tanka)*

Pine needles gliding —  
chemise sliding down her back:  
simple nakedness —  
quivering on silken sheets  
wrapped in sweet adultery.

*Kaizer M. Nyatumba**Three Poems***Words**

on their own  
they look like  
lost sheep  
on a precipice:  
meaningless  
unimportant  
and vulnerable

but shepherd them  
cull them carefully  
adorn and string them  
together  
and they will sing

words  
are like our bodies:  
denuded or attired in tatters  
they prick  
sharper than thorns  
they pierce  
like a scorned mistress's tongue  
and shame  
their utterer  
but draped in fineries  
they soothe festering wounds  
revive broken hearts  
smell sweeter than incense  
and compliment  
their source  
so clothe them presentably,  
my brother  
dust and wrap them  
graciously  
pick and match them  
tenderly with finesse  
for words well chosen  
are more precious  
than diamonds

**A question**

when the sun  
no longer shines  
when the soul  
is empty, starved  
and a smile is foreign  
when what was  
no longer is  
and when love  
—rich and rewarding  
lies shattered  
on the alter of pride  
and its erstwhile flame  
merely flickers

when all that once moved  
is now static  
when fountains have dried up  
and the river which flowed  
freely and melodiously  
has become a desert  
without an oasis  
and sings only to itself  
like my heart:

is there still reason  
to go on breathing?

**Regeneration**

slowly  
the sun begins to shine  
after a torrid heat  
and suffocating humidity  
a gentle breeze blows  
and birds  
—once petrified and comatose  
begin to sing again

Opposite page:  
*Vusi Maseko • Collision •*  
Pencil on paper

# WRITING PROSE DURING TRANSITION



*Kaizer Nyatsumba*

No matter what political vantage point one may be looking at present-day South Africa from, there is no denying that sweeping changes have taken place in the country over the past two years. These changes, sometimes slower than some of us would have expected, but often much faster and abrupt for others, have left in their wake a new and somewhat puzzling reality.

Gone is the certainty of yesterday, and in its place is the uncertainty of a future whose exact nature we cannot yet fathom. Some old 'truths' and formally accepted conventions no longer hold quite easily or as firmly, and there is an ever-present need for us to constantly review and re-assess positions we may have held for ages. Indeed, there is a sense in which we can echo WB Yeats's sen-

timent that even here, too, somehow things seem to fall apart as the centre fails to hold.

The changes which have taken place in this country since February 2, 1990, regardless of their extent, scope or nature — about which we might disagree — have set in motion various forces and their re-alignment, and have led to new social and political configurations. And there is a

sense, in my view, in which there is, or has had to be, a re-evaluation of stock responses to issues and some people in general. Indeed, there is a sense in which there is an on-going re-definition of one's friends and allies, as yesterday's enemies become friends and some of yesterday's friends fall out and become enemies.

Although some of yesterday's villains remain villains and some of yesterday's heroes remain heroes, there are also those who have gone to and fro on that spectrum of villains and heroes. I dare say that almost inevitably, given the nature of change as a process, there are many others who are heroes today who will be villains before that process has come to an end, and vice versa.

In short, nothing is static and certain any more. All South Africans, in

their various corners of the country and in their various roles, have been called upon to question and assess anew their old dogmatic positions and interpretations of things. It is a duty, I suggest, in which we dare not fail as a people.

Yes, change is pain, as troubadour Mzwakhe Mbuli avers. And when people say change is pain they do not, or should not, mean only in a physical sense. They mean, or should mean, also the fact that change leaves people somewhat fearful and full of anxiety, and some with perhaps a fear of the unknown. As the old predictability goes through the window and unpredictability steps in, some kind of disorientation results.

And this applies equally to everyone, regardless of his/her race. This is tempered or compounded, depending on the individual's race and/or political allegiance in this country, by what that individual expects to get from the changes presently taking place.

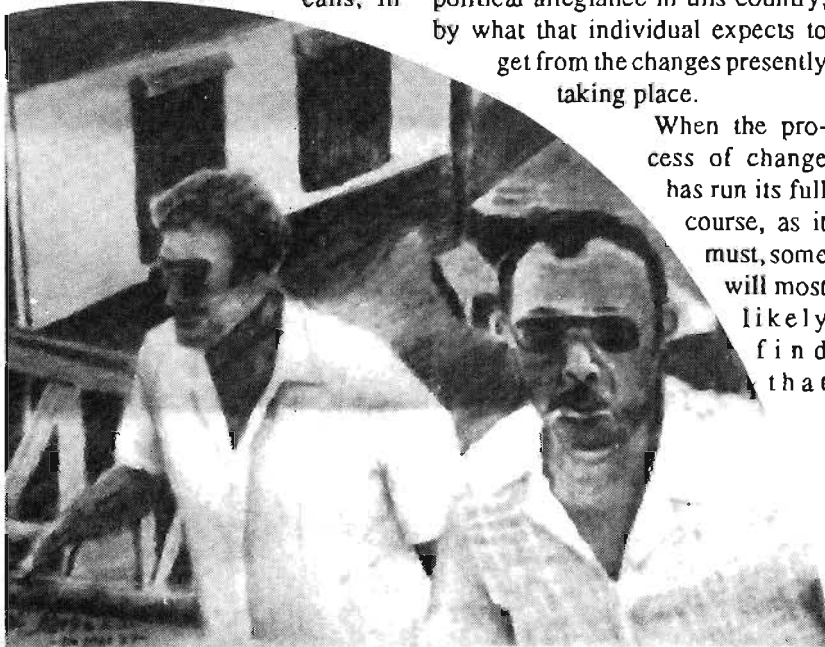
When the process of change has run its full course, as it must, some will most likely find that

their fears were much exaggerated. Others, however, will certainly find that their expectations were way beyond fulfillment, and will then become disappointed, nay, disillusioned. That explains why conservatives — and by definition a conservative is someone who is 'averse to rapid change', and the term has nothing to do with one's race or the colour of one's skin — find change much, much more painful than others.

It is a common cause, I take it, that things are, and have been since February 2 1990, in a constant state of flux in this country. This, I submit, has had implications not only for political organisations and their leaders, but also for many other people, both laymen and professionals. The million-dollar question many South Africans have had to grapple with in the past two years is whether, confronted by the new reality and new challenges, they are going to continue doing things the same old way or adapt to the new situation. Each one of us has had to grapple with that question, whether consciously or unconsciously.

It is a question which we as a people, both individually and collectively, have to deal with. It is a question which we as writers assembled here today have to face head-on and address. In this paper, therefore, I will attempt to answer just that question.

But before we attempt to answer that question, let us take a cursory look at what black South African prose has been about over the years. Although some of what I will say now will apply to the 'Drum Gener-



Kaizer Nyatumba

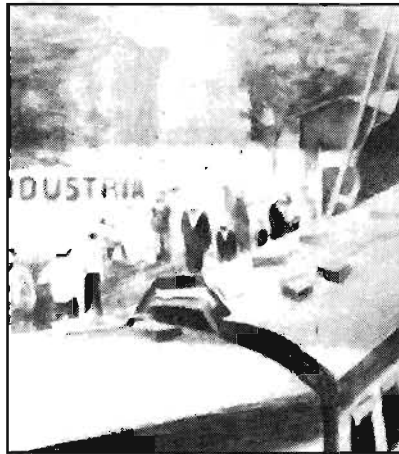
ation' of writers as well, I will not dwell on that period at all, for much has been written about it. The period I will talk about, the one with which most of us will be familiar, is the 1970s and the 1980s.

Now the 1970s, as you know, was a period dominated by poetry. It was a time when Black Consciousness was in vogue, and writers like Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali, Wally Mongane Serote and Pascal Mafika Gwala published their first poetry collections and became household names. It was a decade which saw the emergence of *Staffrider* magazine, which has itself made a major contribution in the evolution of black South African literature.

It was, as I have stated, a decade of poetry — but my paper today concerns itself with prose fiction, by which I refer almost exclusively to short stories. While someone like Sipho Sepamla has written quite a number of novels, it is undeniable that the number of serious black novelists in South Africa can be counted on one's fingers.

Whatever prose was written during this period — and one has in mind here most of the short stories which appeared in *Staffrider*, written by people like Mthobhi Mutloatse, Miriam Tlali, Mtutuzeli Matshoba and many others — falls in the genre of a novelistic documentary or new journalism, a genre I call expository or journalistic fiction.<sup>2</sup> This was prose which tended to focus on apartheid and its ravages on the black majority, and to record whatever was happening to blacks.

Although it fulfilled an impor-



tant function, this kind of prose tended to be shallow and predictable and, like the poetry of the 1970s, saw black and white South Africans falling neatly into the categories of angels and monsters. It was a kind of prose which stunted creativity and imagination: to a large extent, the story was written for the black writer by his/her milieu. It is this responsibility Matshoba spoke about when he wrote:

'I want to reflect through my works life on my side of the fence, the black side: so that whatever may happen in the future, I may not be set down as "a bloodthirsty terrorist". So that I may say: "These were the events which shaped the Steve Bikos and the Solomon Mahlangu, and many others who came before and after them".'<sup>4</sup>

Important though it was, a writing of this nature tends to be ephemeral. Like a beautiful flower which blos-

soms when sun rises in the morning and wilts or droops when the heat begins to scorch it during the day, this kind of writing — which was meant for a certain purpose — tends to date once that purpose has been served. It is by no accident, I think, that the writers who have gone before some of us and have been quite prolific in prose-writing in the seventies and early eighties, have been so quiet over the past few years. Certainly it is by no accident, I think, that new fiction has been conspicuous by its absence since February 1990 compared to the period before that.

Both Lewis Nkosi and Njabulo Ndebele have been particularly critical of black South African fiction over the years — and Ndebele's *Fools and Other Stories* stood out in the 1980s because it was so different as a work of fiction. Many of you will be familiar with Ndebele's views, first expressed in his now-famous essay 'Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction', which first appeared in *Staffrider*. Some may be less familiar with Nkosi's sweeping views, which I have found still relevant right up to the end of the eighties.

With characteristic harshness, Nkosi wrote more than two decades ago:

'With the best will in the world, it is impossible to detect in the fiction of black South Africans any significant and complex talent which responds with both the vigour of the imagination and suffi-

cient technical resources to the problems posed by conditions in South Africa.

Where urban music, for instance, has responded to the challenges of the disintegrative tendencies of city life with an amazing suppleness and subtlety, black writing shows the cracks and tensions of language working under severe strain. Where African music and dance have moved forward, not through renouncing tradition but by fusing diverse elements into an integrated whole, black fiction has renounced African tradition without showing itself capable of befitting from the accumulated example of modern European literature. To put it bluntly, nothing stands behind the fiction of black South Africans — no tradition, whether indigenous, such as *energies* (Amos Tutuola's) *The Palm-wine Drunkard* or alien, such as is most significantly at work in the latest fiction by Camara Laye.<sup>15</sup>

To reinforce these views, we need to point out here that the average black South African writer has at least matric and perhaps a teacher's certificate or diploma by way of formal education, and his/her reading is quite limited. The average black South African writer wants his/her works to be published and read, but is reluctant to invest money in buying other writers' books to read. What, some might say, does formal education

have to do with creative writing? Is it not, after all, it might be asked, a question of being either talented in writing or not talented? I wish it were that simple, because then many people here would no doubt thrive as writers. A good education and a command of the language in which one writes are, in my view, essentials for any writer. I think this short-coming explains why our plots as black writers are never complex, since we prefer to create characters who are stereotypes with which we are familiar, and to deal with the situation with which we are only too familiar, instead of creating real, complex, human characters and digging deeper for inspiration. We know no better: for us the world begins and ends with apartheid within the borders of South Africa.

As writers we are now called upon to broaden our individual scopes and horizons and to begin to see not only one big forest, but also the different trees within that forest. We can still play an important role in future, and serve our country in new ways. What our leaders do not need, and what South Africa can do without at this moment of our transition from the apartheid past to a hopefully democratic future, are sycophantic writers who fall all over themselves in their praise of favoured political leaders and their

vehement denunciation of those political leaders with whom they disagree.

I think the challenge we are facing as writers is to lead the way away from the victim syndrome which has solidly taken root among us as a people, and to begin to see South Africans as people. I am not for a moment suggesting that we now need to disengage completely from writing about the suffering and gnashing of the teeth in our midst. All I am appealing for is realisation of the fact that we are much, much more than just victims, to the exclusion of everything else, we are doing a grave injustice to ourselves as a people.

South Africa, some of my friends abroad have told me, is a country whose writers are never in short supply

for material to write about, given the conditions we find ourselves in. I tend to agree with that observation. But I think that instead of doing what we have done for years, we now need to reach a certain level of creative maturity as writers, and remember that despite our oppression over the years, we can still laugh and love. I think we should begin to explore all those emotions we have in the past been too ashamed of writing about lest we were dismissed as hopelessly sentimental romantics who sang

**The  
challenge  
we are  
facing as  
writers is to  
lead the way  
away from  
the victim  
syndrome**

Kaizer Nyatumba

about roses and daffodils while others waged a revolution.

I think we need to take a closer look at ourselves as a people, and write the many potential interesting stories that are there, waiting patiently to be written. While we throw stones at 'the system' through our pens, let us begin to engage in some soul-searching of our own! Let us engage in introspection. You will be amazed at the number of stories and novels that are waiting to be written.


But not everything is as gloomy as I might be understood to be suggesting here. Indeed, some voices have begun to be heard making exactly the same kind of intervention I am making here today. Although the response from black South African writers so far has, as far as I can tell, remained muted, it is encouraging that such voices are beginning to be heard. I quote now at length from Andries Oliphant's essay on 'The Renewal of South African Literature', where he makes some similar points. Oliphant writes:

The progressive streams in South African literature and culture which have for so long been involved in an opposition to apartheid, have reached a point where the aesthetics of protest and resistance belongs to the past. This will have to make way for new proactive and inclusive perspectives on culture which go beyond a reactive concern with politics. The criticism levelled by a writer such as Njabulo Ndebele against the aesthetic in-

adequacies of the culture of protest in which writers remain preoccupied with presenting readers with information about the nature of oppression is now more valid than ever. Similarly, Albie Sachs's call for cultural freedom, despite his somewhat simplistic and superficial assessment of South African literature and culture, must be welcomed for the autonomy it accords to the processes of cultural production.

In the light of this no thematic or stylistic restrictions should be placed on writers from any political point of view. The imperatives of political orthodoxy have to make way for the freedom to explore new themes as a means of developing a new culture in which the full range of human experience and concern could emerge. This freedom, however, does not imply that cultural production is a process which exists outside the material actualities of social life. While writers and other artists are entitled to freedom from prescription, it does not imply that their creations constitute trans-historical moments unrelated to the world in which their cultural activity occurs. Literary and cultural production, reception and consumption are, after all is said and done, conscious human activities situated in society.<sup>6</sup>

I don't think the point still needs belabouring. In conclusion, however, let me warn that nowhere in Africa do writers enjoy close relationships with their countries' governments. Even those writers who openly sided with the liberation movements in their various countries through their writings, have often found themselves at the receiving end of those self-same governments when they started singing different tunes.

Many an accomplished African writer, as you well know, has been imprisoned, and many an African writer lives in exile, away from the comfort of his/her country and home. The same could happen here. 

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*An address at a seminar of the African Writers' Association in Johannesburg on Saturday, October 17, 1992.*



## Timothy Holmes

### Two Poems



### Lusaka

Driving to the city every day,  
 Half the year through dust and flying filth,  
 The other half through rainy season slush  
 And always potholes,  
 We cross the pullulating shantytown.

And there, immaculate each morning  
 Fresh from a bursted crystalis,  
 Amazing children, fresh as new images,  
 Chewing sugar cane for breakfast,  
 Hitch lifts to school and a future.

### Faces

Walking on the crowded pavement  
 looking into people's faces  
 wishing you were here:

Seeing only faces, faces,  
 miracles are out of fashion  
 you do not appear.

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*Earl Bean*  
*Four Poems*



**A Statue with Blinkers**

You are a feminist, I am aware  
and thus align myself with your cause  
But so you should also expect,  
and allow, my moist lips to swallow  
your erect nipples. Lest your kisses merely  
drool me into a stallion on whose back  
you ride like a statue with blinkers,  
smudged map and impotent sensation

**To Fellow-Poets**

Sometimes I feel we must dump all our solid metaphors  
into the sea and see how they would be punctuated  
by sand, salt, sea-weed, shells and sharks!

**Banality of Seduction**

Once, as a boy  
I lay with a girl in a corn-field  
and came out dry as a cob — she rested  
her head on top of a recoiling mamba

Now, as a man  
I lay with a woman in a bathtub  
and still came out dry as marble —  
a pistol hissed at us through an open window

**Superiors in Toilet**

Lock superiors in a toilet of your mind  
where their huge profiles sprawl over naked seats  
and ankles which are, after all, choked by clothes  
dropped in haste. Then flush them with roaring  
laughter

## ✧ Thendo Maswiswini

*Ramaite Mashau*

U kovhela ha duvha  
Ndi u ya u tshani halo,  
Nyamulemalema u divha zwi<sup>h</sup>hinga,  
Mutambo wawe ndi wa maswiswini,  
Vhusiku ndi dinzwi la vhasiwana.

Ndi do renda tshi fhio tshirendo  
Maswiswini murotheni was vhuriha  
Mano a tshi gekhana  
Ngeno vhana vha tshi nga mbongola  
Ndau dzi tshi vhemba masiari na vhusiku?

Litshani ndi munune thendo  
Vhukati-kati maswiswini  
Vha do pfa, vha pfaho,  
Vha sa pfa ndi do bya lwa muvhunda,  
Vhusiku ndi do hwenya  
Mitsindo yanga yo shanduka ya ndou.

Ni vhona nga mato-mpofu,  
Vhanu vhana vha do vhona ngoho,  
Vha do sengulusa zwino na zwila;  
Huno zwino li tshée lo tavha,  
Tshi do da tshifhinga  
Tshine thendo maswiswini  
Dza do shanduka maluvha.

## ✧ Evening in South Africa

*Mary Ferrari*

I ate my dinner in the sky  
The tablecloth was a lightning sheet  
that shook like a southern flag.

The sunset served  
squash soup  
with broiled salmon  
and illuminated rice  
each grain a piece  
of city light

mango and  
mango mousse —  
small scoops  
of sun  
softened  
the edge  
of South Africa's  
darkening plate

This is Johannesburg  
among politicoes  
Saturday night

## Letters

Dear Comrades

By way of introduction: I was a member of COSAW until I left Cape Town to live in London three years ago. I am author of the book *A Vision of Order* which is referred to several times in the essay: 'Dugmore Boetie and South African Literature' by Mark Beittel in *Staffrider*, Volume 10 Number 2, 1992.

Although I understand and appreciate the underlying principle, it is a pity that no information is given about the contributors. Why for instance, in a South African publication, does Mark Beittel refer to the American edition of my book (out of print) when there is a perfectly good South African one (paperback) published by Maskew Miller Longman in 1985 and still in print?

I would like to comment on the article and hope this will add to the knowledge and understanding of Dugmore Boetie, whom indeed I consider an important writer, and did not, as Beittel says, mention 'in passing'. In a study of black South African literature in English, stretching over a period of 66 years and comprising 270 pages of text, almost 4 pages devoted to one writer is substantial comment.

Unfortunately Beittel's quote on page 57 of *Staffrider* is taken from a paragraph in *Vision* where a line is missing, which escaped my notice, that of the proofreader, and of Beittel. His quote is therefore out of context, through no fault of his. The obviously missing portion would have explained that *Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost* was not of seminal importance, because, through Barney Simon's co-authorship, it was not taken seriously in the same way as were the early works of the black poets.

A little more about this co-authorship. Beittel says in

## The Editors

I wish that in his assessment of Mafika Gwala's poetry (*Staffrider* Vol 10 No.2), Thengani H Ngwenya had referred to a few of those early pieces of Gwala's that appeared, I seem to remember, in *The Classic* magazine and R. Royston's anthology, *To Whom It May Concern* (Ad. Donker). Surely they were included in *Jol' iinkomo*?

What I recall of those poems, with distinct pleasure, is their over-all character. They are fresh, concrete, intimate, witty, modest, substantial.

One that stays more particularly in my mind is 'One Small Boy Longs for Summer': a family in a township house on a winter's night, huddling for warmth; the little boy is so absorbed in his fantasy of warmer days that he absent-

# Letters

footnote 8 (page 65) that I contradict myself by calling Simon co-author. This is not necessarily so, when we only have Simon's word for the extent to which he had a hand in it.

So I would like to add a personal note, which I did not feel had a place in my study. Perhaps I should have added it in a footnote. I first heard of Dugmore Boetie when he met my daughter now Shelley Power, who was then working for the Institute of Race Relations in Johannesburg. He said he was working on a novel so she had him send it to me as I was then (and am still now) running a literary agency. The novel he submitted was a blood and thunder crime story gleaned from films and the comics. Buried somewhere under the ghastly plot and writing, there was talent. We told him to throw it out and write about things of which he had first-hand knowledge. He did and took it to Barney Simon who gave unstintingly of his expertise, time, patience, and — most important, perhaps — the financial support. When I compare the published book and the other manuscript, I have to conclude that while Simon probably did not have a hand in the conceptual action and dialogue his contribution amounted to more than his claim of directing changes here and there. Shall we say that rather than only producer, he was also script-writer for the novelist.

*Ursula A Barnett*  
London  
1 September 1992

mindedly digs his elbow into his brother, to the latter's annoyance. That's all, but so much! Such delicacy, such conviction.

Nor are the larger reverberations absent. I don't know about black humanism, but we have here a lovely true snapshot of black experience — which is why that poem, that poetry, is richly human (in no specific colour).

I think Mr Ngwenya could have written less defensively if he had cited that early work.

*Lionel Abrahams*

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