

Staffrider

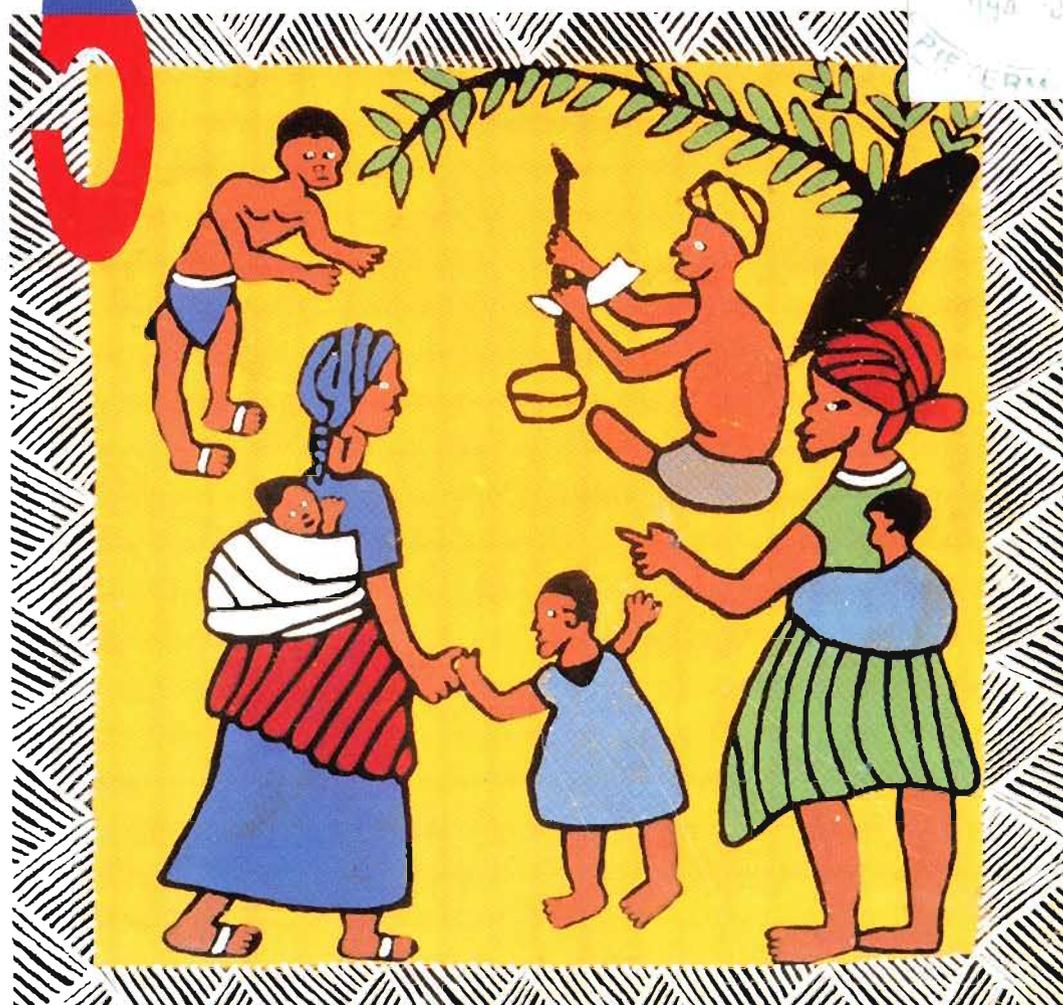
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Stories

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Essays

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Staffrider

Volume 11 Nos 1,2,3,4 1993

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COMMENT

Staffrider is fifteen years old. What a ride it has been! At times dangerous and daunting, but always exciting. From the time of fire and ash in 1978, through the turbulent eighties, and right into the urgent nineties it has always been a ride into the future: a ride away from the status quo towards something new. Now with the social and cultural order against which it boldly pitted itself at its terminal point, it is time to branch out and reconnect South African literature and culture with that of the region. For this reason this special anniversary edition is devoted to Literature and Art from Southern Africa.

The idea for this project has been dormant for some time. In 1989 at a seminar hosted by the Southern African Development and Co-ordination Conference, the editor of this journal was asked to speak about 'The Role of *Staffrider* in Southern Africa in the Year 2000'. This is perhaps an indication of the ultimate lifespan anticipated for apartheid by our neighbours at that time. It's demise came sooner. On 27 April 1994 we will see the end of the racist Parliament and of white domination in South Africa. This amongst other things will normalize our relationship with the region.

Staffrider has, of course, always had ties with the region. The journal is well-known all over Southern Africa and writers from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana, Namibia and Zambia have been published in it. It was also closely involved in exile activities in the region. With this anniversary edition we wish to expand the regional participation of the magazine.

This development is important. The years of isolation imposed on South Africa by an inward looking mind-set are over. We therefore foresee closer interaction between South Africa and its neighbours. This will result from the inevitable move towards greater economic integration and exchange, along with freer movement of people. In

the process the shared linguistic and cultural fabric of the region, torn and tattered by colonialism and war, will be mended. Writers and artists will play an important role in this. It is only when people are able to see themselves fully in relation to the wider world that their distinctiveness is apprehended.

This edition highlights the shared narratives of countries like Mozambique, Zambia, Botswana, Malawi and South Africa in the stories wrought from indigenous oral tradition and rendered in English or Portuguese. The stories, we feel, constitute a rich repository from which contemporary writers should be encouraged to draw in the process of literary innovation and renewal.

This issue comes at a time when artists in South Africa are working to establish their autonomy from political parties and the state. If the policy proposals accepted by the Convention of the National Arts Initiative in December 1993 are effectively implemented by the National Arts Coalition, we will see fundamental changes in the way the arts are funded in this country. These proposals make provision for the establishment of a National Arts Council constituted in a publicly transparent manner and operating free from government control.

A campaign aimed at reducing bureaucracy and enlarging public and private sector funding for the arts is also planned. Furthermore a series of reports focusing on the various arts disciplines such as literature, the visual arts, theater, dance, film, music, community arts and art in education contain far-reaching proposals for change. In the course of 1994 there will also be a series of festivals related to a campaign to enhance freedom of expression. So, 1994 promises to be an eventful and challenging year.

Staffrider thanks all the contributors, and is especially grateful to Hugh Lewin for co-editing this edition.

Andries Walter Oliphant & Hugh Lewin

Going to See

The day his father sent him to see Mr B.V. he put on his cream coloured long sleeved shirt, his flared grey 'Something Else' trousers and his black moccasin shoes. His mother had suggested he put on a tie and insisted on his having a solid lunch. His father had of course dropped hints about him needing to have a haircut, but he had quietly decided on a smart but half-casual look. In form three, he was learning to get his way. He compromised by putting a comb in his back pocket and eating a slice of bread, just in case.

It was a hot, dusty afternoon and he soon began to hate himself for sweating. He sniffed under his armpits and began to smell the perspiration washing off the soap he had glazed over his armpits after the shower and realised he should have taken the bus to save himself the dust and heat of this long tramp through the bush and round the backyards of the industrial

Mr B.V

Shimmer Chinodya, Zimbabwe



Shimmer Chinodya, *Zimbabwe*

sites, going to Mr B. V.'s Wholesales. He had brushed his teeth carefully, and to keep his breath sweet he had bought — with the money he could have used for the bus ticket — a packet of 'Mint Imperials' to suck on — but now he found himself chomping nervously through the medium-sized box.

Just before he got to the market place he stopped in front of a shop window and ran the comb through his hair once more. He brought out a dab of Vaseline he had rolled up in a twist of khaki paper and smoothed it onto his lips, then he noticed the owner of the shop, a tall white man, pointing to him and approaching and he ran on. He stopped to wipe off his shoes with an old newspaper just before he crossed over into the market place. The big watch in Main Street said five-past-two and he thought Mr B. V. would have returned from lunch by now, so he crossed over to Mr B. V.'s Wholesales. He walked past the yard packed full with rows and rows of ploughs, scotch-carts, hoes, door-frames, timber and cement bags to the front of the wholesale where the offices were. In the yard there was a man in a green dustjacket taking stock. The man was a cousin or a nephew or something to them but he did not want to be held up on his arrival and he walked on as if he did not see him.

Right behind the wholesale there was a departmental store where his father worked and this was managed by Mr J. V., Mr B. V.'s younger brother. Once or twice when he and his brothers had gone to the store where their father worked, their father had taken them to see Mr J. V., a quiet busy man in his late thirties who looked sideways at you as if you were about to play a trick on him and nodded briefly and ran on to do his business. Mr B. V. was much older and fatter than Mr J. V., and had a balding head, and talked and laughed with everyone. He spoke Shona and called their father 'Longman' and if you were lucky he would grab a packet of Crystal Sweets or Choice Assorted Biscuits right off the shelf and thrust it into your unsuspecting hands.

As he approached the office he saw Mr B. V. sitting at his desk inspecting some papers. Mr B. V. looked up briefly in his direction and in a sudden

panic he walked past the door and down the street and then turned round and came back again. He patted his pockets to assure himself that the letter his father had given him was still there, then he stepped boldly into the shop. There was hardly time to look into the darkened shop, but he briefly saw, through the long corridors between stacks of goods, men pushing and packing and a young Indian woman writing at the counter. He tapped on the door of the office. Mr B. V. looked up and he stepped in cautiously and stood near the door.

'Good afternoon, sir,' he said.

Mr B. V. looked up and nodded, then turned his papers quickly.

'My father said you wanted to see me, sir,' he said, feeling the perspiration welling up again in his armpits.

'Who?' Mr B. V. said, looking up rather with surprise.

'My father, sir. Oh, I'm George Mahari, sir.'

'You're who?'

'George Mahari, sir. Mr Mahari's son.'

'Longman? You're Longman's son?'

'Yes, sir,' he said, momentarily taken back.

'What can I do for you?' Mr B. V. said, squeezing his hands as if he had just applied a lotion to them.

'My father said you wanted to see me, sir,' he said, and when Mr B. V. glanced at his papers and squeezed his hands again he took out the letter from his pocket and put it on the gleaming glass table and said, 'My father asked me to give you this letter, sir.'

Mr B. V. slit the letter open perfectly with a little knife and skimmed through it.

'Longman wrote this?' he said, stretching back in his padded seat.

'Yes, sir.'

'Wait outside,' said Mr B. V. 'I'll call you.'

As he stepped out of the office a bald headed man in spectacles and a white dust coat called to him from the counter.

'Don't you remember me?' said the man. 'I'm an uncle of yours. Gideon Masimbi is my name. Of course you wouldn't know, the way you keep

yourself locked up at home, studying. Your mother has the same totem as me — the elephant - and I regard your father as my in-law. What's your first name?

'George,' he said.

Uncle Masimbi shook his hand heartily and introduced him to the other workers in the wholesale. 'This is Mahiri's second son,' he said. 'What form are you doing, now?'

'Form three,' he said

'You a big brain, eh?'

'All Mahiri's sons are big brains,' said the man he had ignored in the yard who, as it later turned out, was a distant cousin. 'They have no time to play. They are always at home, studying.'

'You boys are doing very well for your father and we're all proud of you. You have realised that books are the only way out for us people and you are sticking to them. Your father has worked all his life to send you boys through school and you should never forget that. Keep up the good work. And I congratulate your father for raising you the right way. So, what brings you here? Did you come to see baas B.V.?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, but you're not looking for a job yet, are you?'

'No,' George said, 'Mr B.V. wanted to see me.'

'Your father asked you to come and see Baas B.V.?' Uncle Masimbi said, with surprise.

'Yes,' George said hesitantly, 'I brought a letter for Mr B.V.'

'A letter. Oh. And has Baas B.V. seen the letter?'

'He read it and said I should wait for him to call me.'

'Very well,' said Uncle Masimbi, arranging some invoices. After a pause he said, 'Your father and I worked together on this wholesale long before he even met your mother and before anybody could begin to dream that you boys would ever be born. You can sit here at the counter if you like, or walk around to see what we do. Come, Naison, show him around.'

Naison, the distant cousin he had ignored in the

yard, showed him round the wholesale. The place was dark and dusty and hot with the smell of trapped air. The shelves which rose right up to the ceiling were stacked with clothes of all kinds — school uniforms, kitchenware, groceries and other merchandise. There were a dozen or so customers — mostly shopowners — placing their orders. After a quick tour George returned to the counter, anxious to make himself visible when Mr B.V. started looking for him. Mr B.V. was talking animatedly to a young Indian couple who had visited him in the office.

'Baas B.V. seems rather busy today,' Uncle Masimbi said, checking off a big order at the counter. 'You could go out and walk around for a while, otherwise you will exhaust your feet standing in one place.'

Realising that he might be getting in the way, George went out to the verandah and stood leaning against a pillar where he would be visible from the office. The young visitors left and Mr B.V. continued poring over his papers. At one point George saw Mr B.V. eating something from a lunchbox with his bare hands and licking his fingers. Pickled onions perhaps, George thought, remembering the highly spiced foods Mrs. J.V sometimes gave his father to bring home. As he was eating Mr B.V. looked out of his office and crossed eyes with George. George backed off to the wall. He was feeling hungry himself and damn it, he should have had his lunch after all. Rushing off on an empty stomach to come and spend the afternoon like this, loitering on the verandah watching passers-by. And it was hot. He was sweating freely now and was afraid there would be unsightly yellow rings in his armpits. He ran off to a cafe at the corner and stuffed himself with a Coke and two scones, wiped his teeth with a thumb and came back to his post. The office was empty and he could hear Mr B.V.'s voice somewhere in the dark recesses of the shop, shouting names and barking commands. There was a flurry of activity in the shop. At five minutes to five George stepped out into the open doorway of the wholesale. Mr B.V. was standing on a ladder in one of the corridors,

Shimmer Chinodya, *Zimbabwe*

packing shirts on the shelves. He had taken off his coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves and below and around him there were three or four workers, holding up the shirts to him.

'You can come in now, M'zukuru George,' Uncle Masimbi called out to him and he went to stand at the counter. After a while Mr B.V. came down the ladder, rolled down his sleeves and went back into the office. All the customers had gone now and it was time to close the shop. Mr B.V. put on his coat and came out to the counter.

'But why does Longman do this?' Mr B.V. said, holding out the letter and looking at George and Uncle Masimbi and back. 'How can Longman do this?'

'Is anything wrong, Baas?' Uncle Masimbi asked. A silence fell in the darkening shop and the workers gathered round the counter.

'Why your father does this?' Mr B.V. said to George, holding out the letter.

'Hini ndava ena Longman aenza so?'

'What is this all about?' Uncle Masimbi asked George, taking off his spectacles so that his eyes seemed older and wrinkled with worry. 'What is this letter Baas B.V. is talking about? What's the matter, Baas B.V.?'

'Let him explain himself, Gideon. Can't he talk? What's your name again?'

'George, sir,' said the boy hoarsely.

'What form are you in at school?'

'Form three, sir.'

'So why you no answer questions and look stupid? Is that what you do at school to your teachers?'

'No, sir.'

'So why your father write this letter? Why doesn't he come here himself? Your father just write this letter and say, Go to Baas B.V. and get money for your school fees and your uniforms. Haikona mhani. Is that manners, Gideon? Look, he's written a list of



everything in his letter — shirts, trousers, shoes, socks, bags, maths instruments, school fees and he gives this letter to this boy and doesn't come himself. Eh, Gideon, why you people do this, man?'

'No baas B.V.,' Uncle Masimbi said, examining the letter. 'It's just a mistake Baas and Longman has to say sorry. I'll speak to him myself and tell him that Baas B.V. was not happy with the letter. But didn't Longman talk to you about this before writing the letter, Baas?'

'Talk to me, Gideon? You know I talk to you people about it every day. I say to you people, if any of you have a problem, come to me and I'll help you. Didn't I pay for your spectacles, Gideon?'

'Yes, you did, Baas.'

'And you, Taruona, didn't I pay for your father's operation last month?'

'You did, Baas,' Taruona, the short man in a suit behind George said.

'And each time I do that you write a letter or you come to the office and say, Baas B.V., I need this. . . or Baas B.V. such and such a problem has happened? Now you Gideon and Longman, you the old madala here have worked here longer than anyone and I have said to you any trouble with school fees for your children, tell me. Not trouble because of drinking go-beer! Just because I say so doesn't mean I say Longman, write a letter. You hear that, young man? Go tell your father Baas B.V. says he can't have the money for your fees and your uniforms because he is too proud.'

George's eyes were already filled with tears and he took a moment to see Mr B.V. holding the letter out to him.

'You know how long your father has worked for me and my brother?'

'No sir,' George sobbed.

'Twenty-seven years, now. Longman and Gideon

were the first two boys we had here and that time we have small shop at the corner. They worked good and were very good boys. They did not have long hands or eyes and they kept their jobs. And I sent your father to night school. And then we built the wholesale. And then the departmental store where your father works. Your father tell you all this?’

‘No, Baas,’ George said, hoping to salvage something by that lie.

‘How come your father don’t tell you all this? How come you don’t ask him? Do you know my brother, Mr J.V.?’

‘The one who manages the store where my father works?’ George started.

‘How come you say “the one who manages the store where my father works”?’ Mr B.V. erupted, his eyes flashing ‘Why don’t you just say, “my father’s boss”? Are you getting proud too, like your father? You think now because you’re in Form three you can say “the one who manages the store where my father works”?’

‘No, Baas B.V.,’ said Uncle Masimbi, ‘He’s just a child, Baas.’

‘How come your father doesn’t ask his boss for the money? How come your father keeps coming to me when he now has his own Baas? Look at him, Gideon. He’s crying. Why are you crying? Do you cry at school?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Do you cry at home?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Does your father often beat you?’

‘No, sir.’

‘How many times a week he beat you, George? Two, three times??’

‘I don’t know, sir.’

‘Does your father beat your mother?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Does your father make your mother cry at night?’

Mr B.V. laughed.

‘No, sir.’

‘How many wives your father got?’

‘One, sir,’ George choked, alarmed by the question.

‘Your father have any children with other women?’

‘No, sir.’

‘What you do on Sundays?’

‘We go to church, sir.’

‘What your father do on Sundays?’

‘He goes to church, too.’

‘Does your father drink beer?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Is that true, Gideon?’

‘Very true, Baas B.V. You know yourself Longman doesn’t touch a drop and that he goes to church every Sunday.’

‘How many witchdoctors come to your house per month?’

‘None, sir.’

‘Your father doesn’t have a witchdoctor?’

‘No, sir.’

‘What kind of African don’t have a witchdoctor? What your mother do when you’re sick?’

‘We go to the clinic, sir.’

‘How many times you go to the reserves to play drums and drink beer and sing songs for dead people?’

‘We don’t, sir.’

‘Your father is a good boy. He’s been working here for nearly thirty years now. He’s been working here for thirty years now. He musn’t do this. Well what do you say, Gideon? You think we send his son back and say no or we tell Longman to come here tomorrow and explain why he do this?’

Uncle Masimbi glanced again at the figures on the letter and said, ‘I think Longman should come and talk to you himself, Baas.’

‘Haikona, mhan. Haafaniri kuita so. When you go back to school?’

‘The day after tomorrow, sir.’

‘All right. I say, let’s give him the money,’ Mr B.V. said. ‘We’ll give you the money, but your father must come and explain first thing tomorrow.’

Mr B.V. went into one of the offices, rang the cash register and while he was there counting out the money, Uncle Masimbi adjusted his glasses and took another worried glance at the figures on the

Shimmer Chinodya, *Zimbabwe*

letter and said in subdued tones, to George, 'Your father really musn't do this because it makes thing hard for us all. Of course Mr B.V. is our Baas. His brother Mr J.V. is too young to understand this. These Indians are just like us black people and they are particular about how things should be done. Your father should have come to me beforehand to let me know so that I would at least be ready for this. And we all have children in school, needing fees — but anyway, m'zukuru, the problem has been solved and you will be able to go to school and if Longman's son or my own son goes to school — it's all the same. These Indians work us very hard, you know. Very expensive school you're going to, eh?'

Mr B.V. returned with the money and counted out the crisp new ten and twenty dollar bills on the counter.

'Give him an envelope, Gideon,' Mr B.V. said.

'Thank you, sir' George said and Mr B.V. nodded quickly.

'So why you no say thank you to Gideon? You don't say thank you to Gideon for helping you?'

'Thank you, Sekuru Masimbi,' George said. He felt the tears welling up again in his eyes but he picked up the fat white envelope, folded it and put it in his pocket.

'Be sure to take that straight to your father and tell him to come and see me first thing tomorrow,' Mr B.V. said, going back to his office.

'Give your greetings to your mother and my sister,' Uncle Masimbi said. George nodded and stepped out of that dark shop into the paling light outside, away from the murmuring behind him.

'So did you eat any Indian food while you were there?' his brother said.

'Did you sit in that office with him?' said another.



'What's his office like. What does he spend the day doing?'

'Did he speak in English or did he use Indian?' his mother said.

Did you did you did you and suddenly he remembered the day his woodwork teacher had called him at primary school to his table and kept him there taunting him, saying, 'Your life is in the hands of Mr B.V. . . . Everything you do depends on Mr B.V. . . . That man has been paying your father peanuts for thirty years . . . Your clothes don't fit you. . . . Are those second-hands Mr B.V.'s sons shed off for you?' until he, George, had snapped back, 'It doesn't matter,' and the teacher had taken off his glasses and glared at him and laughed and said, 'What, do you dare say that to a teacher?' and the teacher had laughed again and glared at him across the table and the teacher's face had suddenly fallen and the teacher had

taken him out to the next door classroom and said to the teacher there, 'You know what this boy said to me, you know what this boy said to me when I told him his life was in the hands of Mr B.V.? This boy said it doesn't matter!' and he had gone home and told his older brother about it and his brother had kept quiet until the day they fought when he broke his brother's mathematical compass and his brother had said with a bleeding nose, 'That's why you say it doesn't matter to teachers!'

Did you did you did you and he went out of the house and as he got out his father was standing the bicycle on the wall, back from work and his father grinned at him and took off two loaves of bread from the bicycle carrier, two squashed brown loaves of left-over bread some uncle who worked at a bakery had given him and his father said, 'How did your meeting with Mr B.V. go?'

'I left the envelope on the bed,' George said, and he went into the toilet, locked himself up and wept. **S**

Pumpkin Hour

Little Fanuel falls asleep
While sipping his milk
Invariably.

My husband is seldom hungry
When he hobbles into the house
Benumbed by beer.

This
by the way
happens
every day.

He battles bedwards
Or dares the T.V set
to stare him in the face
They blink each other blind.

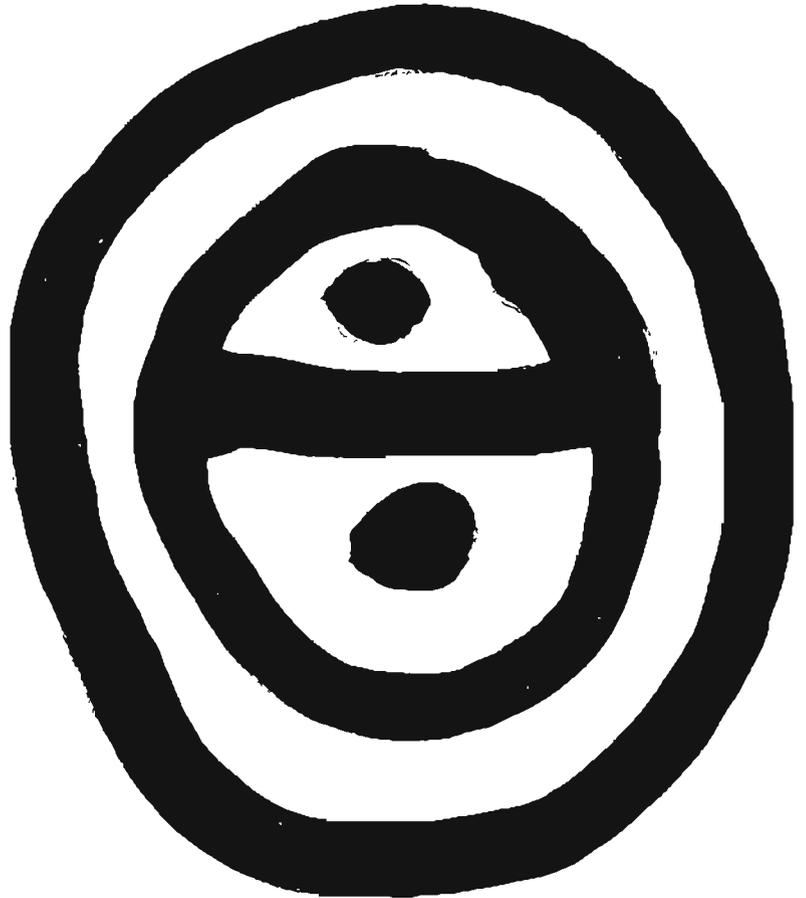
Pumpkin hour, at last
let me rest
And refresh . . . while my family sleeps
For, rise I must
At six
tomorrow
and catch a lift
to work.

I undress
And breathe in deeply, relieved
Then I slip into the sheets
Careful
Not to disturb the drunk.

But as sleep engulfs me
Fanuel gurgles from his crib
I rise to check
If he is wet or just awake.

He kicks gleefully at me
I rock him back to sleep
But back in bed
His father is awake
demanding a fuck.

Lilian Masitera, Zimbabwe



Dambudzo Marachera

Zimbabwe

Two Poems

Part One

The End of Green Baboon

Once upon a time
In a town at the end of the rainbow
There lived a black baboon
And a white baboon
And a green baboon

It was very hot
The sun was bloodshot
There was not a drop of rain
'Drought!' shouted the *Daily Baboon* newspaper

Black Baboon was hungry. Very hungry.
White Baboon was very very hungry.
Green Baboon was also hungry.
'There is nothing but hunger at the end
Of the rainbow,' said the *Daily Baboon* newspaper.

Black Baboon heard a voice.
The voice was the voice of his hunger.
The voice was coming from his stomach.
'A is Awful, B is Baboonery, And C is Cad!' said the voice.
'Shut up!' cried Black Baboon, 'Shut up!'

White Baboon was walking down the street.
He stopped and listened. He leaned over the gate.
Black Baboon was shouting 'Shut up! Shut up!'
White Baboon was very angry. He jumped over the gate.
He hit Black Baboon on the head.

Black Baboon forgot the voice of his hunger.
Black Baboon hit White Baboon. They fought. They bit.
They hit. They smashed. They scratched. They snarled.
Green Baboon was passing by. 'Stop!' he screamed 'Please stop!'
'What did you say?' said Black Baboon and White
Baboon together, 'What did you say?'
'Please don't fight' said Green Baboon, 'I can't stand it!'
Black Baboon looked at White Baboon.
White Baboon looked at Black Baboon.
They both looked at Green Baboon.
Their eyes were small and sharp.

'No!' screamed Green Baboon, 'No, don't!'
Green Baboon was very afraid. 'No! No -ooh!'
Black Baboon looked at White Baboon.
White Baboon looked at Black Baboon.
They looked at Green Baboon.
Their eyes were small and sharp.



They jumped on Green Baboon.
They hit. They bit. They scratched. They beat him up.
They hit him the whole day. It was like thunder.
The rainbow drained of all colour.
Black Baboon and White Baboon were eating Green Baboon.
White Baboon liked his Green Baboon with garlic.
Black Baboon liked his Green Baboon with chillies.

'Let us eat him in a civilised way,' said White Baboon.
Black Baboon agreed, 'Let us eat him in a civilised way.'
They carried Green Baboon into the kitchen.
They cut Green Baboon into chops and steaks.
They cooked Green Baboon with spices and dry white wine.
White Baboon made the salad.
Black Baboon made the custard.

They spread the tablecloth on the table out on the verandah.
They set the knives and forks. They placed two plates
And two serviettes and two comfortable chairs.
They sat down to eat. The moon was up, big and round.
Black Baboon put on a record on the gramophone.
'Ah, Beethoven!' sighed White Baboon listening to the music.

It was beautiful.
It was romantic.
It was the end of Green Baboon.



Part Two

Black and White Baboon Songs

It was very late when Black Baboon and White Baboon
 Finished their meal. The moon was very big and very bright.
 Black baboon and White Baboon were drinking brandy.
 It was very good brandy made in France.
 They lit up cigars and smoked.
 The cigars came from Havana . . . Black

Baboon began to sing softly:
 Moon of France
 Moon of Havana
 A rainbow moon.
 White Baboon sighed deeply. 'Sad about old Green Baboon, what?'
 Black Baboon began to hum the tune
 'O Sole mio'
 And White Baboon whispered to the moonbright night
 'Here today
 Gone tomorrow, what?'
 'More brandy?' asked Black Baboon.
 White Baboon looked at the moon. 'Yes, old boy,' he said.
 They drank in silence. A beautiful silence.
 They smoked in silence. A delightful silence.
 Black Baboon took out his guitar. He began to play.
 And this is what he sang:

On my way to school
 There is a terrible pool
 Full of giant fish, giant monsters
 Ugly toads, frightful frogs.

On my way to school
 The wind blew my books into the pool.
 Daddy would eat me alive
 Teacher would eat me alive



Staffrider Vol. 11 Nos.1,2,3,4 1993

Poetry

Because the pool had taken my books.
I stamped my foot
The fat was in the fire
I shook my fists at the wind
They would call me a liar
Because the pool had taken my books.

Black baboon sniffed. Tears were in his eyes.
White Baboon was miffed. Black baboon was too emotional, he
Thought. And Black Baboon went on singing:

I was small, alone, afraid.
The word was huge frightful.
I fled from Daddy. I fled from Teacher.
I ran away from school, ran away from home,
Because the pool had taken away my books.

The White Baboon stared at the bright stars
'It's a night for beauty and tears,
an evening for bliss and bother,
A dusky midnight for bitter joy', said the White Baboon.

The king drinks blooded wine
In Dumferline..

And White Baboon, the brandy in his brain,
thought of Hamlet, Nehanda, Polonius, Rosencrantz
And Cahminuka..
White Baboon liked songs of heroes, songs of bravery,
Songs of seed and deed - as who should sing
 'The stunning fight
 Of planet and star
 Earth, moon and sun.
 Green Baboon's bolted into the blue
 You and I are waiting our turn
 Who eat who the final candle burn?"

From *Scrapiron Blues*

Thoughts on a Rusty Nail (Recently Hit on the Head)

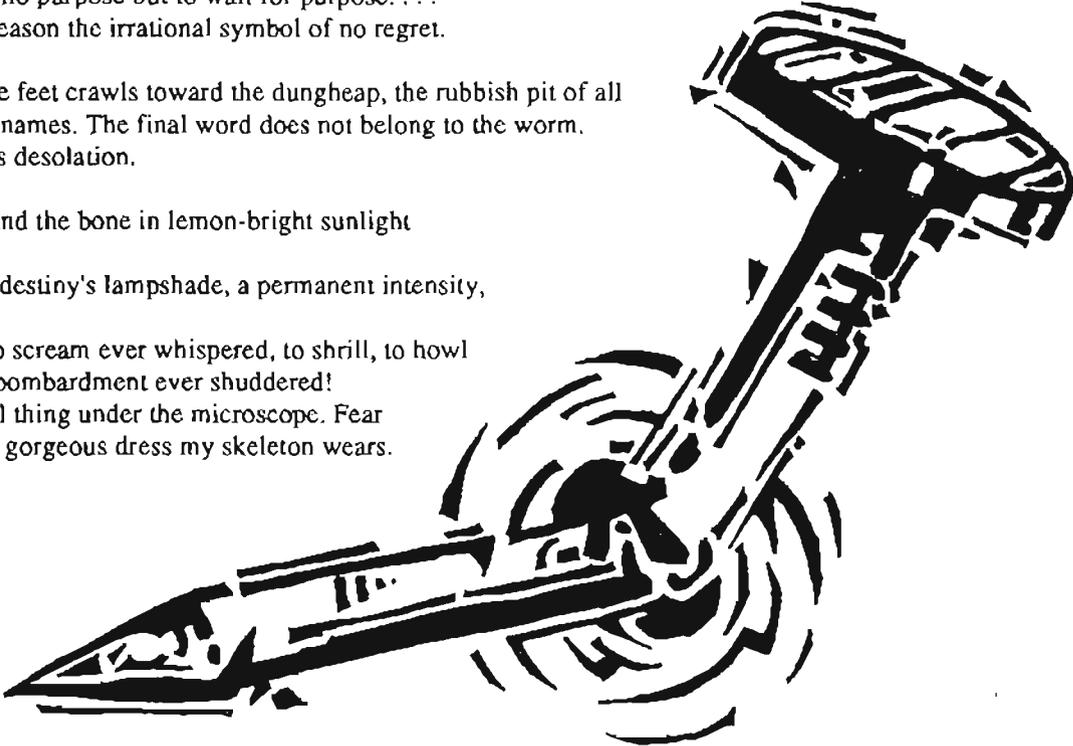
The brain is stuttering. The days are reduced to rubble. There is nothing to rain but water.
 Tell it the way it tastes. Pronounce it the way it touches. Let the singular fragrance waft softly into syllables.
 I am the end of the tunnel lost in my beginning. The answer to a question lost long ago.

I am the room in which something stirs, whispering my name. Your bare arm encircles not my body but a deadly vision of the image of you.
 From the difficult dark, points of light project thought into speech, into the terrain of terror, mystery of common sense.
 I am the small scream underneath the boot of the sky.

Toasted & bartered I await your voluptuous lips, your small cutting teeth, the raw sweet reeling leap into ecstasy, prelude to bathroom anxieties.
 Memory too hot to touch, the black-red magma which underlines every minute, feeling there is no purpose but to wait for purpose. . . .
 Till I resist to reason the irrational symbol of no regret.

History on three feet crawls toward the dungheap, the rubbish pit of all my yesterday's names. The final word does not belong to the worm.
 The last word is desolation.

But first, to found the bone in lemon-bright sunlight
 A pause. . . .
 To gain, under destiny's lampshade, a permanent intensity, dare I hesitate?
 To cry, what no scream ever whispered, to shrill, to howl what no dread bombardment ever shuddered!
 Fear is no small thing under the microscope. Fear is the flesh, the gorgeous dress my skeleton wears.



Nhamiwa's Magic Stick

Maria Munsaka

Zimbabwe

Once there was a polygamist who had two wives. He loved the first very much but treated the second wife cruelly. Her name was Nhamiwa and she had spiritual powers. With her magic stick she could separate the waters of the Zambezi. Every day she accompanied the polygamist to the river bank. She beat the water with her stick and immediately the river parted, leaving a dry pathway in the centre. Her husband could walk across without even getting wet. As soon as he reached the other side the waters closed. He made his daily journey to steal cattle. At sunset he would call across to Nhamiwa:

'Nhamiwa, Nhamiwa,
Beat and part the water!
I have three fat cattle
And the middle one is yours!'

Nhamiwa would beat the water so that he could cross. But when the succulent meat had been cooked and was ready to eat, she was always given bones.

One day the polygamist went down to the river as usual. Nhamiwa went with him and beat the water with her stick, just as he requested. He made the crossing and, at sunset, Nhamiwa heard him calling from the opposite shore:

'Nhamiwa, Nhamiwa,
Whose strength can part the water
Use your stick to let me cross
And you'll eat meat tonight!'

But Nhamiwa's ears were deaf. The polygamist called again. And again. Eventually Nhamiwa sang to him across the river.

'I will not beat the water
I will not let you cross
Today you'll be fixed!'

Suddenly there was a great commotion. The owners of the beasts had discovered who was stealing their cattle. Brandishing spears they surrounded the polygamist. He called to Nhamiwa yet again. This time his tone was desperate:

'Nhamiwa, Nhamiwa
They've come with sharp spears!
Beat the water with your stick
So I may safely cross!'

Nhamiwa did nothing. The owners of the cattle set upon the polygamist and killed him. His body was thrown into the river.

The Jungle Peacemaker

Blessing Museki

Zimbabwe

Once upon a time, when horses and donkeys had horns and rock-rabbits had tails so long they were the envy of other animals, in a jungle kingdom ruled by Lion, there lived a lazy but greedy hyena. Whilst other animals struggled all day long to catch their prey, the lazy hyena would be found lying comfortably in the cool shade of the lively forest. Come dusk and our dear old lazy hyena would be seen eagerly moving towards the nearest village, humming a nice tune, salivating. The next morning it would be left to the village to assess the loss.

This continued for quite a long time and the lazy hyena was happy and proud of himself. But one day he found his match. Arriving at the village, the hyena quickly found a fat lonely goat in a small desolate wooden shelter. Salivating, the hyena quickly broke into the shelter and helped himself to a nice supper. After resting, the proud hyena thought it was time to go. And oh! what a shock! There seemed to be no exit at all! And so the hyena spent the whole night looking for an exit — but it was all in vain. After a day in the shelter it dawned on the hyena that he was in a trap — and a trap it was! Another day passed, and another, then another, then...oh! Hunger began to talk to him in tongues, and no-one passed by to help.

Finally after a time that seemed like several decades, a time of untold suffering, the first thing to pass through there was a man — a villager.

'Sir! Sir!' the hyena called out to the Man 'come and help me out. I have been in this trap for about a week now. I am sick and hungry. Please help me.'

Man looked at the hyena and replied, 'You animals are dangerous, untrustworthy and inhuman. If I help you get out, you will turn on me. I swear by my father, who was buried in an anthill, I won't help you.'

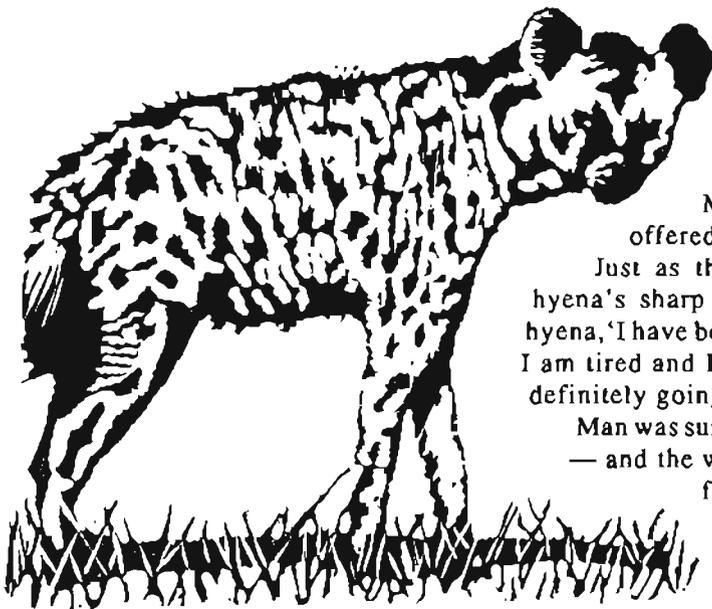
With these words, Man turned as if to go, but the hyena called him back.

'Please Man, help me out. Help a desperate soul. I promise I won't do any harm to you. Please I promise.' There was a pleading expression on the hyena's face and tears were rolling down his cheeks. The Man, feeling sorry also burst into tears and

offered to help the creature.

Just as the Man had finished opening the trap, the hyena's sharp claws sunk into his tender flesh. Said the hyena, 'I have been in this trap for quite a long time, I am sick, I am tired and I am hungry. I can't run after my prey, I am definitely going to eat you.'

Man was surprised. This was the last thing he had expected — and the worst! This was a case of biting the hand that feeds one. But he had a bold idea, 'No, please don't kill me. First let us go out and find three fellow creatures to give their views. If they think that it is fair that you eat me, I will not dispute it.'



Blessing Museki, Zimbabwe

'Okay,' agreed the hyena, still salivating. And off they went.

The first creature they met was a donkey, fresh from a day's hard labour. Man related his side of the story to the donkey without even adding a pinch of salt, to the satisfaction even of the hyena. He then asked the donkey to judge.

'You people are our worst enemies. You make us work hard for you and after that all we reap are the miserable stalks and chaff. You should be eaten,' was all the donkey said. And off he went.

The next creature they met was Mr. Moyo, and so when Man saw one of his own kind, his brother, one with whom he shared the same ancestors, he was very happy and his hopes were raised. He knew he was lucky. The hungry hyena meanwhile was not happy, as he thought he was going to lose his God-sent meal.

'My friend,' Man called desperately, 'please come and help me. I found this hyena in a trap and helped him out. Now he wants to eat me. What do you think?'

Mr. Moyo looked first at Man, then at the hungry hyena, then at the Man again and replied, 'We people are untrustworthy. They say a man's enemy is another man. If I help you today, you will turn against me tomorrow. You should be eaten.' And he was gone.

Man could not believe it. What? His own kind betraying him? Man turning against man? He was surely dreaming. To believe that he had been condemned, relegated to the graveyards of history, yet all this by another man? No, that could not be it!

The hyena, very impressed by what was to it a very fair judgement, was sharpening its teeth. . . why not? It was going to have one of the best meals of its life, and even more so after a very long period of involuntary fasting. Oh, what a perfect match! If a man thought it better to condemn another man to the horror of his menacing teeth, why should any other creature think otherwise, thought the hungry hyena.

Man trudged behind the hyena, as they sought a third judge. The hyena could not hide his happiness

and satisfaction at the judgements so far made. With two judges already on his side, the hungry hyena thought he had already won the case. Finding the next judge, was a mere formality. The Man was his meal, come rain or thunder.

A short distance from where they had met Mr Moyo, the two enemies bumped into a jackal. Man seeing his last flicker of hope in the jackal, quickly presented his case. 'This afternoon I was just moving along the path near the big Muende tree when I saw this hyena in a trap. I felt sorry for him, and rescued him, but now he wants to eat me. How do you see this, your Worship?

'Okay,' said the jackal. 'You Man were in a trap and hyena took you out? In that case he has every right to eat you.'

'No!' pleaded Man, trying to hide his anger at the jackal's lack of understanding. 'I found the hyena in the trap. I was not in the trap.'

The jackal seemed much more confused. 'Where did this happen?' he queried.

'Over there,' pointed the Man.

'Let's go there,' said the jackal, his patience obviously running out.

When they arrived at the scene of the incident, the jackal ordered the two to take their original positions before the incident, which the two quickly did.

'What about here?' the jackal asked, referring to the point where the hyena had got into the trap.

'It was closed,' replied the hyena

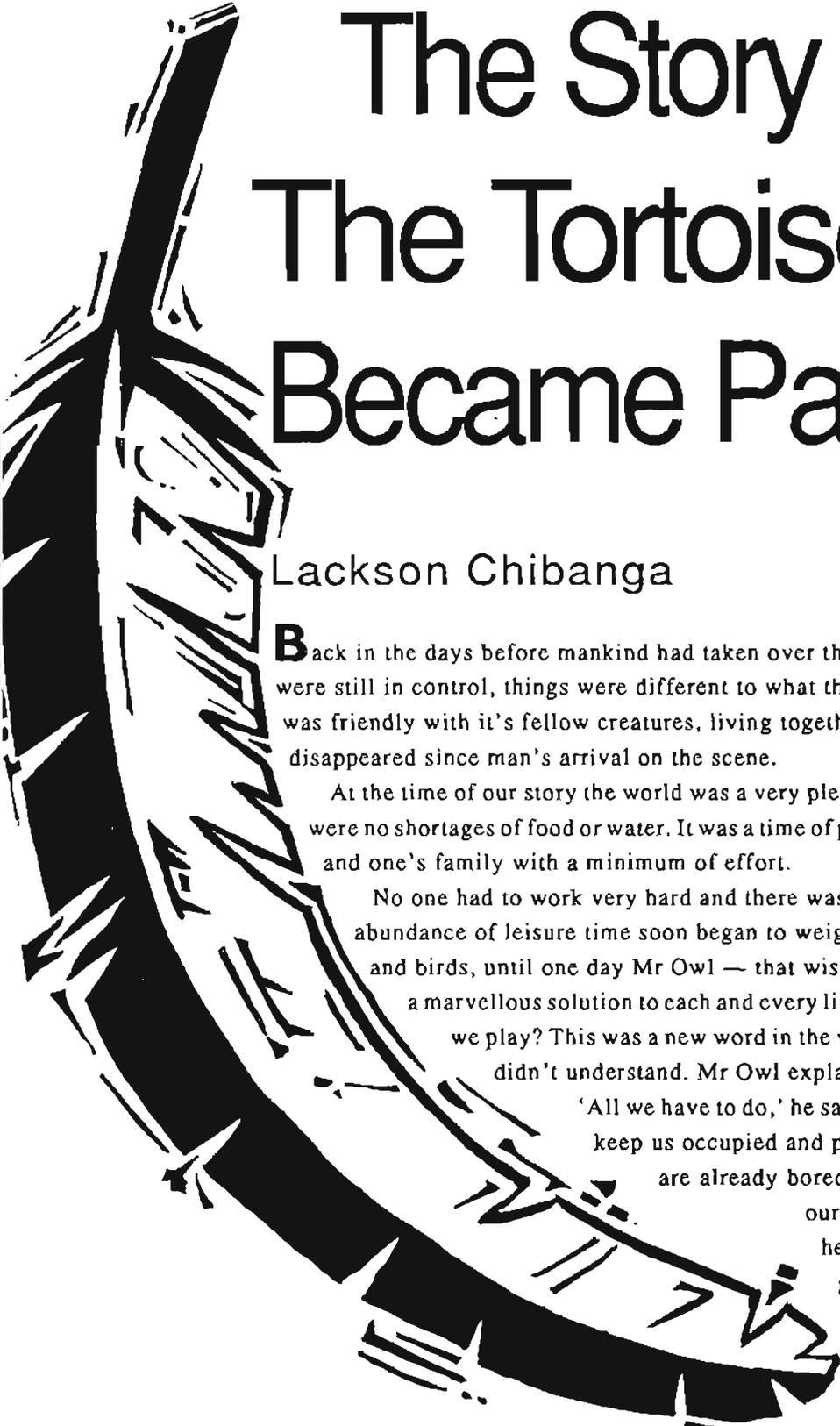
'Like this?' the jackal asked, closing the trap.

'Yes,' replied the hyena.

'So then what happened?' asked the jackal

'I was just walking by this path when. . .'

'You can continue your journey,' interjected the jackal, 'and you hyena, you can stay in your shelter. Goodbye the two of you.' With these words the jackal turned and went. He had done his part. He had saved the innocent and punished the guilty, all in an amicable and satisfactory manner. The Man had been saved and the hyena was back to square one, all because of greediness. **S**



The Story of How The Tortoise Shell Became Patterned

Lackson Chibanga

Zambia

Back in the days before mankind had taken over the world and when the animals were still in control, things were different to what they are today. Every living thing was friendly with its fellow creatures, living together in a harmony that has all but disappeared since man's arrival on the scene.

At the time of our story the world was a very pleasant place in which to live. There were no shortages of food or water. It was a time of plenty when one could feed oneself and one's family with a minimum of effort.

No one had to work very hard and there was plenty of spare time for all. This abundance of leisure time soon began to weigh heavily on many of the animals and birds, until one day Mr Owl — that wise and clever bird — came up with a marvellous solution to each and every living thing. Mr Owl said, why don't we play? This was a new word in the vocabulary of the animals and they didn't understand. Mr Owl explained:

'All we have to do,' he said, 'is invent a few games that will keep us occupied and prevent us from getting bored. We are already bored and beginning to argue amongst ourselves. This could be dangerous,' he continued, 'for soon we will begin to fight — another word the animals did not understand — among ourselves. Just yesterday,

in fact, I saw Mr Lion tell Mr Giraffe that if he didn't stop getting in the way at the waterhole, he would be eaten.'

The animals were aghast. Why would Mr Lion eat Mr Giraffe? How would he do such a thing? It was all very strange and completely foreign to the normally placid natures of the animals.

'Does fight mean to eat', they asked Mr Owl in unison, 'and how do we "invent" games?'

'No, fight does not mean to eat,' intoned the wise old owl, 'it means to argue with force. To hurt each other and maybe even kill each other. Then the danger would arise that the victor would eat the vanquished.'

'Oh dear,' gasped the assembled animals and birds, 'we cannot allow that to happen. So tell us, how do we invent "games"?''

Mr Owl said he didn't really know just yet, but he would give it some thought and let them all know in a week from that day.

So on the appointed day, the animals, who had been arriving from all over the world — some flying, others walking or crawling or slithering and others swimming to get there on time — all assembled before Mr Owl's place of residence. All those animals meeting in one place — no one could remember if it had ever happened before — made a tremendous noise. They all talked at once and few, if any, listened to what the others had to say.

Suddenly Mr Owl appeared and, raising one wing, brought the meeting to order. Silence reigned. Then he spoke, slowly and clearly so that all could hear what he had to say.

'I have given this problem much thought,' his voice boomed out, 'and I have come up with an idea which should prove popular with you all. We will play soccer' Then he went on to describe how this 'game' should be played, with eleven players on each side, a goal at each end of the field protected by one of the eleven players and the fact that each team should try to hit the ball into his opposing side's net.

It all sounded very exciting, but where would one find a ball?

'That,' said Mr Owl, 'is probably the least of our worries. Mr Python sheds his skin at regular intervals and if the skins are wound up tightly, they'll make very nice footballs.'

So it was that the animals of the world took up soccer and very popular it became too, with all the various animals and birds participating in the sport.

There was one animal, however, who didn't have a team to play for. It was Mr Tortoise — He was the only one of his species who was interested. The rest of the tortoises felt they were too slow for such a fast game. But this tortoise, with his shiny, smooth shell was an absolute soccer fanatic and what he lacked in speed he made up for in artistry. He was the finest goalkeeper around, but one without a team.

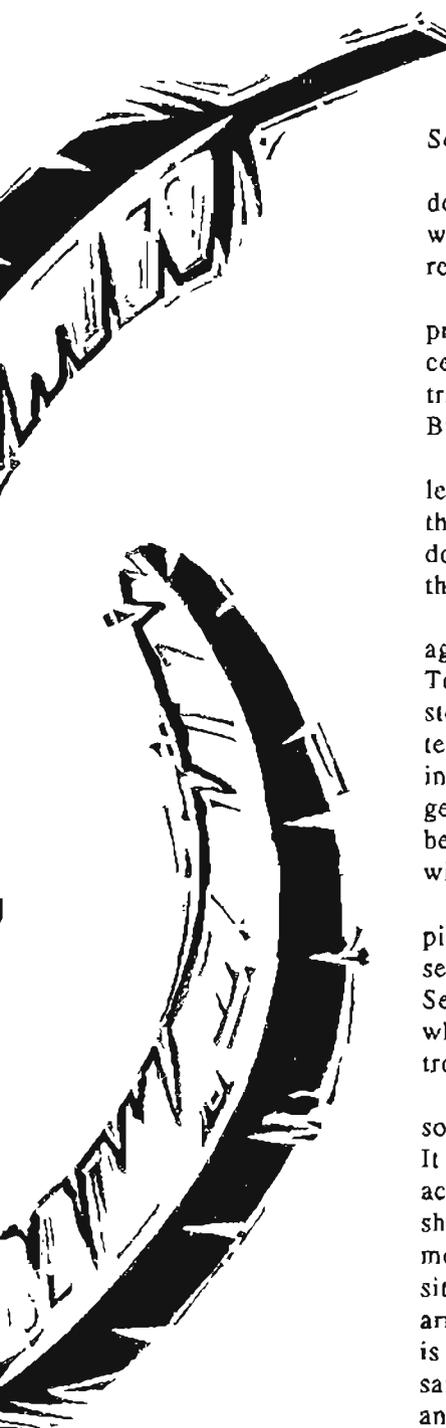
Now it so happened that the Eagles had a great team but no goalkeeper and one day the great birds approached Mr Tortoise and asked him to play for them. This was the opportunity Mr Tortoise had been waiting for and he accepted the invitation with alacrity.

Soon the Eagles were the best soccer team in the whole of the animal kingdom. There was no side that could beat them and this was largely because of the brilliance of Mr Tortoise in the goal. His acrobatics in the goal-mouth had to be seen to be believed; he was the star attraction of not only the Eagles team, but the entire Animal Kingdom League. Other animals would trek for days just for the opportunity of seeing the Tortoise in action.

It did not take too long before it was obvious that the Eagles needed stronger opposition, but there was none. They tried opposing them with Select Elevens, made up of the best of the rest. But none could beat the Eagles.

The dangers of conflict grew. As that wise old bird, Mr Owl, had warned, the animals were becoming disgruntled with the Eagles, for they always won. They wanted to see some opposition that was strong enough to beat them. So it was with great relief that Mr Owl was able to announce one day that the Earth had received an invitation to send its best team for the Championship of the Universe

The Story of How The Tortoise Shell Became Patterned



Series to be held in Heaven.

Once again there was unity in the Animal Kingdom on Earth. No one had any doubt as to which was the best team and all wanted the Eagles to represent the Animal in the Heaven Series.

It was at this time that another unexpected problem surfaced. All of the Eagles, with the exception of the goalkeeper, had no problem as far as transport was concerned: they would just fly there. But what about the Tortoise? He couldn't fly.

Everyone thought long and hard over this problem, until one day one of the Eagles came up with the answer. Each Eagle member of the team would donate some of his feathers to the Tortoise and then they should all fly off together.

Such a feat would be impossible in this day and age, but at that time it was not, so it was done. Mr Tortoise was overcome with emotion as they all stood there ready for the journey. He said, with tears streaming down his cheeks: 'Friends, this is indeed a great day for me and in honour of your generosity, I am changing my name. I now wish to be called 'All of You,' to show everyone that without you I could never make this journey.'

Then, amidst much cheering and whistling, clapping and feet stamping, the team that was to represent the Animal Kingdom left Earth for the 'Heaven Series'. They had the full support of all the animals who felt they had an excellent chance to win the trophy.

The team arrived in Heaven in good fettle and soon were on the field training for their first match. It had been a tiring day and when they reached their accommodation, all were hungry and tired. They showered and went into the canteen for their evening meal, and that's when the trouble started. After sitting around for some time, a flustered waiter arrived at their table with one dish and said, 'This is for all of you.' The Tortoise — greedy fellow — said, 'Thank you,' and set about the bowl of food and, before the eagles could move, finished off the lot. When they protested, the sly Tortoise said: 'But you all heard the waiter? He said this is for All of You and as you all know, that is now my name.'

Lackson Chibanga, *Zambia*

The Eagles grumbled, but couldn't fault the reasoning of the Tortoise, although they were still grumbling when they went to bed hungry that night. But not to worry; the first game was early the following morning and after a good night's sleep they were ready for their opponents in an early game, winning easily by five goals to nil. Tortoise had been called on to make very few saves and the Eagles moved on into the next round of the competition.

Then along came time for the evening meal and once again the waiter arrived at their table and said, 'This is for all of you.' Again Mr Tortoise said, 'Thank you,' and set about the single bowl with a will. This time the rest of the team were a bit more vociferous in their complaints, but again, the tortoise soothed them saying, 'You heard the waiter, this is my food. Your food must be coming.'

But no more food did come and when the Eagles went in search of food, they were told that there was no more. All the available food had already been dished up. Again they went to bed hungry, but now they were getting more than a little annoyed with Mr Tortoise. This was soon forgotten, however when Mr Tortoise cleverly turned the conversation around to the next days game. An important one this, for if they won, they'd be through to the semi-finals.

The third match proved to be a much tougher proposition than the previous one, Tortoise was called upon to use all his skill and brilliance to keep the ball out of the Eagle's net. He pulled off a number of spectacular acrobatic saves and before the game had ended the Eagles managed to scramble the ball into their opponents net, to take the match one — nil. It was a triumph for them all, but the majestic Eagles were quick to point out that had it not been for their goalkeeper, victory would not have been theirs. All this adulation was soon forgotten that evening, however, when once again Mr Tortoise grabbed the food when the waiter said once again, 'This is for All of You'.

The Eagles had had enough. They were tired, they were hungry and feeling weaker by the minute

from their lack of food. They cried in unison, 'If you are going to eat all the food, we are going back to Earth now, for we'll be too weak if we wait any longer. And we're taking back the feathers we gave you, for in our weakened state we are going to need all of our feathers to make the journey home.' With that they seized the Tortoise and stripped off the feathers they had given him.

'But how am I to return home now,' cried Mr Tortoise, you have taken all my feathers?'

'We don't know and we don't care,' retorted the Eagles, perhaps you should jump?' And with that they flew off, abandoning the Heaven Soccer Series and heading for home, desperate to get there before their wings failed them from the hunger they were suffering.

Left to his own devices and completely alone now because of his great greed, Mr Tortoise sought help from the other competitors. But they weren't interested, just glad that the Eagles had pulled out of the competition, because they knew with a goal keeper like Mr Tortoise, they had very little chance of winning the competition. Finally, in desperation, Mr tortoise jumped from Heaven in the hope that he would indeed fall to earth where his wife and family awaited him. He tumbled and spun and fell for a long time until at last he crashed back on the ground of Earth. His shell was shattered in many pieces, but somehow he had survived his great fall.

His wife was soon on the spot and seeing her husband's shattered shell, wept for him. Then she noticed signs of life and carefully she pieced the shell together and stuck it back into one piece and that is why today when you see a Tortoise, he is not only slow and hesitant, but his shell is made up of several pieces.

It's no longer smooth and shiny as it was in the days before Mr Tortoise swindled his friends the Eagles out of their food and had to jump back to Earth from Heaven. That is also why the animals and the birds are no longer friends; why the one will eat the other. It's the real reason too, why man has been able to take over the planet and rule over the animals and birds as he does today. 

THE RETURN OF THE DEAD ONE

Suleiman Cassamo

Mozambique



He came out of the burning sunset there at the edge of the world, through it's paths in the depths.

He went to the ultimate song of the *codornizes* birds, the last flight of the *rola* pigeon, a prayer for the toads of the swamps, the earth is covered in shadows and silence.

The dead ones, when they return, it is said, carry a cross heavy with the weight of their own tomb doubling up their shape. However, no one sees the return.

But behold this return. A heavy metal trunk in place of the cross. He comes dragging his feet in a pair of heavy boots, the dust forms large shapes on his sweaty cotton trousers, a blank gaze below the helmet: If it is true that the dead are tired, he should be very tired.

He puts the trunk on the ground. The bones.

squeak like the hinges of an old door when he straightens up to his full height. He is tall. His stiff limbs are slightly bowed, which gives him greater presence over the ground.

He stares at the house, closely. An axe blade hangs in the air like a ray of light, and in an arc, explodes against the dry tree trunk. A woman, between two palhota dwellings, splits firewood. When he fixes on her, the fire revives his dead eyes.

'Hodi!'

The breeze sends the feeble voice back into the setting sun.

'Hoodii!' he calls again with more gusto.

The axe hangs in the air. The old woman turns, slowly, and searches for the person behind the voice. Then eyes bulging, body trembling, the axe drops to the ground.

'Hoyo, hoyo.' The Dead One hopes to hear that greeting. But no-one before has ever welcomed a ghost.

She stays there, absolutely still, hair on end and chest without air.

Seven years before, on an afternoon just like this one Maria, her daughter-in-law, stopped her task of grinding mortar in the air and said:

'There is a man coming.'

'Who is it?' The sieve dropped from the fingers of the old woman.

He has the habits, a newcomer, an *ndzava*. The old woman complains about her legs and the man laments the cough, but nothing too serious.

'Moisés died in the mine,' informed the newly arrived, gathering his voice. He knew the friends, he worked in another compound.

Moisés, *mafunda-djoni*, an inexperienced youth on a mine contract, dreamed of a gramophone, expensive clothes, comfortable blankets and shiny trinkets, pleasant smelling bread protected for days against the mould, the dough dissolving deliciously in his mouth.

Ever since he was a child, Moisés had looked with admiration at the returning immigrants, the *magaças*, getting off the train from Manhica, suitcases full, eyes shining with pride. And the Country

of the Rand began to attract him.

'I'm not going to school any more,' he decided. 'The teacher hits me too much.'

'You're going to become a donkey carrying sacks,' sentenced his mother.

'Not a donkey, a miner. What must I study for?'

And he added to this with his broad shoulders: 'I will return with *massonica*, the magical powers to sweep up all the people!'

He left at the age of nineteen without a goodbye. Not a letter since then. Notice of his death arrived, his family dressed in mourning. It was still while in those clothes of suffering that the Dead One encountered the aged woman.

There is a strength which magnetises. Dominated by that strength, eyes wide and misty with emotion, she advances, step by step, towards the Dead One. The strong bones squeeze her in an embrace.

'Don't cry mother, I did not die. . .'

She had already fainted. 



Essop Patel

South Africa

Two Poems

Nashrin, Brush Stroke Your Cheek

On remembering an Iranian friend, wherever she may be

let Paloma
Picasso
brush-stroke
your copper tone
cheeks
for you are
homeward
bound
streaking
a rainbow
in the tresses
of spring-rain
eager
for Persian
slopes
and the *clickety*
click of mating
crickets

let the wild
flowers dab
your jaded
cheeks
for you have
zigzagged
frontierless
night-skies
experienced
adversities
of exile and
homelessness
scattering your dreams
from your
fingertips

when you
return to
Teheran
will you
hide your
beautiful legs
in black *chuddar*
and colour
your ashen
cheeks with
saffron
flowers?

SEX-SEA-SCAPE

In the cupric darkness
the surfing waves nudge
the impressions of her bodyprint
as she touches a pebble,
sighing, 'take me! take me!'

In the sybaritic night
the pearly waves gentle
and yet puissant swirling
through her quivering limbs

and she dreams
of becoming a pearl
in an oyster ...

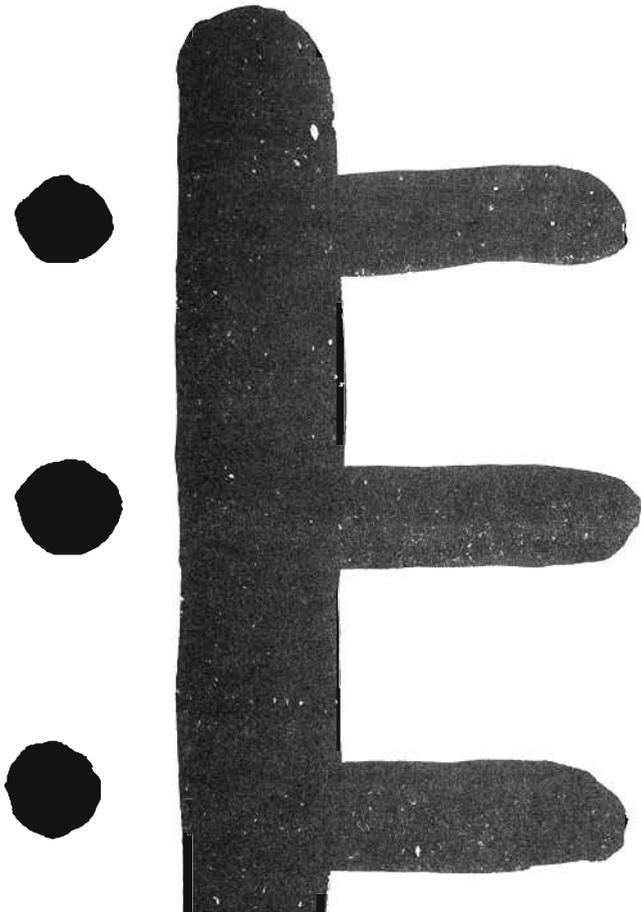


Poetry

Night In Town

Arm-in-arm we strolled
The town-lights robbed the moon
As lovers we hugged and kissed
And moved along
In the serenity
Which man had created
Music from the nightclubs rammed the air
We walked arm-in-arm
Admiring what man had created
Drowning ourselves

Amon Olisi, Zimbabwe



Mella Bella

Remembrance of you
is not the mirror to place
before me your portrait,
lest it sap away the energy
of my memories;
like if I had to eye you
through the keyhole.

Our curled understanding
of how far apart we are
is like sighting the hazy bottom
of a crystal ball:
clear but distant
like chandelier bulbs.

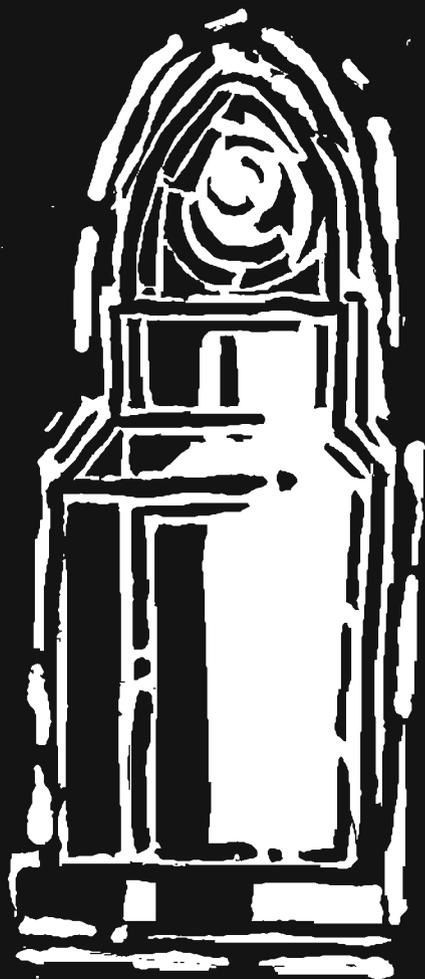
Yet from this quiet room's corner
I seek the landscape
and the cityscape
of your smiles.

Mafika Pascal Gwala, South Africa

Behind God's Back

Sandra Braude

South Africa



The Sabbath is an island in time, a day of rest, when one is required to emulate God. For six days He laboured and, on the seventh day, He rested. He made all the things and creatures of the earth, culminating on the sixth day. Then He was entitled to rest. And so is the ultimate of his creations — man.

On Saturday, 10 April 1993, little groups of worshippers were returning home after the Sabbath service. They were walking slowly, and chatting amongst themselves, as befits pious Jews. To the synagogue you run, with joy and alacrity; when you leave, you dawdle, as though held back by ties to the house of God.

'It's amazing,' said one. 'Do you know that ours must be the only shul in the world where they give a *bracha* on *Pesach*?'

'And what a *bracha*!' said another, smacking his lips. 'Three different kinds of herrings. And that cake -- did you taste that chocolate cake?'

'I did,' said his friend. 'I wonder where it came from?'

'Must have been Vered's,' interpolated a third.

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'Only Vered could have made a cake like that.'

For a moment there was an appreciative silence. When God made the world, He, in his wisdom, did not neglect the possibility of chocolate cake.

The intellectual in the group piped up. A thin, ageing man, he always had something to contribute.

'The *sedra* today was very interesting,' he said. 'You see, Moses wanted to see God. But of course he couldn't. It would be too much. No man could survive that. The Almighty told him that outright. "You can't see my face," he said, "but I'll allow you to see my back as I pass." Now, what do you think that means?'

The group passed down the street, arguing the point vehemently. A couple were still stuck on the idea of the chocolate cake, but those we shall disregard as of little importance.

At the corner the group split. Some went to the south, others to the east, where they had to cross a bridge over the highway. Cars whizzed past underneath, hurrying to their destinations. A slip street marked the exit from the highway. Here cars had to stop and allow pedestrians to cross over. The thin man crossed first.

Several cars had stopped. In the first sat a plump, yellow-haired woman. She shouted loudly at the man, and gesticulated wildly.

'These bloody drivers,' commented one of the pious. 'She's clearly Jewish. What does she have to drive for anyway on the Sabbath? She should be in *shul* like the rest of us. And why does she have to behave so badly, making a spectacle of herself like that? Does she have to shout and wave her arms around like a mad woman? Why doesn't she just sit quietly and let pedestrians have the right of way? I suppose she thinks because she's sitting behind the wheel that she owns everything. I've got a good mind to tell her what I think of her!'

He walked quickly up to the car with this intention in mind. But as he approached, the words he heard did not make sense. Instead of the woman warning pedestrians to keep out of her way, as he would have expected, she was shouting excitedly,

'He's been killed! They shot him! They shot him

through the head! He's dead!'

'Hey! What's that you're saying? He's dead! Who's dead?'

'Hani!' she shouted, 'Hani! Chris Hani! He's dead!'

'Hani? Head of the Communist Party? He's dead, you say? How's that? When? Who killed him? Who shot him?'

The yellow-haired woman was weeping. 'I don't know,' she said. 'I just heard it on the news. They said he was dead. That someone had shot him through the head. I don't know... this is terrible... terrible... terrible...' She revved her car and disappeared in a haze of exhaust smoke down the road.

The thin man whistled between his teeth. 'Whew. This is bad. Oy vay, this is bad. This is what we need in our lives? Hani, the head of the Communist Party shot dead?' He shook his head.

'So? He was a communist,' said one.

'So? So he was a communist? So what?' asked the thin man. 'Wasn't he a human being? Wasn't he one of God's creatures? And so what if he was a communist? Do you remember how many of us were communists in the old country? And isn't a man entitled to his beliefs, whatever they are?'

'So what's going to happen now?'

'*Freg mir*,' said the thin man, 'ask me another. Who knows? But whatever happens, we know it won't be good for the Jews. We remember the deaths and the pogroms in the old country. One madman starts something, and who knows where it ends?' He shook his head again, and sighed.

Then he continued. 'In the *sedra* it says that God would not let Moses see His face. He passed by, and let Moses see His back. What does this mean?' He paused. 'It means,' he said, 'that one cannot see what is going to happen in the future. One can only look at things that have already happened and then judge them.' His eyes looked into space. 'Who knows,' he said, 'what the death of this Hani will bring about?'

The next week began to show what the death of Hani

would bring about. Anger began to rumble about the country. This had been a leader. Even those who had not realized it before, realized it now. He was loved and revered by many, and held as a figure-head, a symbol of freedom by many more.

The name 'Hani' was on everyone's lips.

The President appeared on the television screen. His face, normally totally controlled and devoid of emotion, was sombre. 'We regret this dramatic event,' he said. Only dramatic? Not lamentable? Not tragic?

But drama was indeed in the air. Within a week there would be a funeral, the likes of which the country had never seen before. Then, seventy-five thousand people would converge in ordered formation, would cram every inch of space of the massive stadium in Soweto, the great, black, shadow city of Johannesburg, would show their fists to the sky, and raise their voices in protest. 'We are the people,' they would cry, 'we, the legitimate. We will no longer tolerate injustice. We will prevail.'

Their leaders would arrive on the scene in stately fashion, driving in the newest model Mercedes. Statesmen from all over the world would be there, declaring solidarity. In sombre mood they would stand, awaiting the funeral cortège. This would wind, in stately fashion, onto the stadium-grounds. The ornate coffin would be unloaded, huge bouquets of flowers adorning the white hearse. Freedom soldiers would carry the coffin, with great care, to a dais, followed by a satin cushion, bearing the Cap of Freedom. Then, to the solemn music, the soldiers would perform the funeral march around the stadium, slow and measured, arms swinging, legs rising. Round the stadium, slowly and rhythmically they would march, while the people shouted and saluted. Soon they would be back at the dias where the coffin lay in state, under a yellow canopy, on which the words 'City Funerals' were embellished, and next to which stood a man, naked from the waist up, except for the symbolic chains which enclosed him.

Then the leaders would rise, one after another, and speak to the people. The leaders of the tripartite alliance — the ANC, the SACP and COSATU. Their

messages, although the words differed, were all the same.

'Amandla! Power! We shall prevail! We, the people, shall prevail! We have suffered! We have lived under injustice! We shall rise! The future is ours!

'Viva! Viva! Viva the ANC! Viva the SACP! Viva COSATU! Viva the memory of Chris Hani! His body is dead, but his spirit shall live! Viva! Viva! Viva Chris Hani! Long live! Long live!'

And the people would reply, 'Viva! Viva! Long live! Long live!'

They would rise and spontaneously began to toyi-toyi, that wonderful, energetic dance, that must surely make revolution in Africa South the most rhythmic revolution in history?

The speeches that would follow would rouse the people into a spiritual frenzy. 'We are the people! The land is ours! We are the legitimate! Our leaders are the legitimate leaders! The present government is not legitimate! On to the future! Viva! Amandla!' The cause was righteous, timeous, supported by messages from the whole world.

'I have not time to read you all the messages,' one speaker would say, 'but the world is with us, with our cause. I would like to read you just one — from Fidel Castro.'

And the people would shout, 'Viva Castro! Viva Castro!'

Many generations back the Greeks used to converge on Epidaurus. There they watched, and participated in the tragic events that befell great men — kings and emperors and generals — who fell at the hands of fate, or under the impact of their own tragic flaws. And the Greeks watched, with bated breath, involved in the events, and experiencing a catharsis from the suffering by means of pity and terror. And so it would be with the people in the Soweto stadium. There they would relate to and involve themselves with the greatness, and the tragic death of Hani, academic, soldier, leader, human being, one of theirs. And by so doing, by focusing on the fractured earthly remains in the revered coffin, they would purge themselves, and

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be empowered to move on to the future.

Outside the stadium, those who had not gained entrance, would riot and loot and burn.

On the outer wall, where the words CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS were scrawled, someone would put a stroke through the T:

CHRIS DIED FOR OUR SINS.

But all this was afterwards, a sort of culmination of the event. A funeral is a rite of passage, a requisite killing of one's dead. For the week before there was only anger, and the expression of anger.

It did not take long to apprehend the assassin. A woman who had been passing heard the shots, saw a car skid away, took down the number and gave it to the police and, within hours, a man had been arrested.

A Pole, an immigrant, someone who would seem to have no reason for such an act. But there was the car, and there was the gun, and there were the powder marks, and there was the death. Can one ever explain away such an act? Can one ever truly account for human behaviour?

The newspapers commented on his origin. A Pole, in the country for only a few years. Was his anger against the Communists, who had taken away his family's possessions — before he was born, in fact? Was there a mental aberration? Someone mentioned that Verwoerd's assassin had also been a foreigner. Was there some sort of subtle connection between the two events? The newspapers also spoke of his personality. 'We cannot believe it,' said his colleagues. 'Such a gentle man — loved animals, would not hurt a fly.' Should one add, in passing, that Hitler had been known to kiss babies? And that murder is always murder?

Perhaps the saddest thing of all was the revival of a racism that had seemed to be giving way to a more humanistic approach. The black leaders spoke vociferously against the assassin.

'We cannot forget that it was a white hand that pulled the trigger.' And the apparent amelioration of, 'But we must remember that it was white eyes

that bore witness,' also had racist overtones.

The period of mourning started almost immediately. A day of marches and demonstrations was called for. How else does one overcome one's anger if not by means of activity? March, comrades, march! Sublimate your frustrations into something productive.

The silent people were silent no more, the invisible ones invisible no more. South Africa was alive, moving. People joined together in masses, the likes of which had not been seen before. They moved, in solidarity, chanting and toyi-toying. Being denied the right to put a cross on ballot-paper in expression of their desires, they marched.

White fears, supported by military might, responded. Police stood by, their guns at the ready. Helicopters buzzed overhead, drowning out the chanting. Television cameras showed people like swarms of ants, of bees, fascinating but terrifying.

Suddenly there were mobs. And mobs are uncontrollable, beasts let loose. A common intelligence, a common mind, that says, 'There! There! That way to the Bastille! The Ghetto! The arsenals!'

And the mobs moved.

And the media took hold.

Throughout the world viewers sat in front of their television sets, watching, while mobs swarmed down city streets, rioting, looting, destroying. A captivating shot of a youth, running up the side of a shop-window and kicking it in. Strength, virility, beauty. A flower of evil. Grabbing and running, and shots from waiting police guns. Scampering away with goods, fighting over a clothes-dummy. The loss of reason.

In another scene a young, Afrikaans man stands, bewildered, stammering his response to the camera. 'Man, I was standing in my lounge, and suddenly this group of people breaks in. Quick-quick, everything in my house is gone. I runs down to the gate to call the police, and it's all gone!' Around him is chaos and emptiness — broken lamps, smashed furniture, smashed dreams.

Fifty thousand people close in on a police-station

in Soweto, and the police open fire. Two marchers are killed, shot in the back as they are running away. More anger. Anger precipitates anger. 'What right had the police to shoot on peaceful marchers?'

Memories of Sharpeville, when so many died, shot in the back with dum-dum bullets.

And fear? Families, predominantly Afrikaans, say, 'If the police will not protect us, then we will protect ourselves.' And the sale of firearms soars.

The youth-leader stands. His hand movements are specifically expressive: 'de Klerk — No!' he shouts, his thumb pointing down, and, 'Kill the Boers!' He begins to toyi-toyi and, round about, the toyi-toying starts.

As the mob mood takes hold, anger and fear predominate.

The Sabbath has come around once again. The island in time. So much trouble in the world, but here is a haven of peace. It is inevitable that this should be, unless the world is to end, and we are not there yet. We still have to wait for *Moshiach*, and he will only come when either utter goodness or indefatigable evil prevail.

The little synagogue emanates an atmosphere of calm and quiet joy. The congregation is intent on reciting the *amidah*, the standing prayer, ancient and beautiful. Eyes close, bodies sway, lips mouth silently.

Then the *chazan* begins the chant. 'Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh — 'Holy, holy, holy...', and all rise to their toes, in emulation of the seraphim and the need to reach towards the Almighty.

The strains of song are taken up by the congregants. 'Who is like God? There is none like God,' 'Lord of the universe, you are with me, and I shall not fear.'

As the service ends, the women kiss the covers of their prayer books, which are tenderly laid on the shelves. Then they walk out, chatting, and wishing their friends a '*shabbat shalom*', a sabbath of peace, and join the menfolk for the after-service *bracha*. A

blessed meal, for the more observant of the worshippers have not yet eaten, and they look forward eagerly to breaking their fast.

The tables are, as usual, well-laden, for this is an affluent community. Cakes, biscuits, herring and little balls of *gefilte* fish are spread out on the long tables. Cold drinks and tea are there, and one member carries round a bottle of whiskey, which he liberally pours into proffered glasses. There is laughter, and sounds of clinking cutlery, and then a fork is rapped sharply against a bottle.

'Please, please. It is time for the rabbi to talk.'

'Nu — so who's stopping him?' More laughter.

The rabbi stands behind the dais. As he leans on it, he sways forward and back.

'Good *shabbes*, everyone. It is good to see you all here, and I am looking forward to this opportunity of speaking to you.'

He pauses and takes off his glasses to clean. The lenses are thick, and his weak eyes look distorted behind them.

'I have something very important to say. You know that I do not hold back when I feel strongly about things. There are some of you who get upset, but this I must take the chance of. So, please bear with me.' He pauses, and puts his glasses back on, better to see

his community.

'Tomorrow,' he said, is *Yom ha-Shoah* — the Day of the Holocaust. Now who has made this *Yom ha-Shoah*? That is what I want to know. Who has set the date for this? I will tell you — it is a secular date. It is secular people who have decided on it. Where did they get the date from? That is what I want to know.'

One of the congregants sitting at the main table bites his thumb.

'Rabbi,' he says, 'tomorrow is the anniversary of the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto. That is what the date is.'



'And so?' asks the rabbi rhetorically. 'Firstly, it is **not** the date of the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto and, secondly, what if it is? What has that to do with the Holocaust?'

'Rabbi,' says the same man patiently, 'the president of Israel will be present at the Warsaw Ghetto tomorrow to participate in its uprising. Is he wrong?'

'I'm sorry,' says the rabbi, throwing up his hands, 'but he is wrong. It is not the right date. And in any case, I ask you again, what has that to do with the Holocaust?'

The man tries again. 'It's a symbol, Rabbi,' he says. 'Six million of our people died, nameless. They simply walked into the gas ovens. At least in the Warsaw Ghetto they fought. They died, but they fought.'

The rabbi shakes his head.

'That is exactly what I am saying,' he said. 'They fought. They took up arms. Who told them to take up arms? Is this what God wanted? If God saw fit to cut off so many Jews, perhaps there was a reason for his doing so. Who can say? Is it up to me? Is it up to you?'

'But I tell you this, that God did not want his people to act like the animal that slew them. If Hitler, may his name be blotted out, was the instrument of destruction, then maybe there was a reason for it.'

Now his audience is listening intently.

'What I am saying, is that it is not right that a secular date should have been set for the commemoration of the Holocaust. Do you realize that now is the month of Nissan? That there may be no *hazkorim* during this period.'

'The secular may not take it upon themselves to determine God's will. I shall not be present at the memorial services for Holocaust victims at the cemetery tomorrow, and I call upon you, my congregants, not to be there either.'

There is some mumbling, but general silence, as grace is said, and the community disperses. They begin walking towards their homes, in little groups.

Suddenly from the bottom of the synagogue

garden a noise is heard — voices raised in song. It is the voice of Africa. Some take no notice, simply shrug their shoulders and walk away. But some prick up their ears, and hurry down the garden slope.

The lower lawn of the synagogue verges on the wide, multi-laned highway. Usually traffic swishes past at great speed, but today there is no traffic. Instead there are people, masses and masses of people, walking arm-in-arm, and in controlled fashion towards the city. Some are singing, but most are silent, intent on the march. They look tired, but there is a spirit that emanates tangibly from them.

'My God,' says the thin man, who is standing at the front, watching. 'These are the marchers. They have come all the way from Alexandra, and are going into the city. D'you know, that must be at least twenty kilometres? And nowhere to stop, and nothing to drink on the way. What spirit these people have!'

The marchers go by, rank after rank after rank. They stare at the onlookers standing on the verge above them. Some smile. If there has been anger, it has long since worn away.

One of the marchers raises his fist in salute. 'Peace,' he shouts, and the cry is taken up by the marching crowd. 'Peace! Khotso!' cry the marchers, amidst a forest of fists. And the thin man responds, 'Shalom!'

'Peace! Peace!'

A Jewish woman, a survivor of the Holocaust, is weeping. 'Peace!' she cries, and thrusts her hand in salute through the rows of razor wire that surround the synagogue property. The sharp little blades catch and cut her arm, and huge gouts of blood drip onto the highway below.

'Peace! Peace!'

The marchers trudge past. A contingent of military vehicles bearing soldiers, their guns at the ready, rolls along behind them.

The thin man shrugs.

'God never shows his face,' he said. 'You can only see his back, from behind.' 

Shot By Camera

August the 3rd
 Day 1 General Strike
 3rd Avenue, Alexandra
 Trevor, Gerry and myself;
 The SKY NEWS crew.
 Recording another day of history,
 another day of the future.

We saw the two Casspirs
 squeal around the corner.
 Like excited bloodhounds.
 Two shelled-out cars
 barricading the road.
 A crowd of drunken residents,
 hurling beer-fueled
 abuse
 as the police wrestled youths
 into the mouths of the yellow beasts.

One resident said,
 'These cars have been here
 since last week,
 the children were playing
 on them, they didn't put them there.'
 One mother cried,
 'My child is in there.'
 One rubber bullet came
 hurtling along the ground,
 sniffing for shins,
 this way and that.



We hid,
 and filmed YOU
 from round the corner,
 You were in the window
 on the second floor,
 You had an R1 rifle,
 your silhouette
 suggested you were
 a tough soldier.
 The police wouldn't do anything
 if we showed them the film,
 you're just a silhouette,
 besides,
 they didn't do anything then.
 But remember,
 tough soldiers die too,
 when shot in the back by cowards.

I still have the rubber bullet,
 it's next to my bed,
 on the table where I burn
 incense every night.
 It's hard and cold.
 It still smells of fear and hate.
 I picked it up,
 it smells of cordite and rubber.
 It was as tough as steel
 and big.

Poetry

The police,
ploughing the cars
with their yellow bulldozers.
The residents, in high spirits,
sitting on the cars and pushing
them back onto the road.

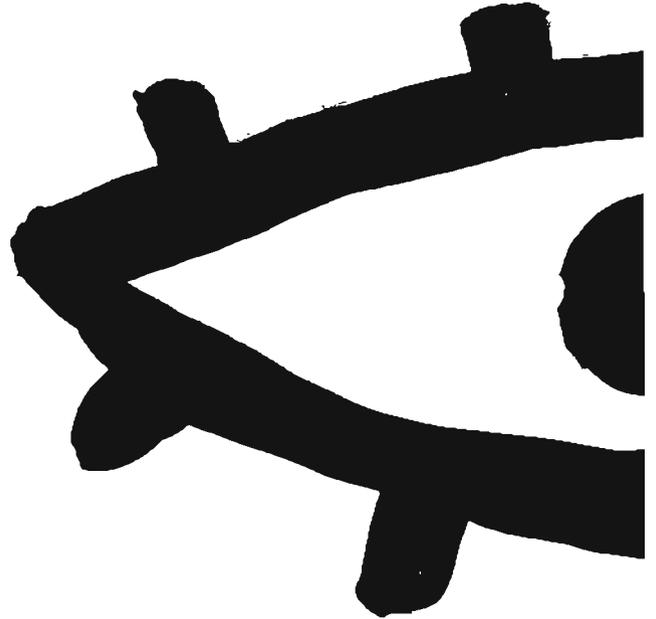
A small crowd of Inkatha supporters,
chattering hate
at the top end of third,
not at the police, but at
the ANC residents.
After chaining the cars
to their vans,
the police drove off.
The residents returned
to the shebeens.
The shebeens,
making a roaring trade
on day 1 of the general strike.

The police returned,
this time to the top end of 3rd.
They sat chatting
with the Inkatha residents.
We'd heard the rumours,
you know,
passing guns to Inkatha.
We thought we'd got it on film.
When the police saw us filming,
they drove away, so did we.
But they were back five minutes later,
so were we.

I was in the middle
of the four-way stop,
full view of the Kwa Madala hostel
and then it came.
Like I was in Beirut
or Northern Ireland.
But I wasn't.
I was at a 4-way stop in Alex.
4 gunshots,
the first clear and loud,
then 3 confused, together,
as if the bullets
were a pack of dogs

racing up the barrel
to taste blood first.
Startled I shouted to Trevor,
the cameraman
'What the fuck was that?'
'You, they're shooting at you!
Get back in the fucking car.'

Steve Brimelow, South Africa



IN TO THE DEATH ZONE

Lesego Rampolokeng

South Africa

i started out writing a story. trying to weave webs of stingray words hammered to the point of truth where time & place meet history at the counterpoint of their eternal strife. & now i've got nothing to prove just have to groove whipping up a storm of sound where the typewriter clicks in battle mode on the sights i paint. visions i strive to point out on the map of experience. & now there's nothing idle here none static i can tell no riddles. so this strip of flesh unwinds off my bones & moans its way into print. feed on what you need & throw whatever lacks meaning to you into the trashbin.

the age of reason turned thought into a prison put philosophers to the fire caused a raze & rages off the pages of time carted off trailer-loads of descartes' sense. without psychological discourse the gods of sense waxed verbal smelling of fish, creatures of the dark kinkdom. it was not random chance they fire-danced around the burning human. it didn't start in the south of slavery. the jonah man was in the mouth of man thinking it a whale. all the mental poison there to inhale oh god, calling it caliban the nature of man by virtue of being black. shakespeare poked his dick into a hole altogether black & spent his entire life repenting for that transgression against the racial purity of the day. stand back i'm coming in through the black door of history. all that fiction gave me mental constipation. the soul of a nation lost in the cesspit of hate was found in a swiss bank account. musi oa tunya thundering smokescreens on the myths of a colonization that bought hotels in switzerland. zimbabweans get cut-rates at some place there

bought by the ruling family. eat the fruits of your labour vegetable man. egypt was shipped across the oil-trail channel where blood tracks cover the face of iraq.

sankie frail backs become rail-tracks my father coughed his lungs into the space between sanity & my life while from the mine the gold 'rode on his broken spine' to the surface of commerce. & now the judas eye of finance glitters without remorse reclines on a bed of corpses snivelling about recession but when you access the situation it's no recess in the deaths marching up the graph of progress. on the finger of capital.

the girl next door is gone crazed on soap operas watching celluloid nymphomaniacs parading their sex of rottenness in purity of purpose, doped hanging on to hope knowing her lot can only be poor. some boys run in a daze after their days gone up in smoke of the truck they just set ablaze in a portrayal of the rules of repossession. mother push me back in but no...wait...there's nuclear waste in there. of the power race machine.

complexes tamper with my reflexes got to oil my muscles but it's such a hassle to take on the fucked situation. on tv they speak of hormones in a riot...someone's just kicked a man in the genitals & he vomits thinking his testes will jump out of his mouth he shuts it tight. they speak of virginal tightness where i screw my head in my hands until it feels it'll run out of my cock. my communes run out of the mission gone after the fashion of all past radicals now they all queue at the gates of the first



Lesego Rampolokeng

national bank stadium hoping they'll be there when it rains american dollars. it takes shit to kick my art. & the smell of blocked sewer systems. my rhythm was created in the toilets of the nation it stinks of the rot of my society.

immunising themselves against death in feeding on human flesh.

the land burnt the smoke rose to heaven & god licked his lips in relish. the boys grabbed the white preacher put him under his car & called him father motor mechanic. & the rosary wailed jesus screamed on his bosom but the heavens didn't come down to put the fire out. religion is the opiate not the fire extinguisher. he burnt & turned to char & turned his psalms black in his hour of need & the youths sucked in his dying smell & took it home to eat with their supertime pap. for some it was an aphrodisiac, they went on a rape-spree. a white journalist was abducted outside the stadium while the leaders made impassioned speeches about racial tolerance within, dragged off into the bush, choked with her camera straps, & raped by a gang of twelve. that was the lucky number in the bible. jacob looked down & called them his adopted children. & in the northern suburbs they went grey when the 'kill the boers' chant erupted in the living room.

once again scott heron the revolution is in quarantine. revolutionaries act out a part on the television screen. i'm going in to the death zone.

fed the legend of the big cock, 'all the kaffirs want is to fuck white cunt will you let a kaffir near your sister...?' they grabbed a man cut off his phallus sliced off his tongue so they could ascertain the theory that they are interchangeable. & of the same size. when it was reported in the news segments of the nation played with its own genitals. the semen dribbled down the face of the leader on television. he opened his mouth to speak of the revolution & the spunk rolled down his tongue. switch off & the

fight is over. & across the schlupping sound miles davis blew his horn spurting black acid sweet whoever said blacks wanted pink fuck anyway...& was destroyed when a white woman refused him one.

in the era of destruction mercenaries share the loot in a collection of human bones. in a selection of flesh pieces falling in to the jurisdiction of satan, speaking fraternity yet seeking mortality. they sneak to the limits of insanity.

they laid a trap for my rap wrote the slate / testament of this toilet state. & now watch them catch the stench of my when i hit the hell-gates of hate. & blood & brain spill, more tales of death to tell. where i'm going in to the death zone, singing my own praises through the storm of this time. screaming rhyme-missile powered ahead of time. turning this pen to a grenade the page is a battleground & the stage explodes...

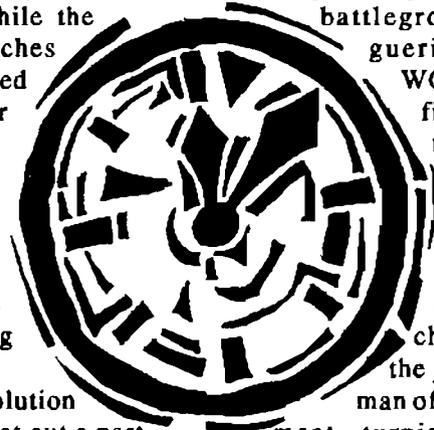
guerilla's at the microphone! WORDSOUND has power in rapid fire action OR slow & hard aimed to tear the heart of the gun-tower apart.

i'm going in to the death zone. arts & politics...false start, the question is vexed. but they sexed up the situation right up the pop-charts, taxed the nation chewing on the juicy-sluicy bits & parts counting man off the shit-list at the feast of human meat. turning woman gun-feed-breeding-machine.

& now senility comes with insanity.

& the youth is caught in a blind moment of old truth that 'arthritis is a disease like all man's enemies not conducive to progress' so the smell of milk gone sour behind the ears rises in illusions of power strapping the elders/leaders on the rocking chairs of history.

from high towers of rhetoric, onto the gathered masses beneath, standing on a veritable platform of the people, 'we need new blood in ranks of leadership' comes tumbling down, great boulders



of orders. crack the brittle boned back of the revolution's stalwarts. the need is the removal of all warts, even if by dint of perversion they actually beautify instead of off-setting the rot within.

& by historical record commonly known if you digress from the road to drawn battle lines, you tread on a landmine. so cowardice runs helter-skelter to shelter in the welter of the folds of the masses.

& i scream my hysterical irrelevance cloaked in pseudo-intellectual garb 'they can't relate to the mess in the verse i create.'

but to quote a line of poignance got to dig deep into the mine of profundity.

'the greatest one can contribute to the collective effort is the individual input.'

the lion stands alone, show your own true colours, chameleon.

it's the rise of the dogs of war on progress. in the heat of reform digging deep into human flesh, the snake tribe chant a fake vibe, on the march they change colour & form. they hide & hibernate from the storm. they wait for the pressure to drop. then hop on top of a people's loins & fake the revolution's orgasm.

it's the hour of the prophet to come out of mysticism's shelter of complacency, shower us with words of wisdom to put the fire of lies deception & treachery out.

MAKE YOUR PEACE with the wine of your brother's blood, hyena of the earth. heaven is spread before the lord, his own tomb. reproach the living god, in this time of the dead. & a heaven of wood & stone cast in eternal flame.

garrisons in a land of grain, peace. go to war my devastated nation, at the same time as you refrain from it. in shame. i said it in silence, let it then be inscribed on my tongue. the WORD pleased the kings & princes of time & place, but it murdered the children.

the harem at the palace of justice struck me to

impotence. god, shall you answer to your name, or does the shame of it strike you dumb?

after all, you're the god of grace in silence.

& justice spoke peace.

in DEAD MAN'S LAND

in a land of the dead addicted to blood, where the earth spins on its rotter axis of red, in a spiral of disease pestilence & the violence of silence.

it's said the instinct of the insect leads it to the dirt that made the pig fat. likewise the loud fart of pretence gets applause for the disaster junkie bowling for peace through putrid orifices that tremble in high rise glass tower offices of power polished with the gloss of decadence. where the existence of the man on the ground is mapped out in poverty & impoverishment become a holy concept.

in my country of christianity where the few hold a monopoly over the plenty in a pocket of humanity become a profanity, blasphemy in the mouth of a system of predation dating creation back to man's own apparition. where corpses roll on & bloat the land's death factory floor.

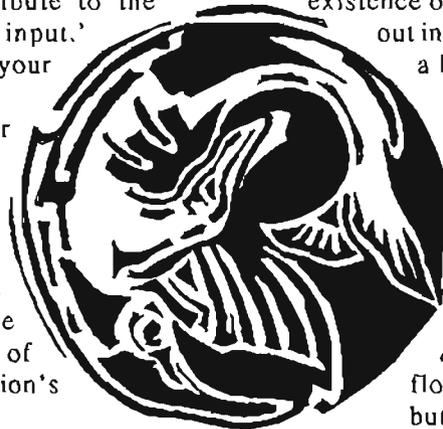
but the law of the land, of supply & demand, calls for more of the gore on the sleek hands & sick minds of doctor jekyll & mr hyde the slaughter house from the world.

merchants of death ring the desecration-bell of commerce in underground cells of covert operation, to balance the deficit their statistical equation of perversion on a pathological fetish's mission.

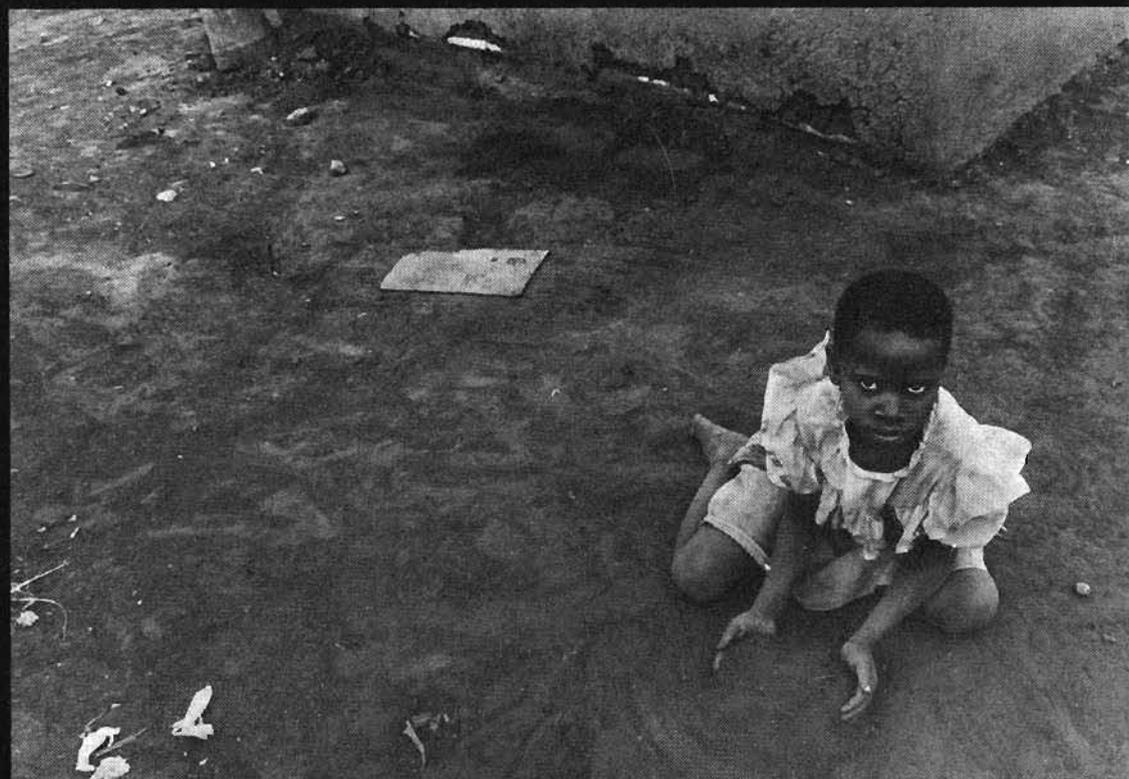
it's a situation of putrefaction.

the disease of ignorance eats into the nation in the storm of assimilation, some succumb to the glitter at the bottom of the gutter of human relation, pick up the flesh of their own conscience grown skeletal like the fruits of a revolution aborted in the explosion of greed's cannibalism.

it strikes my typewriter dead, & the vultures descend through the fire burning through my brains.



F A C E S O F
H L U P H E K A N I



P H O T O G R A P H S B Y
R A L P H G R Ü N D E R



Hluphekani after occasional rainfall.

Hluphekani (Shangaan - Place of suffering)

Near Giyani on the road from Giyani to Tomo is the largest Mozambican refugee camp in the Giyani district of Gazankulu. Up to eight thousand people live packed together in cardboard houses, four corner shelters and tiny rondavels. These are mainly constructed from mud bricks, sisal polls and anything else which can be used. These people had

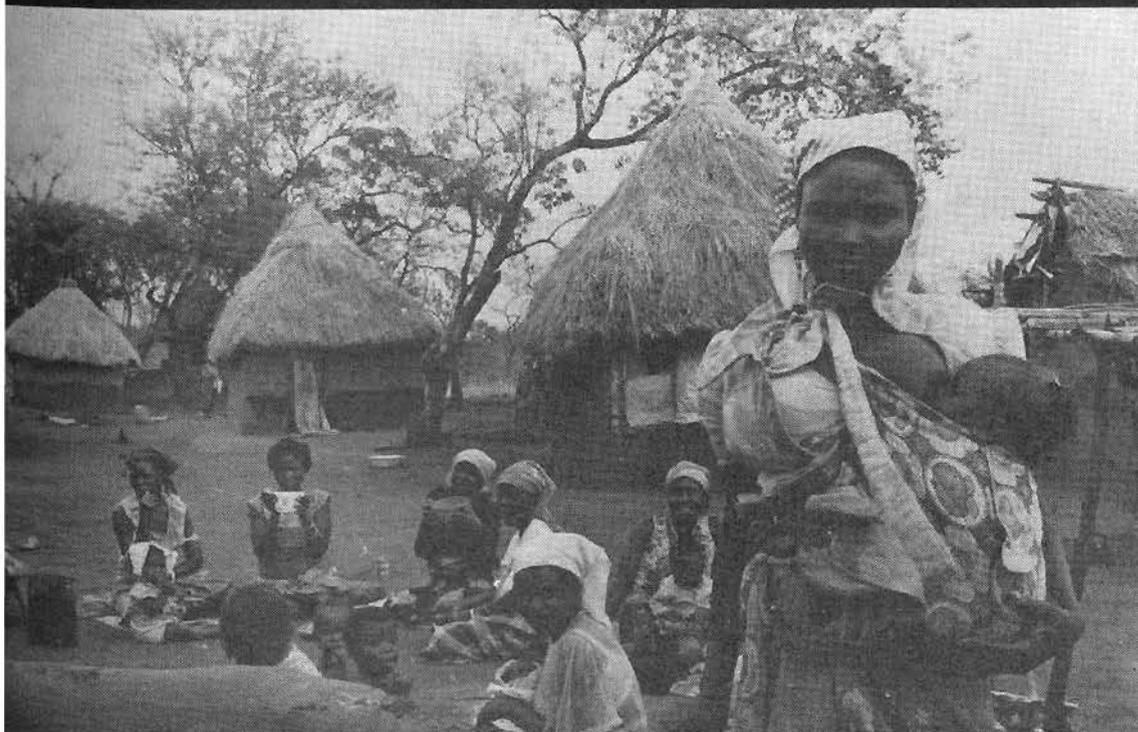
to leave their houses in Mozambique due to the war between Frelimo and Renamo and the deteriorating living conditions. They had to risk their lives crossing the Kruger National Park in search of a peaceful place to live.

Hluphekani stands for the hardship of people who had to seek refuge in nearly every settlement in the Malamulele, Giyani and Mala districts of Gazankulu as well as for the refugees in Lebowa and Kangwane.

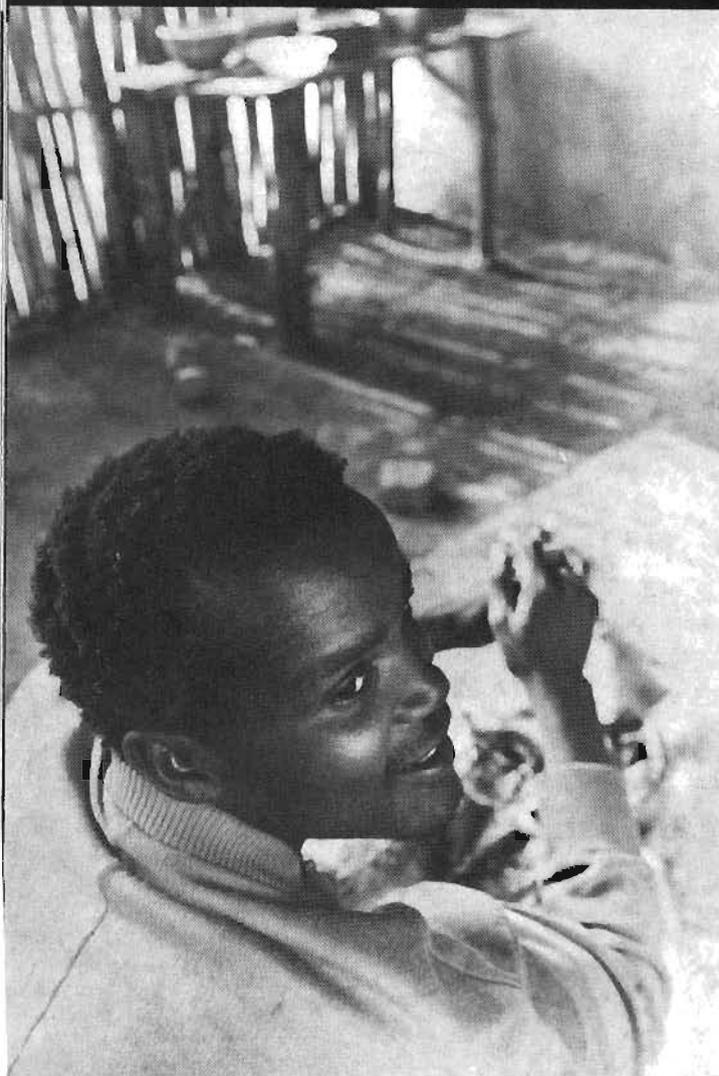
Previous page:
Refugee child playing with mud,
Hluphekani, 1992



Water shortage in Hluphekani, containers are queued up.



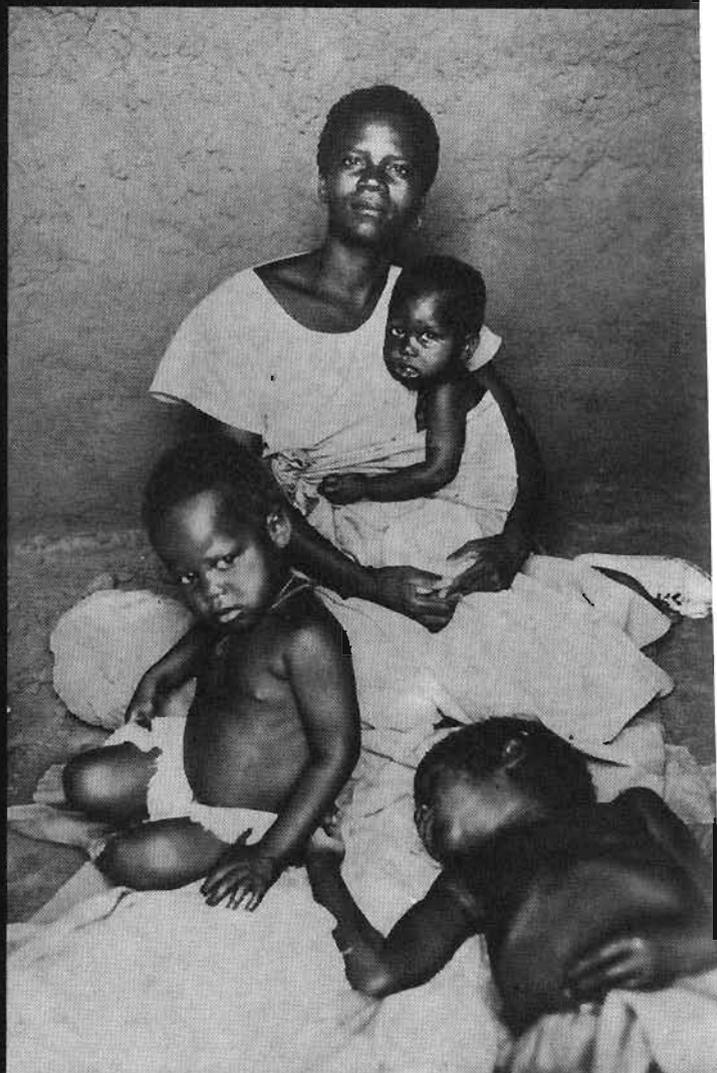
Young mother with family,
Hluphekani, 1992



'They (RENAMO) tied him against a tree, his mouth and ears were cut off. The student cried and was ordered to be axed to death because he could alert the Zimbabwean soldiers.'

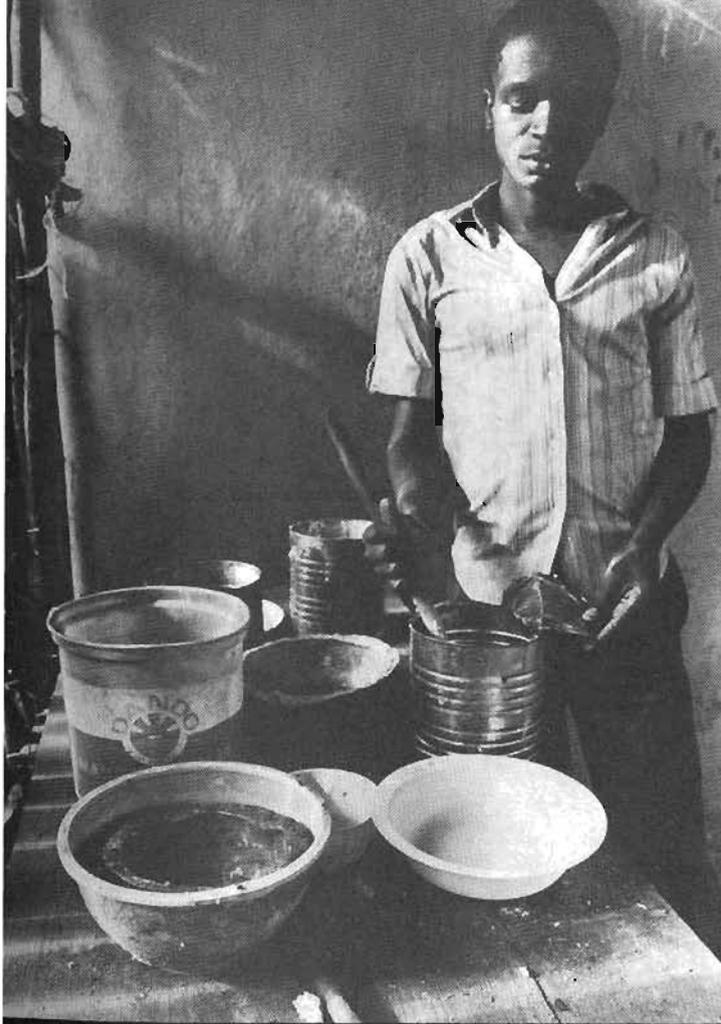
This student was part of a group of 19 teenagers attending school at Jersey Tea Estate and were taken by force by RENAMO and brought back to Mozambique to be trained.

Thomas Sithole, refugee who fled from Mozambique to South Africa via Zimbabwe.
Hluphekani, 1992



'They (the raiders) don't ask anything, they burn the houses whether there is someone in or not.'

Annah Mhlongo,
Lulekani, 1992



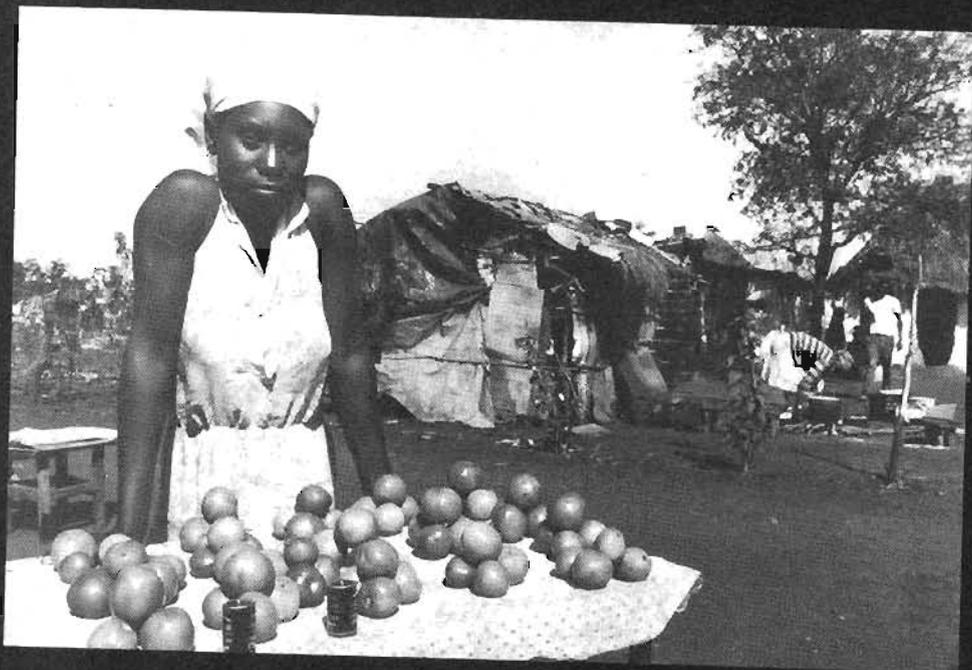
'They took us to the river and the soldiers (RENAMO) started by cutting off hands, the ears and the feet of the five students who refused to be trained, and then fed them to the crocodiles. Our training continued that same day.'

Liberty Shimango, refugee who fled from Mozambique to South Africa via Zimbabwe.
Hluphekani, 1992



'We've heard that there is war. Somewhere near our village people got killed. We decided to sleep in the bush, but the war had not reached our village yet. After that, all the people who could walk moved to this place!'

Alinah Mabunda
Lulekani, 1992

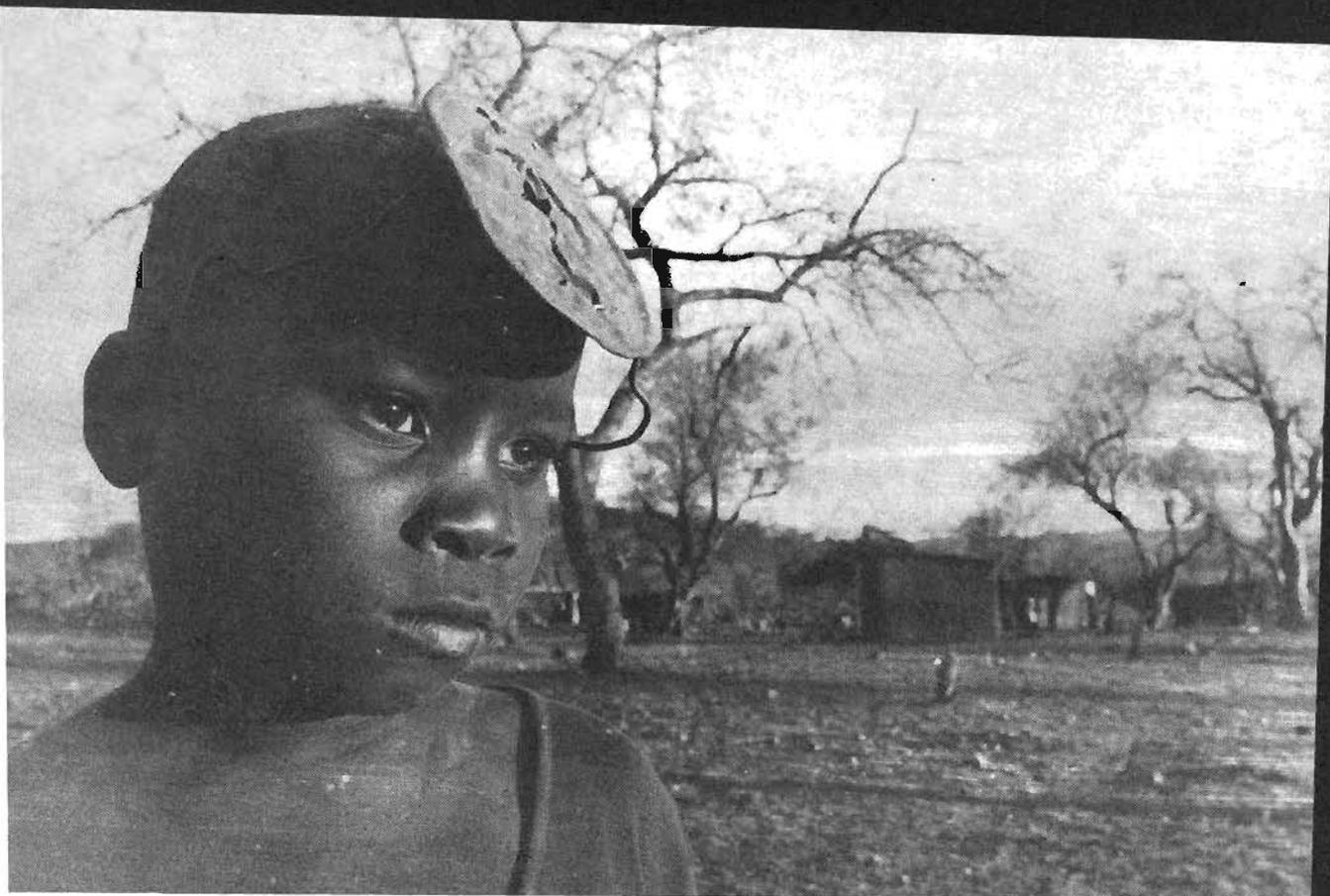


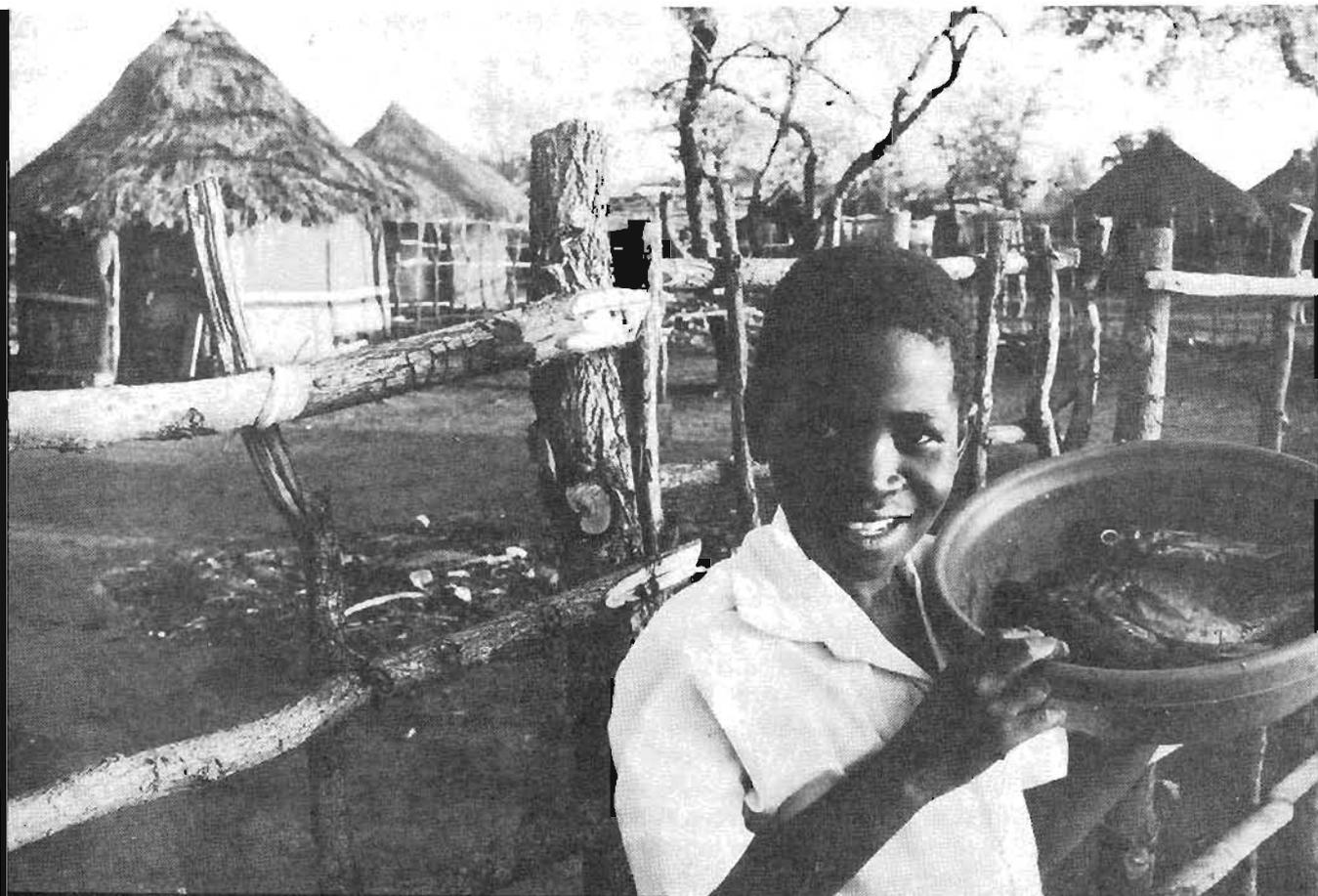
Left: Informal business, refugee woman selling vegetables.

Hluphekani, 1991

Below: 'If (RENAMO) found a young woman in the river, on the way, they cut their breast. Some people's mouths were cut.'

Pilele Soyani, 9 years old.
Mapuve refugee camp, 1992





Above: Young refugee
selling fish.

Hluphekani, 1992



Right: Refugee mother
and child.

Mangweni refugee
transition camp.

Noemia De Sousa

Mozambique

Two Poems

Translated by Luis Raphael

Chimami

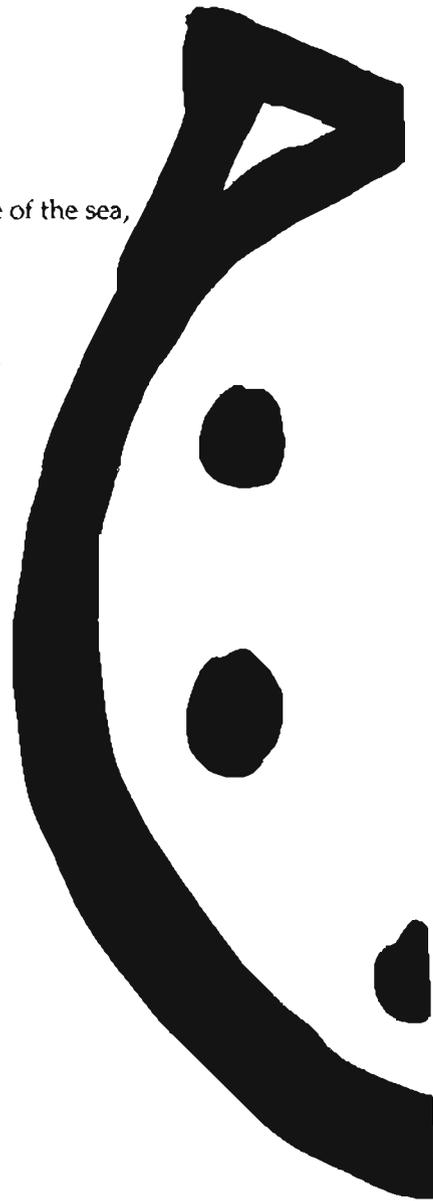
Whenever I remember my childhood's house on the shore of the sea,
I see your half-eyes of a wounded *xipeia*,
wet with humility
and constant, like the pain of regret.

Do you remember, my friend, the straw hut in Guachene?

A doll, her eyes as green as the cat's, was always smiling
in my selfish arms of lady of the house.
And in your arms that were always empty, Chimami,
there was only an immense and unsatiable tenderness,
the true tenderness of a mother.
Your gentle eyes of a wounded *xipeia*,
with their eternal glint of resignation,
slowly caressed, almost with despair,
my beautiful blonde doll.

Do you remember?

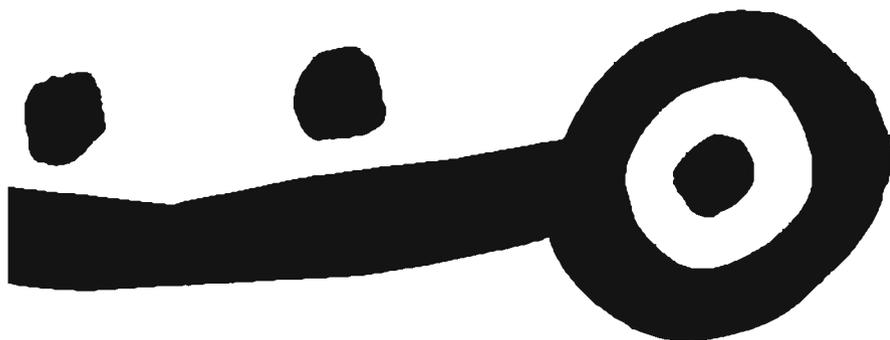
Then it was Christmas
and my flouncy silk dress
was one of the highlights of the day.
And what about the little oven papa gave me
and the gold ring that my godfather brought
and mama's present of white shoes?
And the cakes, the rice pudding,
and the pig on the spit,
and the flowers on the white table in the dining-room?
It's Christmas, Chimami, Christmas day!
Did you go to mass like I did,
did you go to mass, Chimami?



No, Chimami, didn't go to mass,
more likely she doesn't even know it's Christmas
day,
because she didn't wear a flouncy dress,
only the same striped dress she wore everyday,
the old and torn dress she had bought from the
Indian in the bazaar.
And she came barefoot, without a present or
anything at all,
only with her large gentle eyes of a wounded
xipeia
of that glowing face stuck into the long, thin neck.

Ah, Chimami, on that day
you shared my Christmas.
And you continue to share all the Christmasses
that come after.

But now? Now?
Who's going to wipe away that tear that always
remains
in your gaze of a wounded *xipeia*,
that gaze, constant like the pain of a regret,
that hurts beyond all comparison!
Ah Chimami, my Chimami!



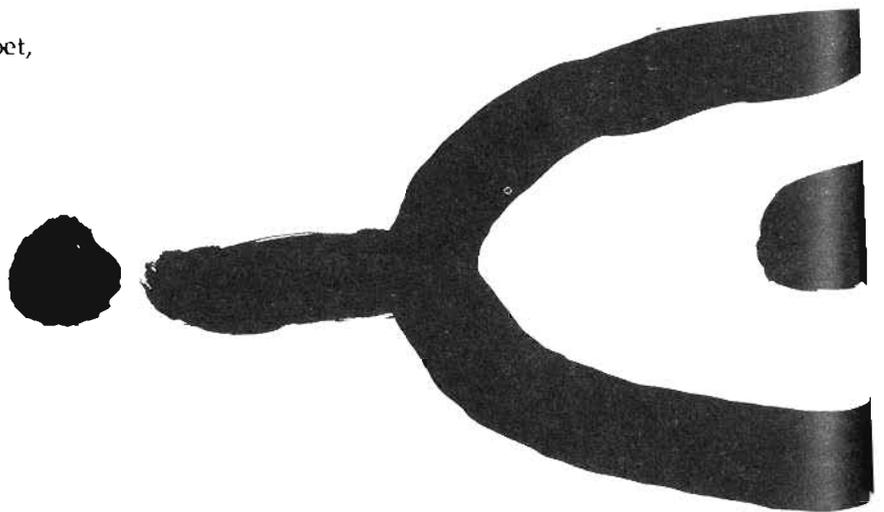
Poem For Rui De Noronha

(On the Anniversary of his Death)

In the wild bushveld of our native land
the tracks slashed open by the cutlass
have taken a new emotional direction,
a single path that cannot be changed...
A path of sharp points, oh yes, thorns,
but still a path for wounded feet to walk on,
surely, Poet, taking us there. . .
As the new horizons open themselves like a gift,
our resigned souls learn to desire,
both with strength and in rage,
and they raise themselves, warrior-like,
ready to face the difficult struggle,
and our mouths become a single closed line
in that final No of a vigilant sentry.

Rui de Noronha,
in this new Africa restored to its strengths and certainties,
you come to me, tormented and solitary,
and even though you are immersed in 'passions' and in the drunkenness of Christmas-time,
you still delve into the deep clefts of your inner world,
sunk as they are in the prodigious greens of boredom
and dissatisfaction...

You come to me bleeding of your loves, Poet,
your inhuman loves,
with suicidal despair and Brahmin pride



Staffrider Vol. 11 Nos.1,2,3,4 1993

Poetry

But even though you come to me, Poet,
all banished and tragic,
I shelter you within my warm *capulana* of understanding
and I lull you with the music of the most enchanting song
I learnt from my black grandmother...
And you, Poet, will sleep,
sleep that slumber you desired so much,
rest after having lived through all those fictitious tragedies
which are yours alone,
but don't pay any attention to the song...
Allow its tenderness to heal the wounds,
but don't pay any attention to it, no!
It may awaken the *tokolosh* of remorse,
for the song comes with the most powerful sorceries
of the *ngomas* of Maputo,
the land of my black grandmother.
And perhaps it will ask you very gently:
ah, Poet, always so blind and deaf and insensitive,
what did you do for me,
what did you do for Africa?
- Did you not go past it and yet did not see it?
- did it not raise itself and yet you did not sense it?
- did it not shout and yet you did not hear it?
and the remorse would be even more painful, Poet,
like an army of *chigoes* assailing your whole body.



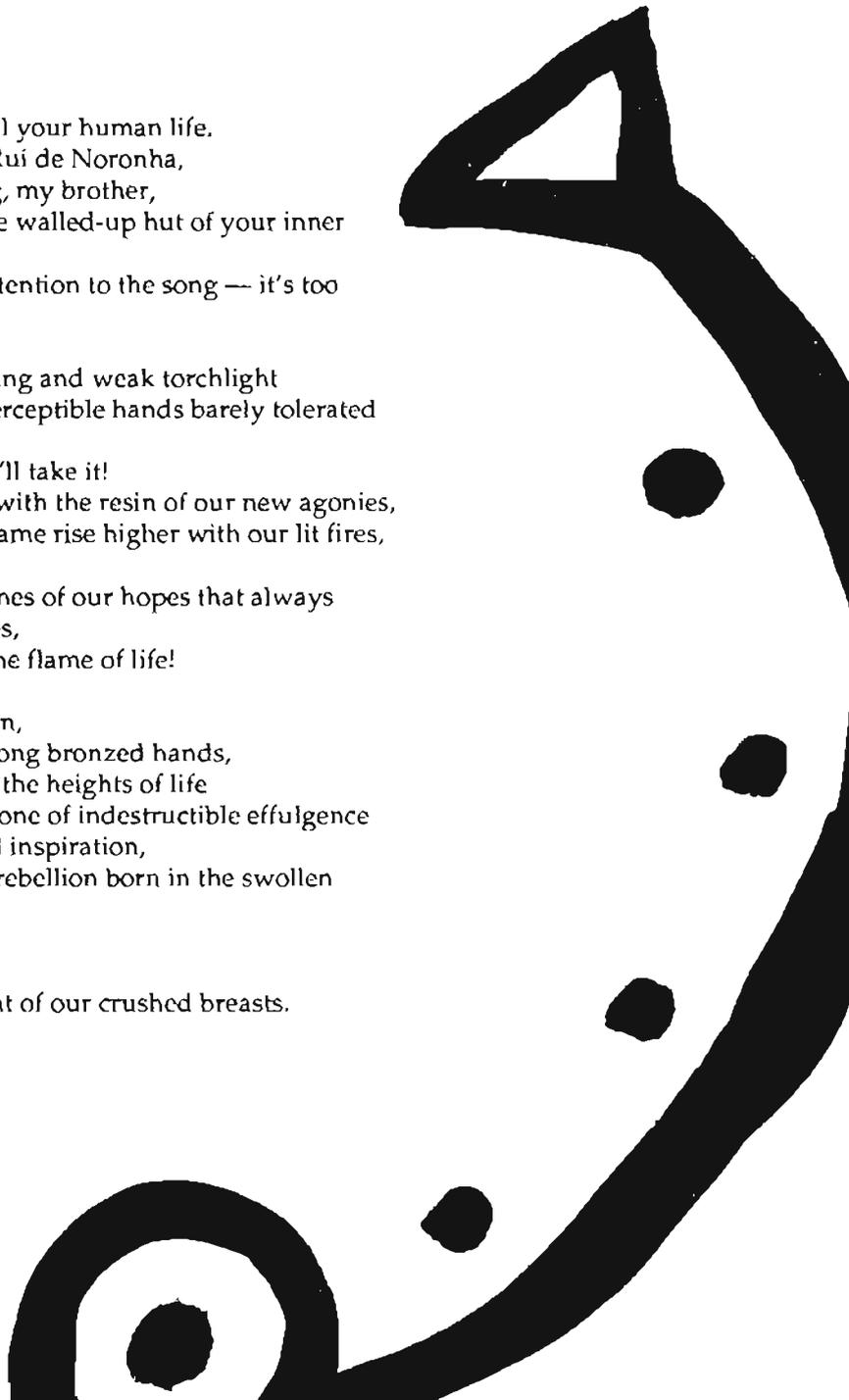
swallowing up all your human life.
Sleep, sleep, oh Rui de Noronha,
carry on sleeping, my brother,
imprisoned in the walled-up hut of your inner
world.
Don't pay any attention to the song — it's too
late...

But as for the dying and weak torchlight
which your imperceptible hands barely tolerated
holding,
give it us, for we'll take it!
We'll give it life with the resin of our new agonies,
we'll make the flame rise higher with our lit fires,

and with the flames of our hopes that always
renew themselves,
we'll keep it as the flame of life!

And then, oh then,
raised by our strong bronzed hands,
as if a banner, to the heights of life
may his blood-stone of indestructible effulgence
be our guide and inspiration,
and spur on the rebellion born in the swollen
veins.

Like a comet
crossing the night of our crushed breasts.



A BUNDLE OF JOY

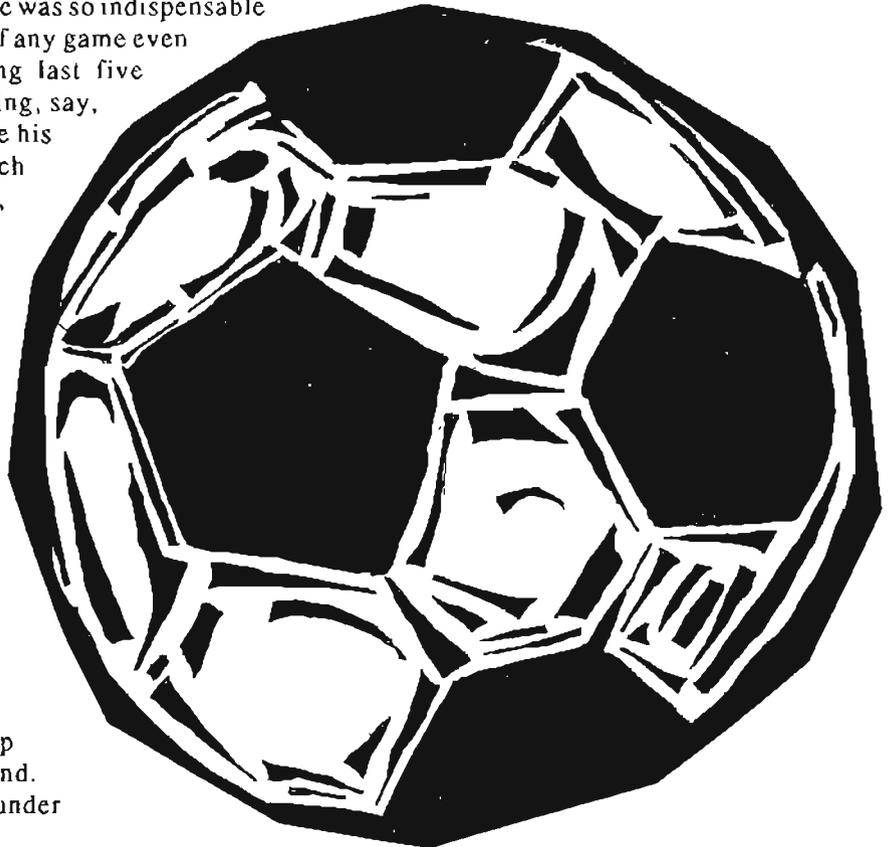
LANCE NAWA

SOUTH AFRICA

SEKALA was not his real name. He was called Sekala because of his sudden plunge into the bottom of a calabash pending some disastrous incidents in his life. Before that, he was known as Msindisi — also not his real name. Msindisi means 'the saviour'. In his prime, Msindisi kept his local football team, Naughty Boys, afloat with his skill and prowess.

During those days, it was virtually impossible to imagine Naughty Boys winning a single game without Msindisi in his number 10 jersey. He was so indispensable that he could still change the flow of any game even when fielded — for the remaining last five minutes of play with his team trailing, say, three goals behind. That was before his valuable asset, his right leg with which he used to mesmerise opponents, was amputated and replaced with a wooden one.

It was now a Sunday afternoon and, as usual, the residents of Marokolong village had gathered at the local football grounds to watch a nail-biting contest between two traditional rivals, Naughty Boys and Home Sweepers. Everyone was there. Children, in their Sunday-best clothes, hopped around the field with ice-creams and suckers tucked in their cute mouths. The elderly sat under the trees with their legs stretched on top of grass-mats strewn on the ground. Young lovers walked hand-in-hand under



umbrellas. A few groups of young men formed squatting circles around the stadium, playing dice. This was in anticipation of raising enough money to place bets on their favourite teams. Other people carried with them portable radios tuned into some Sunday jazz programme or a commentary of a national duel between Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates. Everyone was in high spirits, save Sekala who sat in a beer-garden not far from the grounds. Now and then he could clearly hear the spectators' excitement above his drinking mates' rantings and guffaws.

'Shut those blerry drunken mouths!' yelled Sekala at the drinkers in the most unprovoked, loudest outburst ever. They all obliged, except one or two brave males who felt that Sekala was now disrespecting and undermining their dignity in front of their newly-acquired lovers — that is, if one could call them as such. They vowed to discipline them. Not now though, as they were still busy entertaining their best halves. Perhaps later. Or not today at all as it was Sunday, a day they saw as meant for rest, love and peace.

Sekala lifted his metallic beer mug to sip the remaining thick liquid. His eyes caught a huge fan wobbling uneasily from the ceiling. It seemed as if it could descend upon them any minute and mow down their heads like grass blades. Sekala did not like this one bit. How long had he not asked the owner of the place to change the fan. This Makhanjane, it seems, does not want to listen to me like he used to when I could still don his club's maroon and yellow colours. I'll make him think otherwise, Sekala declared to himself while trying to pull his wooden leg up with the rest of his rubbery body. And didn't I also request him to open up a cafe or butchery next to the beer-hall in case of his customers getting hungry while drinking? But does he listen this good-for-nothing money-grabber, huh?

A mere thought of food made his mouth drool. He headed towards a Kentucky Chicken outlet but immediately changed his mind. He had just remembered that he was no longer welcome there. The owner of the place had told him that his

distasteful behaviour was tarnishing the outlet's image whereas patrons, on the other hand, once pulled a sick trick that made him not want to grace that place with his presence ever again. There is certainly a conspiracy against me, Msindisi-the-once-hero-of-all, in this community. They won't forever keep a good man down though; this they must get into their thick skulls!

Sekala stood there, reminiscing about how he used to help himself to chicken after every game. His fans, including the outlet's management, would in fact literally go as far as almost gouging each other's eyes out in their attempt to be the first in offering him pieces of the savory bird. This changed immediately after his misfortune and a certain incident. All the same, Sekala thought that if people could treat him like a hero when he used to entertain them with soccer, why should their attitude change now that he could no longer play. After all, it was not as if he had ceased to be a member of the community. Hence if they were not going to offer him meals themselves, then he was going to help himself, uninvited, to their plates and boxes.

He soon got into operation in the most theatrical manner a beggar could think of.

Firstly, he would drown himself in liquor (for which he did not pay) at Makhanjane's and then stagger off to Kentucky. At the back of the outlet always stood a brazier on which a local nightwatch man cooked his nocturnal coffee and warmed his hands. Sekala would then dip his hands in its now-cold interior and rub soot under his fingernails.

Having done that, he would then walk over to the tables where people sat and ate their meals. After surveying, sizing up and carefully picking his would-be victims, he would then dip his hands into their box without much ado. When asked what he was doing, he would simply tell the people in question that he was hungry and thus naturally helping himself to any available meals. Seeing his dirty fingernails they would normally walk away, leaving the food with him, or if they were stern enough to stomach the spectacle then they would give him some money with which he was supposed to buy himself pap and

raw meat at a cafe just adjacent to the outlet where braai stands stood for that very purpose.

His approach there would also be met with equal disdain. Except on one particular day when, at the sight of Sekala, one barbecuer chose not to follow the others who left the stands in a hurry with their meat half or totally undone. He just stood there with a big inviting mischievous smile. In front of him there roasted a huge juicy piece which he would not be able to finish even if he wanted to. The man offered Sekala the piece, saying that he had just finished another equally huge chunk by himself before Sekala turned up. Sekala devoured the meat in a manner that could shame even the hungriest of wolves. He then thanked the good samaritan and was about to leave when the man brought something to his attention.

'Sorry, but I have something else for you.'

'Yes, what is it?' Sekala asked expectantly.

'You'll see for yourself,' he said, handing over a neatly wrapped package to Sekala. What Sekala saw inside it shocked him even right down to his artificial leg. And made him puke along to the nearest toilet. It was a skin of a cat which, it was evident from its freshness, had just been slaughtered!

That particular memory threatened to upset his bowels. Hence he immediately erased it from his mind and limped along to the football field. He sat there alone by the touchline, waiting for the game to begin. By the look of things, the players had already warmed-up to an extent that their sweaty jersey clung to their bodies. Yet there was no referee in sight. He could have been delayed or simply absent. But one could not tell. It was while a certain enthusiastic lad was thrashing spectators' feet with a sjambok yelling 'Bek 'iline!' 'Bek 'iline!' that he noticed Sekala. Knowing that Sekala knew the rules of the game fair enough to enable him to officiate the game, the lad promptly dragged him to the centre of the field where the teams' two captains stood, looking around like baffled hens. The two asked Sekala to officiate the game in spite of his immobility and the league's regulations which prohibited anyone who was not registered with it, as

a referee, to handle any game.

Sekala took to the whistle like a musician to a trumpet only after he was promised R50.00 as remuneration for his troubles. The game turned up to be more of his showbiz than the players'. The manner in which he blew the whistle was so hilarious that everyone, including even the players, was in stitches. Outside the field, children threw themselves on the ground in laughter. The elderly displayed toothless smiles. For Sekala sanctioned a mere throw-in or goal-kick with a blowing that had never been stressed and stretched like that before: pppssssseeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!! A foul or rough tackle, on the other hand, received an erratic pse! pse! pse! pse! pse! pse! Pse! pse! pse!; accompanied by gesticulations about where the infringement took place. As a matter of fact, he would even give free demonstrations of the whole episode, including full sliding, tackling and somersault. Spectators would, at that stage, close their eyes in anticipation of Sekala's artificial leg splintering when it hit the earth on its way from his midflight. Instead, they opened them to a sight of the dusty and yet unperturbed referee running away from that spot as if he had just seen a vicious snake. His finger pointed in the direction the ball had to be kicked: pppssssseeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!

The game was now late into the first-half, half-way towards Sekala receiving his cash when something disastrous happened. Sekala was blazing alongside a fiery striker, Gozilla (nicknamed thus from his close likeness to the animal both in appearance and character especially when faced with a goalkeeper), as if he expected a pass from which he was simply to tap the ball between the poles. Gozilla dribbled passed one defender and suddenly found himself face-to-face with two others who just came rushing in from the flanks. Boomerang, who was all the time trailing behind his teammate, now shouted SHIA! at the sight of the tight defence. Gozilla skipped the ball, giving Boomerang an opportunity to unleash a shot to which the goalkeeper could only feign an attempt at diving. The referee blew for a goal with his hands

raised in jubilation — as if he had been the scorer — and bolted to the centre of the field where a kick-off was to be executed.

All of a sudden, Sdididi, the captain of the team against which the goal was scored, came forward to register his disapproval with the referee.

'What are you telling me?! That a player is not allowed to say Shia?!' Sekala inquired from the captain. 'Just tell me then: how else is a player in front, with the ball, supposed to know if his teammate behind him is in good position to receive the ball if he does not inform him, huh?'

'But the league regulations prohibit such yellings, be it to your own teammate or not.'

'Look here, Sdididi,' replied Sekala, 'you know fully well that it was okay to say Shia! when I still used to play with you. Actually, not with you as a person. You were then still a young boy only fit to carry our kitbags, if I recall correctly. Now you want to turn around and tell me what to do!'

'But that was then, Sekala. Things have changed. Unlike those days, we now play in a league which's got its own strict rules.'

'Oh, I see. As far as I am concerned, you can take your blerry whistle and cards and find someone else to ref.' Sekala threw the lot, including a watch, on the ground and limped off the field. Enraged spectators hurled abuse and apples at him. Those belonging to the losing team cried for his blood. Sekala engaged his wooden leg into full flight from people who wanted to chop it into pieces for a bonfire.

It was while fleeing like this that he recollected that fateful Sunday afternoon, of nine months ago, when he lost his leg. The day was as equally electrified and sensitive as this one. The same two teams had met to determine once-and-for-all as to who was the king of Marokolong. The stakes were never as high, in the community's entire soccer history, as they were on that afternoon. Besides pride and dignity, they were contesting for five cows, ten sheep, seven goats and a round of chickens: winners-take-all! One could have sworn there were other sidebets such as shoes, cars, houses and even wives!

Naughty Boys had all their hopes on Msindisi. Whereas their opponents, obviously scared of him, had vowed to go to any length to keep him in check. This included muti, stepping on his corns when the referee was not looking, or even sticking their elbows in his lungs.

To Naughty Boys' horror, their hero did not show up for the game. And as such began the game without him until late into the second half. Meanwhile, he was involved in a serious argument with his lover, Mantwa, at home.

'What do you mean you want me to leave football?' Msindisi wanted to know. 'After all, you know we both met at one of our games. Need I also remind you that you were one of those smitten fans who would do anything to see us in action and lay your hands on us afterwards. The way I see it, you are simply jealous of other females fans. You just want to have me for yourself!'

'It's not true!' protested Mantwa. 'I just want us to assume our responsibility of what is to come. We are about to become parents, you know. Therefore we must begin to prepare ourselves for that.'

'You know fully well that I am prepared to do anything with you, but not now. I must go and play. People are depending on me.' It would later be evident that Msindisi had missed the significance of Mantwa's conversation at that point.

'If the truth be told,' continued Mantwa, 'I cannot see how you can expect to maintain a family from playing non-professional, non-paying soccer. You need to get a job and leave the sport while you are still basking in glory. Besides, your clubs will soon be compelled to join Bophuthatswana Soccer League, and I suspect it will be inferior, financially and otherwise, to the South African one which, for that matter, you are not a party of at present.'

'That's ridiculous. You know fully well that we are South Africans and there is no way that any homeland policy can fiddle with that-'

'Aha, that's the whole point. Didn't you hear that things are changing?. The area on which we live will soon be under Bophuthatswana jurisdiction.'

'Hush, stop camouflaging your selfish ends with

politics. I still maintain that you are scared of losing me to other women. It's funny how people meet their would be lovers at a specific place with appropriate skills and later use that very fact against them. Do you honestly think I will have any soul left once I quit soccer, huh?' The argument went on and on until Msindisi came to be dragged by desperate fans from the house.

The stadium erupted with euphoria at his sight. Naughty Boys fans promptly dwelled in the rendition of their war-cry:

Rena re bafana ba Naughty Boys
Rena re bafana ba Naughty Boys
Re tlile ka mission
Re tlile ka mission!

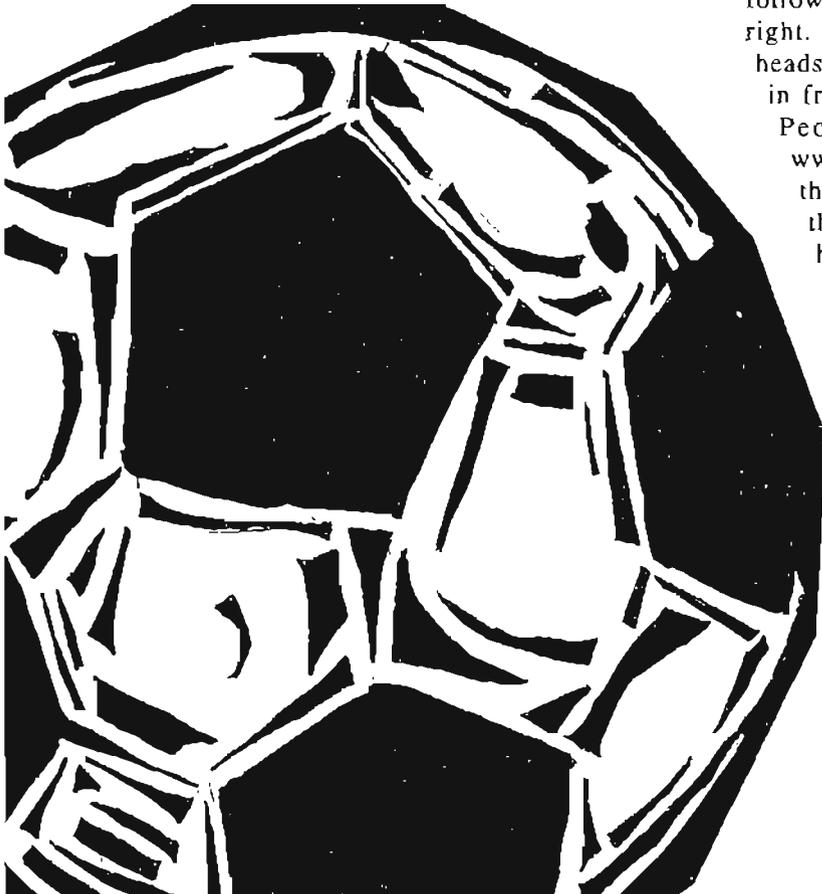
Home Sweepers' supporters, on the other hand, held their hearts in their hands. In fact, a few

pessimistic others began to file out of stadium while cursing the skies inspite of the fact that Msindisi had only the remaining last five minutes of the game to play. More over, their team was leading one-nil at that stage.

Msindisi ran around the opponents' danger zone in an attempt to position himself well for any loose ball that may come his way. Defenders gave him no room. One or two actually spat at him when the referee was looking in the other direction. Msindisi's only chance at levelling matters came via Puncho who dribbled passed two players around the mid-field and kicked the ball over to him. He trapped it with his knees. It dropped dead on the ground — the way he always liked it. Fans screamed Msindisi! Msindisi! Sindiisa! Facing three defenders, who clearly displayed fear and resignation in their eyes, Msindisi looped the ball into the air. The defenders followed it to the left whereas he dashed to the right. The ball swerved in the air, above their heads, and flew in his direction. It bounced right in front of his foot already poised for a strike.

People began shouting for a goal: wweeeeeeeeeee! He was about to do what then looked like a formality of just slotting in the equaliser when all of a sudden someone held on to his legs. It was Mantwa! Msindisi tried to manouvre himself out of her grip but lost the control of the ball in the process. It rolled right into the keeper's open hands. He held on to it 'till kingdom come. It was at that stage that the referee ended the game.

Sweepers supporters stormed the field in ecstasy. Naughty Boys' fans saw red. They could not stand being humiliated like that. They went for Msindisi with all assortments of weapons. With jersey and all, he headed for open land. He crossed the railway lines with ease. The horde, which seemed to blame Sekala solely for Mantwa's treacherous deeds, pursued him down to the main road where Msindisi was knocked down by a car. It dragged



him for a few metres before he got untangled from it. His bloodied number 10 jersey hung like a shredded kite against the vehicle's grille. His leg, well, his leg...

That was the last time he remembered ever using his natural leg. Having acquired the new one he obviously could not utilise for the sport he loved and was respected for Msindisi then knew he was a lost cause. He was lost to desperation and depression.

Having realised that their teams were yet to play the second-half of the game, and thus there was still time to acquire the services of yet another referee, the irate mob (of the second Sunday) stopped chasing Sekala and went back to the grounds.

Meanwhile, the panting Sekala landed in Makhanjane's. He ordered himself sorghum beer. But rather than taking a thirsty sip from it, he began unscrewing his leg. Placing it against the bench on which he was sitting, he then hopped to the toilet. To his sheer horror, he found the leg gone on his return. No-one bothered to tell him where it went, or who took it. He suspected that it could have been those two men with their ugly partners. But he was not certain. Also, there was no way he could trace them even if there was confirmation that they were the ones who had stolen his leg for he did not know where they lived.

Just a day after this loss (on a Monday), Msindisi saw the leg hanging at a local pawn shop. He hopped around the area trying to raise the money the pawnbroker asked. But R200 was too hard to come by. There was also no way people would give a nuisance like him that amount of money — just like that! Out of desperation, he eventually tried his hand at playing dice. That too, was not without serious repercussions. He once received a full shoe in his mouth while trying to cheat. He was supposed to throw a ten to a stake of R200. Tencame alright, but it was a combination of three dices not two as the game is normally played. It was very clear to every gambler that Sekala fumbled when he tried to switch the real dices with 'loaded' ones tucked between his fingers. One guy kicked him so hard in

the mouth that his front teeth grew wings.

As if that was not enough, Sekala experienced yet another dose of ruthlessness when he was caught helping himself to a half loaf of bread in a corner cafe owned by a Portuguese immigrant. For his punishment, he was ceremoniously given a choice of being shut inside a huge fridge for a few hours or receiving a few lashes from the owner and his extended family.

'Wena funa fridge or Kwakwa?,' the cafe owner asked Sekala while holding him by the scruff of his neck. No sooner than Sekala could finish saying 'kwakwa!', the man began pouncing on him to a point where he (Sekala) could no longer keep track of the number of lashes that befell him. Thinking that he probably made a bad choice he should retract from, Sekala pleaded for the fridge instead.

'No, no, no...wena khethile kwakwa!,' retorted his assailant with the sjambok lapping his blood...

Since then, Sekala was to be seen drowning himself in methylated spirits and thereafter sleeping in front of the pawn shop.

He one day woke up to a gaping space where the leg used to hang. He was still wondering as to which sinister spirit had taken it, and for what purpose also, when a young girl came to speak to him. She was sent by auntieMantwa to call uncleSekala, she had said. Why the woman wanted to see him, the messenger was not briefed.

Sekala suspected, as he hopped to Mantwa's house, that it had to be in connection with a baby. He was almost certain that he overheard some people talking about Mantwa in one of his drunken stupors. They had said something about her giving birth to a bonny little baby a few days ago. Curiosity propelled him even faster towards the house.

'I bought you this, Loli,' Mantwa did not hesitate to announce as soon as Sekala walked through the door. It was his artificial leg all right. There was no doubt about it.

'I just want to see my child,' responded Sekala while ignoring and side-stepping Mantwa (with the leg in her hands). He hopped towards a bundle of joy lying sedately on a bed...

PLAYGROUND FOR ECHOES

NAJMUNISA GAFFOOR

SOUTH AFRICA

Three days between days.

Contemplation and the act of artful murder. The ultimate satisfaction and the release of pent-up frustration. Murder is all very simple really. First there is its contemplation, the resplendent act follows next and finally the aftermath.

Adrenalin, calculated, flowing evenly through hopeful brain, body and bone. Night after night. Deliberation. Solutions. Ending. Calculating. Apathetic. Choosing a sharp-edged finish. Sharp. Caressing ax. Wooden, long. Caressed. Sharp-edged ax. Dead centre of his head. Wonderfully accurate. Hacked. Deeper, harder, faster, deeper, deeper. Yes it was done.

I sift through bits of poetry in the hope of finding some clue to the frame of mind. The key, I'm sure, the logic for the murder is to be found herein.

Doctor Lotus's sentiments reverberated in the silent room the clinic allocated him.

Once more he read the poem aloud.

*In shallowed rifts
Anger wedges
itself so deep
Each cursed thrust.
A chip off humanity.
Initiator, mortal
Yet this cursed tongue
Spurts forth venom
Deadlier than any serpent.
Poisoned, mosaic imagery,
Camouflage,
Tainting tortured life
Devious, cunningly masquerading
Self-righteous perfection.*

The poem seems an emotional outburst. Rhythmically rubbing his chin, a sign of intense concentration he murmured, 'An interesting choice of words: 'Initiator', 'Mortal', 'cursed tongue', 'masquerading'. Another perusal and mental analysis, then. 'Amazing, given the case history she has condensed reasons for murdering him into a poem.'



Some days.

Hysterical laughter echoed along strange corridors, bouncing off walls.

Wild eyes wild observing. Loud.

An echo within a conscious mind. Hypodermic needles
punched, inserted, travelling into reluctant veins to keep reality but a
temporary fantasy. Another body placed, boxed in. Suffocating.

Freedom. A bird flew into a box. There is no freedom,
no peace of mind. They are merely mythical tales on
sceptic ears. A spiralling void of which there is no
escape, but an ongoing sinking, absorbing. A darkness
so deep, it shadows that which seeks so violent a
release. I observe the world through bars of this four-
sided room — mirror images. Reflections. Reflected
imagery within. Projection of an outside.

Naive like the blossoming youth passing through positive
stages. . .of positive degeneration. There was no question
of protection. She loved him. Naive writings, imitations of
John Donne as best adolescent youth would allow. Why can't
humanity explore the tensions of our youthfulness? Instead we
flourish strangers to ourselves.

*More writings. All written before the murder. No verbal
response yet.*

A sweet silence have I not tasted yet.

Serenity has been the furthest from my score.

Earth and life and life on earth

Has catapulted me, into a noisy ocean

Where oneness can never be.

Oh! I long for the silence, not unnatural

For that secret place, which is far

Beyond my grasp.

Yet intensely within my imagination

Silence, pace, freedom of choice

And above all new experiences

Must be filled to climax all life.

And yet, my hesitation covets my indecision

To experience the oblivion, long-sought after

Which will free me of bonds

I choose to forget.

My bearer call out to me

Like a fitful dreamer I transcend (to the present).

I regret this dream

Always a reality away.

Najmunisa Gaffoor, South Africa

This one is indirect contrast to the previous one. No hint of extreme violence, seems almost normal. Writing exudes feelings of extreme phobias, repetition of 'freedom'. Feelings of 'closed in'; unfulfillment, escape, but escape from what? Of bonds, the murder victim most probably.

Doctor Lotus continued his analysis talking into his dictaphone, while clouds gathered outside casting shadows in the office.

Another day.

I live inside my head, I love, I live, I dream giving nothing away. I am everything inside myself. How easy cowardly, away from all.

Listen... to the whispers of the wind. A message, messages drumming to my brain. Peaceful messages on the wind. Willowed reeds bend and blend in a silent wind. Fragile willowed reeds anticipating the wayward foreplay of the wind.

Juxtaposition, like a sickness, like a fungus, like a reality. Directionless noise, movement, intentions.

Crowding, crowding nearing like a sickness, like a fungus, like a reality. Palpable, sensory.

Now...and now recede. Breathe, breathe even, breathe, slowly, reinstate equilibrium.

Some days.

Outside it is bleak. Colours merge. Outside it is grey. Humanity merges bleak with grey. Dark humanity in its masquerade. Facades; they fit like skin. Faces blend and become one. Masked faces masked. I uncover mask upon mask. Lies become truth; truth manipulated and lies restored. Reduced to inversions, confusions. They strangle and corrupt the senses; a playground for echoes; and rapid beat tattoos; like an ax on bone like ax in bone.

'Have you discovered enough to reduce me to word, a phrase? Abnormal perhaps or acute mental anxiety? We reduce ourselves to words, always words. They don't do justice to human emotion. Both you and I are guilty of that. Words! They lie, they misrepresent.'
'Is there a particular word you dislike, despise or maybe even...?'
'Father.'

This one's been written here. After the murder. More emotional than the others, nearly violent. Clearly reflecting the state of mind.

Low tones clouded numbed lulls
De -
scend-
ing.

Dreamer, dreamer
The echoes accused
Leaking through a saturated consciousness
Protesting vehemently.

Saturated with
Accusations
Reality saturated
Permeating stench of
Reality.
Leaking
drop
drop
drop

Until all facets coloured
With bold imprints of
Reality.

Clearly the subconscious and conscious have merged; words like 'conscious', 'Protesting', 'Reality' indicate an internal struggle. there appears to be a total mental override; no distinguishing between right and wrong.

Days between days.

You stand in the shadows like an expectant lover bidding your time. Always I thought of your brown twinkling eyes. You slipped in like you did just now. Sooting my senses. I met you at the station. Remember you wore aqua? I committed to memory your image, your voice when you said smilingly, 'I have my ticket here, somewhere', to the sceptical conductor. You were everything I was not, relaxed, satisfied and free. Yes, I could see all this. I shoved to one side, the negativity, scepticism and the breeding fear, and created a place in my subconscious where everything is real, and willed you stay, recreate and fill with unchained optimism, when things happen...

'Where the hell were you so long you bitch?' the sturred voice echoed through the house like a death knell. 'I don't need you, I don't need anybody!' he shouted like a madman, shoving her against the hot stove.

...through green fields and ripe air pregnant with optimism, until low sounds of obscenities become muffled obscurities.

This one's dated before the murder. Somehow, there is change of mood, more positive nearly optimistic. What could have possibly stimulated this mood swing?

*Come! Away
From your man-made troubles,
Your shallow lives
Which you so diligently lead,
Away from the mirage
You blithely name
Happiness.
Extract yourself
From life's spiralling void.
Zealously you sway
To this enticing call.*

*Though spiritually
Shackled
To the past
Rejecting the
Future
Like an abandoned child;*

*Whose enigmatic,
Existential search,
Will only incubate
Once this shackling
Past
Absolves itself.*

*Bouts of normality interspersed with madness and
irrationality clearly indicate mental instability and
abnormality. Quietly, switching off the dictaphone,
'whatever our definition thereof'.*

Another day.

Mother; she sat covered in a corner, watchful, weary,
wide-eyed, wild like an animal hiding. A mental state,
ticked, ticked, ticked above me, ticked around me,
ticked, ticked everywhere in the space I occupied then; a
bold imprint upon the brain of body, which would later aunt
and contradict. In this state I could no longer be five
years old.

Three days.

'Is there any reason why you prefer me to
address you as X?', asked Doctor Lotus.

'He has left again. He wore aqua. I met him at the
station. Each time te visits are shorter and the image
become vague, more distant', she replied.

'Who is he? Does eh have a name? Did he visit you here?'

She nodded.

'You could not have had a visitor, I checked your roster.' Then
more softer and with a hint of compassion, which was unusual for
Doctor 'don't take your work home'

Lotus, for he vowed never to become too involved with any patient, because 'to feel' is to be vulnerable and weak and this would interfere with the progress of the job. 'No one visited you in the four months you have been here,' replied Doctor Lotus.

'He as left again. I am a subject. An entity moving between realms of consciousness. Confining oneself to dimensions like time, space is to limit oneself. I speak to you of emotions in my poetry and feelings not names, they complicate; the universal language which humanity has buried in the deep recesses of the self. Identity doesn't make anybody somebody; to identify emotion and feeling is the ultimate identity of the self.'

It could well be that X as created a character, perhaps fictitious, a possible form of escapism. this could possibly account for the mood swing in the previous poem.

Days

Tiny hands clasped a butterknife. Wide, impressive eyes glared deliberating, as he sat there waiting for his afternoon meal. the perpetual, hardness of his eyes was replaced by something different, more approachable. Mopther, she demurely smiled at him as she dished his meal. Something had changed; with the innocence and naivety of a child I hadn't realized what had transpired. Left out, ignored, something had happened which I wasn't part of. I wasn't too preoccupied with being ignored, because I realized everything would be good. I sat down the butterknife which stuck to sweaty palms. Compatible co-existence for two day, when she sat hiding from him.

He strutted with it raised in one hand. Light reflecting from the sharp blade. Waving, slicing the air, thick, heavy palpable with apprehension. Reinstating his power. And she who protected him by enduring and hiding, gathered her brood in a mindless state of hysteria, like a decapitated hen; my head in a gas oven waiting for the next explosion.

*'X is ready consultation, Doctor Lotus', came the voice from the office door.
'Sure nurse Meyering I'll be there.'
Hell is it time for my 3.30 appointment already. I must've been working on this report for two hours non-stop. Nigel has been breathing down my back for a report on the 'X' case for some time. Nurse Meyering see that the director gets this report before he leaves. Yes Nigel this one's going to spoil your sex drive tonight for sure. To be a victim of circumstances and so young; and Nigel you and I are to decide her fate.*

*Three days.
She sat there small and fragile dwarfed by the walls of the clinic room. Each day becomes more difficult for me to listen to her. Her wayward profanities make such sense to me. It is not easy to remain objective.
'X', he paused coming to sit opposite her, 'I have been seeing you for five months, this is not an easy task. I have to decide whether you were liable for your action or whether you were not fully conscious of what you did. Why don't you help me to help you? I need to know what happened the day you murdered him.'
She looked up from her clasped hands folded tightly in her lap. She looked at me, then through, pain and anguish registered then a hint of a satisfied smile reflected in the wide oval eyes.*

Three days.

What a hypocrite. Here I am, sitting in judgment of a young woman who performed an act which I thought of committing a long time ago. I remember coming home from school; my mother was at an art seminar; to find my father laying on top of a strange woman, while her legs and arms covered his body. They seemed happy, or satisfied, I never knew which, even in their apparent uncomfortable positions, and blissfully ignorant of my confused eye as it took in each unfaithful undulation upon the matrimonial bed. 'Matrimonial bed', how words misrepresent. I experienced an anger so intense, having been taught by parents, right from wrong, I felt lied to and cheated. For days, weeks, I contemplated murdering him. I looked up the word 'murder' in the school's dictionary and encyclopaedia in the hope of finding a step-by-step instructions on how the act should be committed. Needless to say, I didn't find any, but consoled myself by imagining his head being sucked in through the Hoover or split in fragment by the rusty blades of the lawnmower. These spiteful murderous thoughts were therapeutic in itself though.

Thought and action. So closely related yet so far removed as society dictates its litany of social acceptance and permissibility. Oh yes, to think of vile meanderings and lustful deeds is fine but, don't act upon them.

'X, can you hear me, answer me?'

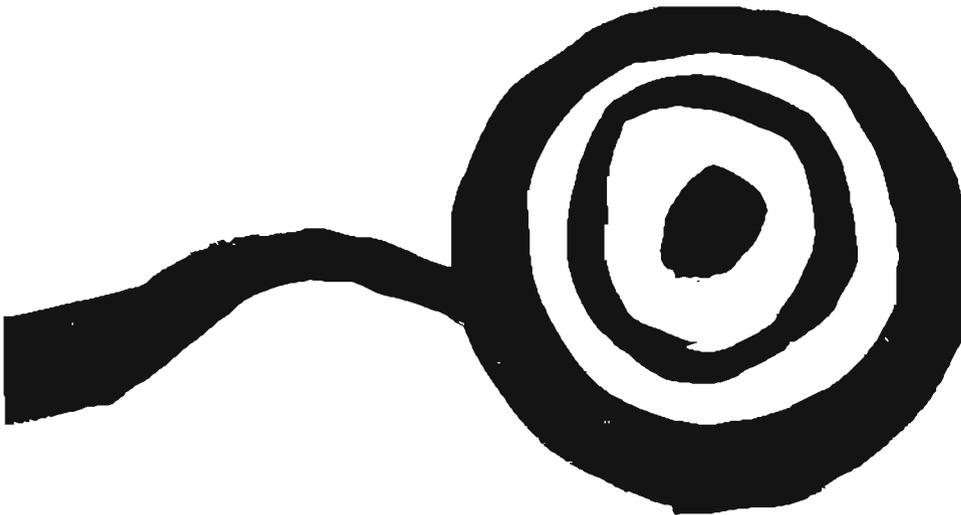
A conscious mind, where reality breeds. Shut down.
I live within my subconscious. Eyes innocent. Dilated
pupils register shock. But I looked through into the
conscious mind where reality breeds. And I became
a bird. Exhilaration soaring like hacking blow upon
blow upon blow. Shackles hacked, Bonds hacked...

I came home expecting anything and prepared for
nothing as always. He enjoyed variety, no two
episodes were alike or stemmed from the same
source, today could be that the food is too hot,
tomorrow...

Rotation of ambulance lights. Round and round,
red, blood red rotations. Mouths moving. Soundless
expressions, then senseless words penetrate; an
accident; fell; lost baby; nearly died.

Now, you reject me mother, like an abandoned child. Was
I so deep inside myself I never realized you love him -
and yet even had I known, it would not have made any
difference, because all I hear is the life bursting
inside you like a cheap rubber balloon.

'Yes, I hear you.'



Reinaldo Ferreira

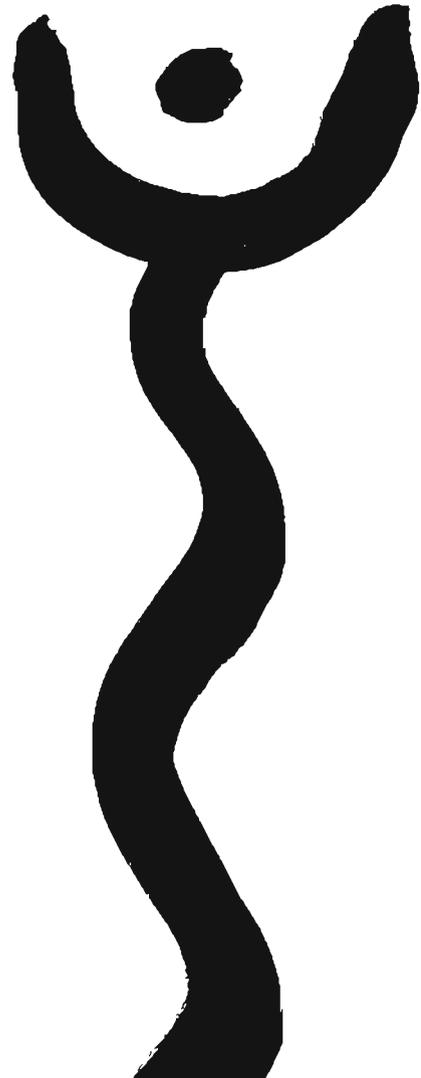
Mozambique

Two Poems

Translated by Luis Rafael

'If I never said that your teeth...'

If I never said that your teeth
Are pearls,
It's because they are teeth.
If I never said that your lips
Are red corals,
It's because they are lips.
If I never said that your eyes
Are onyx, or emeralds, or sapphires,
It's because they are eyes.
Pearls and onyx and corals are things,
And things don't exalt things.
If someday in some vague place
I were to praise you,
I surely would search in poetry,
In the landscape and in the music,
For the unsurpassable images
Of the eyes and the lips and the teeth.
But believe me, believe me in all sincerity,
That all metaphors are idle
To express that which I see.
And I see lips, eyes, teeth.



Copelia

I keep three sadly wistful letters of Copelia's,
and a ribbon, and a rose,
a faintly discoloured bud
which took its fragrance from her hair.
An elusive air, both ancient and sad, permeates the place.
But of course Copelia doesn't exist
and neither do the letters.
She's only real to me because she's absent,
and because I never possessed her I trust both in my vision of her
and in the memory of who she was in my past,
in the clandestine walks we took,
in the stars we made, in some kiss we shared,
in the exaltation of some dance that took flight,
in the feeling that a cloud wove itself around me;
and in the smooth and pure and fine emotion
of that sometime when her hand
delayed itself among mine.
This is Copelia,
if by chance it was her destiny
to be born or to have lived,
whose stern father would have refused me,
to whom I would have dedicated ill-fitting poems,
without ever having possessed her,
so she, belonging to another or died a virgin,
could remain, clear and alive,
within me.

From *Poemas*, 1960

Fikile Magadlela

South Africa

Three Poems

Smiling Splitting Images

So distant
As forever
To wake one
In a minute

Forever these images
Will not only torment
 the nation
Who might seem not to care
 Yet love wholesomely

Smiling splittingly images
Reflected on the mirrors
Of our minds
Never to deny the split
 images
Let the lightning strike
And burn the loins of
 My manhood
So the Nation & the World
Disassociate itself from me
Only for the creator
To rediscover man
I love my smiling splitting
 Images
'Cause they are me
I'm them! ! ! ! ! ! !

For Raks

With a tear
I see life
passing through
these very hands
that stop
the wind
 &
say amen.

Letter To One

With wings clipped
I would love to fly,
Where — I don't know.

With the love
I have
I would love to cry,
Why not
I wish I knew.

For the hate that I fear
There's so much dislike,
Who to blame
The state of mind.

I will sail
With the gale,
What will you tell your mom,
Simply
I'm gone.

Landmarks

'Behold our vegetable Athens rise'
- Roy Campbell

You're so vulnerable today
on that lectern, reciting away
after the same sage lecture
likening South Africa to an aloe or
khakibos or a river ford or
some other manifestation of nature

(slightly polluted at present, you confess)

wiping the oily skin of your forehead
with a detumescent white handkerchief

as the handful of aesthetes à la mode
in the scruff of your audience grown
inspired over you and your art

(how tangible! how true!)

learn to recline on the
upholstery of your verse
to feel how luxurious
metaphors can be



You give us

'Miners at The Face'...
'Great-Great-Grandfather'...
'To a Patient in a Health Spa'...
'Poffadder Still Life with Snake'...
'Kissing a Girl on Umkomaas Beach'...
'Letter to Doris, My Aunt, In Sandton'...
'Reflections on Grahamstown's Festival'...
'Orpheus and Eurydice Tryst in the Veld'...
'Table Mountain, As If Scumbled by Constable'...
'Rhodes Cottage Glimpsed Rounding the Cape'...
'Afar in the Desert I Like to Backpack'...
'August Sotho, Or Will They March?'...
'George Grey Mourns Nongqause'...
'Riots Are Just Not Cricket'...
'Syringa Trees in Autumn'...
'Prayer of a Bushman'...
'Soweto On My Mind'...

Poetry

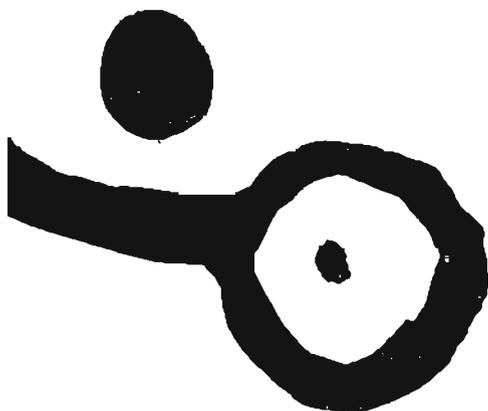
the myth of Adamastor borrowed
from Camoens
which never
seems quite to penetrate
the common mind, despite your efforts -

tearful elegies on leaving stroke returning
to the Cape -

your symbols refined from the Karroo
- since Schreiner your authentic landscape -

you search the top of every stone
you turn
on occasion around to find
the scorpion lurking there
in its horror
beneath the other side

which (although predicted)
makes you
start back
in some haste, towards your car



Behind the mark of the sensitive,
the misunderstood chap you crayon on
for these readings, between the covers
I'm not so sure you're sure of it, you

- your listeners dwindle by the year

- two months ago, a dreadlocked poetess
spat in the back row and walked
out without explaining why

you

try to brazen it out with
those who seem to circle you now
increasingly hostile, who surround
you with inscrutable eyes as

you

become so hurt, and sigh

though in the watchtower of your mind
embattled with dust and smoke,
you protect yourself with your own
image

still

THE RUSSIAN PRINCESS

Mia Couto

Mozambique

'It was enough for the rumour to spread that in Manica there was gold and that a railway line would be built to transport it, and pounds appeared in their hundreds of thousands, opening shops, setting up courses for the sailing of steamships, establishing networks of land transport, attempting to establish industries, selling brandy, trying to exploit in a thousand ways not only the gold, but also those who explored for that future gold...'

Antonio Ennes, Mozambique: Report Presented to the Government, Lisbon, 1946.

I'm sorry, Father, I'm not kneeling properly. Father knows, it's my leg: this thin leg I use on my left doesn't lean well against my body.

I come to confess long-time sins, blood trampled upon my soul, I'm too scared even to remember them. Please, Father, listen to me slowly, be patient. It's a long story. Like I always say: the path of the ant never ends nearby.

Maybe Father doesn't know, but this village once benefited well from another life. There was a time when people from far came here. The world is filled up with countries, most of them foreign ones. They've already got the sky filled up with flags, I don't even know how the angels can walk without bumping into all those cloths. What you say? Walk straight into the story? Yes, I'll go inside. But don't forget: I ask for a small lot of your time. You see, Father, life takes a long time.

I'll continue, then. During that time there also came to the village in Manica a Russian lady. She was called Nadia. They said she was a Princess in that land where she came from. She arrived with her husband, Yuri, also a Russian. The couple had come because of the gold, just like all the other foreigners who came to exhume fortunes from our soil. But like our elders always say: don't run after the chicken with salt in your hand. Because, Father, those mines were the size of dust, just one puff and there was almost nothing left.

The Russians did, however, bring with them the left-overs from their former livelihood, the luxuries of old times. Their house — if Father could only see it — was filled with things. And servants? There were more than many. And I, already being 'assimilated' like I was, was made the head of the servants. Do you know what they called me? General Foreman. That was my rank, I was somebody. I didn't work: I made the others do the work. I was the one to attend to the requests of the Master and the Missus. They spoke to me in a nice way, always with respect. I would then take those requests and scream out instructions to all the house-boys. I shouted, yes. That was the only way they obeyed. No one acted all tired just because they felt like

acting so. Or isn't it true that when God expelled Adam from Paradise he got rid of him with a kick?

The servants hated me, Father. I felt their rage when I stole their holidays from them. It didn't matter, you see. I actually enjoyed not being liked. I was fattened up by their rage, and I felt almost, almost a boss. They told me that this enjoyment for giving orders was a sin. But I think it's this leg of mine that advised me to go bad. I've got two legs: one is a saint, the other the devil. How can I follow a single path?

Sometimes I snatched some of the servant's chatter in the back-rooms. They raved on about lots of things, talking with clenched teeth,

I would get closer and they'd shut up. They wouldn't trust me. But to me their suspicions were like praise itself: I commanded over that fear which made them so small. They took their revenge; they made fun of me. They always, always, copied my limp-limp. The bastards, they laughed. I'm sorry to use swear words in a place full of respect.

But this old anger remains as though it's still happening today. I was born with a defect, it was a punishment God reserved for me even before I was shaped as a person. I know God is completely magnanimous. But Father, still, still! do you think he was just to me? Am I offending the Holiest One? Okay, I'm confessing now. If I cause offence now, Father will increase on the forgiveness side.

You're right, I will continue. The days were always the same in that house, sad and quiet. Early in the morning the Master set off for the mine, the field of gold, that's what they called it. He only came back at night, at the nightest. The Russians had no visitors. The others, the English and the Portuguese, never stopped by. The Princess lived locked up inside her sadness. She dressed to go out even inside the house. And I can say this: she visited herself. She always spoke in whispers, and to listen to her we had to bring the ear really close. I would reach to her delicate body. I've never seen such skin, the whitest. That whiteness recurred in my dreams and even today I shudder at the fragrance of that colour.

Mia Couto, *Mozambique*

She had this habit of lingering in the small hall, staring at the glass clock. She listened to the dials dripping away the time. It was a family clock, and I was the only one entrusted to clean it. If this clock were to break, Fortin, it would be my life that broke. She always said that, counselling me to take care.

It was one of those nights when I was in my back-room, lighting the coals. That was when a shadow from behind me gave me a fright. I looked, it was the lady. She brought a candle and she slowly moved close to me. While the candle light danced in all the corners she absorbed my room. I became all agitated, even embarrassed. She always saw me in the white uniform I used at work. Now I was there in shorts, shirtless and without any respect. The princess hovered around and then, to my astonishment, she sat on my mat. Have you seen anything like it? A Russian princess sitting on a mat? She stayed there a great deal of time, just sitting, remaining. Then, in her way of speaking Portuguese, she asked me, 'So you leeve zere ahfter awl?'

I had no answer for her. I began to think she was sick. Her head was mixing places up.

'Missus: it's better if she goes to the house. The room is not good for the Missus.'

She wouldn't answer my question. Again she asked, 'Put faw you it iz goot.'

'It's enough for me. A ceiling that covers us from the sky is enough.'

She undermined the certainties I held. The animals, she said, are the ones who hide in holes. But each person is a place to stay in, the place from where we sow our lives. I asked her if there are black people in the land where she came from. She burst out laughing, 'Oh, Fortin, you ask such questions!' I was astonished: if there were no black people in her land then who did all the heavy work? 'They're white people,' she replied. Whites? It's some lie of hers, I thought. After all, how many laws are there in this world? Or is it possible that misfortune wasn't really allotted in accordance with race? No, Father, I'm not directing the question to you, I'm only discussing it with myself.

That's how we went on speaking that night. When she was at the door she asked me to show her the hostels where the others slept. At first I wouldn't oblige. But deep down I wished she would go there. So she could see that there was a wretchedness far worse than mine. And so I agreed: we set out in the dark to see one of those places reserved only for domestic servants Princess Nadia was filled with sadness when she saw how they lived their lives. So expressive did she become that she began to swop languages, skipping from Portuguese to her own tongue. Only now did she understand why the Master never let her out, why he always withheld his permission. It is only so I would not see the misery, she was saying. I noticed she cried. Shame on the Missus, I felt sorry for her. A white woman, so far from her own race, there, in the middle of the bushveld. Yes, all that must have been bush for the princess, suburbs of bush. Even her large house, tidied up according to the taste of her customs, even her house was a dwelling of the bush.

On our return I pricked myself on one of those thorns of the micaia. The thorn got deep inside my foot. The princess tried to help but I turned away:

'You can't touch this leg of mine, Missus...'

She understood. She began to console me; that leg was no defect at all, my body didn't deserve to feel any shame because of it. In the beginning I didn't like this talk. I suspected she only felt sorry, compassion, but nothing else. But after that I gave into that sweetness of hers, and I forgot the pain on my foot. It felt as if my ambulating leg was mine no longer.

From that night onwards the Missus began to go out all the time, visiting the environs. She made use of the Master's absence to bid me to show her all the pathways. 'One of these days, Fortin, we are going to leave early and go up to the mines.' I was frightened by those desires of hers. I knew the Master's instructions; he forbade the goings-out of the Missus. Until one day the whole thing burst.

'The other servants have told me you are taking walks with the Madam.'

Bastards, they'd complained about me. Only to

show that, just like all of them, I was reduced to size by the same voice. Envy is the worst type of snake: it bites with the victim's own teeth. And so, at that moment I drew back:

'It's not because I want to, Master. It's the Missus that tells me to.'

You see, Father? In a second there I was denouncing the Missus, betraying the confidence she gave me.

'It's the last time it happens, you hear that, Fortin?'

We stopped roading. The princess would ask me, urge me. Only for a very small distance, Fortin, But I had no spirit. And so the lady retreated to that state of being a prisoner in the house. She looked like a statue.

Even after the Master had arrived, already at night, she still kept that inert pose, staring at the clock. She observed time which only showed itself to those who weren't present in life. The Master didn't even bother with her: he marched straight to the table, ordered drinks to be brought. He ate, drank; repeated. He didn't even notice the lady; it looked like she was an under-existent. He didn't hit her.

Beating her up wasn't the thing for a prince to do. Death or giving a hiding weren't things they carried out by themselves, they ordered others to do it for them. It's we, whose destiny it is to serve others, who are hands of their filthy wishes. I always hit others when I was ordered to do so; I scattered beating-ups all over the place. I only hit people of my colour. Now I look around me and have no one I can call

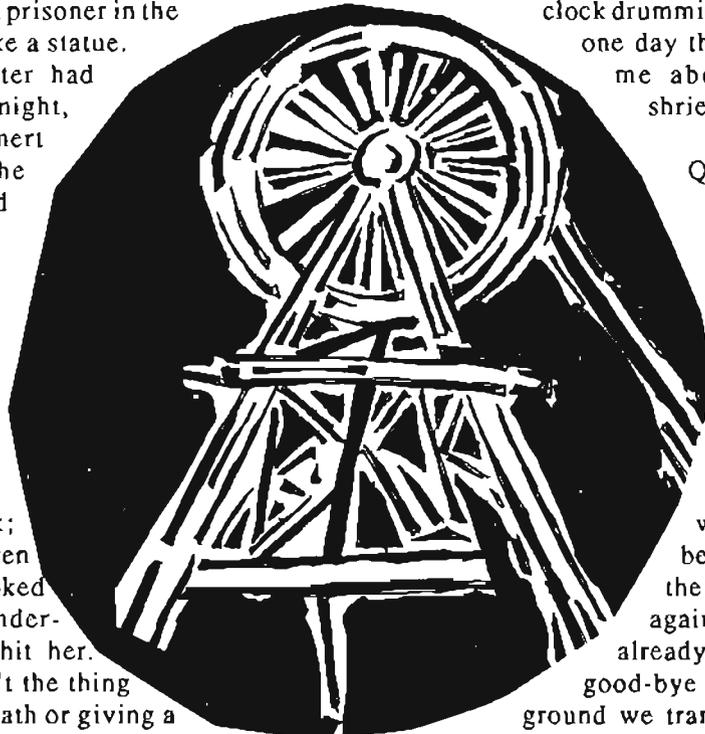
brother. No one. They never forget, these blacks. This race of mine is a vindictive one. You're also black, Father; maybe you understand. If God's black, Father, I'm in the frying pan; I'm never going to receive forgiveness. Never again! What d'you say? I mustn't talk like this about God? Do you think he'll hear me over here, so far away from the sky, me, such a tiny thing? He can hear? Wait, Father, let me just straighten the way I'm standing. Blasted leg, it always refuses to obey me. Okay, I can confess more. Like I said. Or like I was saying, to be sure. There was no history in the house of the Russians, nothing ever happened. There were only the silence and sighs of the lady. And the clock drumming away the silence. Until one day the boss started ordering me about with all types of shrieks.

'Call the servants, Fortin. Quick, all of them. And go outside.'

I got them all together, the house boys, the servants and even the fat cook, Nelson Machine.

'We are going to the mine, Quick, get on the wagon.'

We got to the mine, were all given spades and began to dig. The roof of the mine had collapsed once again. There were men, some already very dead, others saying good-bye to life, under the very ground we trampled upon. The spades went up and down, nervously. We saw arms stuck in the sand, they looked like roots of meat. There were shouts, a confusion of commands and of dust. Next to me the fat cook was pulling an arm; he was preparing to use all his strength to haul out the body. But what: it was a loose arm, already torn away from its body. The cook fell with that dead



Mia Couto, *Mozambique*

chunk he was holding in his hands. Still sitting awkwardly he burst out laughing. He looked at me and then his laughter began to fill up with tears; the fat man looked like a lost child, sobbing away.

I couldn't bear it, Father, I was unable to. It was a sin to do so, but I turned my back on those afflictions. That suffering was too much. One of the house boys tried to hold me, he sneered at me. I turned my face, I didn't want him to see I was crying.

That year the mine collapsed for a second time. The second time I also ran away from this work of saving lives. I know I'm a good-for-nothing, Father. But Father's never seen a hell like that one. We pray for God to save us from the hell-fires after our death. But, after all, we already live in that Hell, we trample upon its flames, the souls we carry full of scars. Just like in there, it was like a field of sand mixed with blood and we were scared to even tread on it. Because under our very eyes death was burying herself, grabbing our souls with her very arms. Why is it my fault, tell me with all frankness, why's it my fault I'm unable to sieve bits of people?

I'm not a person to save others. I'm a person for things to happen to, not one to happen. I thought about all this when I returned. My eyes didn't even ask for me to show them the way, it looked like I walked in my own tears. All of a sudden I remembered the Princess, it seemed like I heard her voice asking for help. It was as if she was there, at each tree side, begging on her knees like I'm doing now. But once again I wouldn't allow myself to dish out help, I drew away from goodness.

When I was in my back-room it pained me to hear the world around me full of the beautiful sounds of the dusk. I hid in my own arms. I locked all my thoughts away in the dark room. It was then that her hands came. With great slowness they unrolled the obstinate snakes of my arms. She spoke to me as if I were a child, the child she never had.

'It vas ahn akseedent in ze min?'

I only replied with a nod. She uttered curses in her own language and left. I went with her, I knew

she suffered more than I did. The princess sat in the large lounge and waited silently for the return of her husband. She stood up slowly when the Master arrived. It then became visible that she was holding the glass clock in her hands. The one she had so often entreated me to take care. She lifted the clock well above her head and with all her strength hurled it against the floor. The shards scattered and the floor became covered with glittering grains. She continued to break the other china-ware, and everything she did was unhurried, done without a shout. But those shards cut her soul asunder, I knew that. The Master, yes, he screamed. At first in Portuguese. He commanded her to stop. The Princess didn't obey. He called out in his own language, she didn't even hear it. And do you know what she did? No, Father can't even imagine it, even to me it hurts just to recount it. The princess removed her shoes and, staring into her husband's face, began to dance over the shards of glass. She danced, danced, danced. The amount of blood she left behind, Father! I know, I was the one who cleaned it up. I took the cloth, I moved it along the floor as if I was caressing the body of the lady, giving consolation to her many wounds. The Master ordered me to get out, to leave everything as it was. But I refused. 'I have to clean this blood, Master.' I replied in a voice that didn't even seem to be mine. Was I disobeying? Where did it come from, that strength that tied me to the ground, locked me up in my own determination?

And that's how it was, as truthful as it is improbable. But then, all of a sudden, a lot of time went by. I don't know if it was because of the glass, because on the following day the lady became sick. She was laid out in a separate room; she slept alone. While I made the bed she rested on the sofa. We spoke. The topic never changed: recollections from her land, the lulling of her childhood.

'This sickness, Missus, I'm sure it's because of longing.'

'Aw! my laife is zhere. Fartin, ze man I love iz in Russia.'

I was hesitant; pretending to be, that is. I didn't

want to understand.

'Chee iz kulled Anton. Chee iz the only man of my cheart.'

I'm imitating the way she spoke, it's not to make fun of her. But that's the way I keep her confession about that lover of hers. Other secrets followed; she was always granting me the memories of that hidden love. I was scared in case our conversations were overheard. I got the job done quickly only so I could leave the room. But one day she gave me a sealed envelope. It was a matter of utmost secrecy, no one was allowed to even suspect its existence. She asked me to post the letter at the town's post office.

From that day onwards she always gave me letters. They followed on from each other, one, another one, yet another one. She wrote lying down, the handwriting on the envelope shook with fever.

But Father: do you want to know the truth? I never posted those letters. Nothing at all, not even one. I have committed a sin and I suffer for it. It was fear that put the brakes on this obligation to obedience, fear of being caught with these burning indictments in my own hands.

The poor lady regarded me with all her goodliness, trusting in the sacrifice I was doing for her. She would give me her correspondence and I would begin to tremble, it felt as if my fingers were holding flames. Yes, I'm saying it was like it was: flames. Because that's where those letters ended. I threw them all into the kitchen coal-stove, The secrets of milady were burnt over there. I listened to the fire and it sounded like her own sighs. Goodness, Father, I'm sweating just by talking about this embarrassment of mine.

And time went on like this. The lady only weakened from strength. I would walk in the room and she stared at me for a long time; she almost pierced me with those blue eyes. She never asked if there had been a reply. Only the mute despair of those eyes stolen from the sky asked anything.

The doctor came every day now. He would leave the room and shake his head, denying all hope. The whole house was shaded, the curtains were always closed. There were only shadows and silence. One



day I saw the door open, half-slit. It was the lady who peered out. With a wave she bade me to enter. I asked if she was getting better. She didn't reply. She sat in front of the mirror and decked herself with a fragrant powder, deceiving death's colour on her face. She painted her mouth, but she took a long time to colour in the lips. The hands shook so much that the red made lines on the nose and all over the chin. If I were a woman I would help but, being a man, I stayed looking, cautiously nervous.

'Is the Missus going out?'

'I am ckoine to ze staytione.'

'To the station?'

'Yes. Anton iz komin on zhis terrain.'

And, opening her hand-bag, she showed me a letter. She said it was his reply. He had taken long to answer but he was now due to arrive; she shook the envelope like children do when they are scared their make-believe will be taken away. She said something in Russian. Then she spoke in Portuguese: this Anton was coming on the Beira train, he was to take her from there to some far away place.

For sure the lady was delirious. The lady was only make-believing and idea. How could a reply have arrived? After all, didn't I collect all the post? And the lady hadn't left the house for more than a long time. And what's more, hadn't the lady's handwriting been addressed to the fire?

She took to the road, held in my arms. I remained her walking-stick until close to the station. It was here, Father, that I committed the worst sin. I'm very hard on myself, I won't give myself any allowances. Yes, I defend myself against everything except against my own self. That's why this confession is stealing the weight off me. I'm already sure God is on my side. Don't you think I'm right, Father? Listen then.

The skin of the princess was tight against my body; I perspired her sweat. The lady, all forlorn, was on my lap, the whole of her. I began to dream [that] she was running away with me after all. Who was I if not for that Anton? Yes, I was the authenticated writer of that letter. Was I being deceitful? At the time I gave it my full consent.

After all, if the lady's life had no worth what did it matter if I helped her fantasies a little. Maybe, who knows, these follies would help to heal the wound that stole her body away from her. But, Father, have you noticed what I was pretending to be? I, Duarte Fortin, general foreman of the house-boys, running away with a white woman, and a princess at that. As if she would one day want to be with me, a man of another colour and unequal footing. There's no doubt about it, I have the soul of an earthworm, I'm going to be crawling in the other world. My sins ask for many prayers. Pray for me, Father, pray a lot for me! Because I still haven't told the worst.

I was carrying the Princess along an out-of-the-way path. She didn't even notice that we had strayed away. I took the lady to the bank of the river and I laid her on the soft grass. I went to the river to fetch a bit of water. I wet her face and neck. She replied with a shiver; the mask of powder was becoming disarranged. The princess breathed with difficulty. She looked around and asked:

'Ze staytione?'

I decided to lie. I said it was there, adjacent to where we were. We were in the shade only to hide from the others who were waiting in the courtyard of the station.

'We can't be seen. It's better to wait for the train in this hiding-place.'

She, poor woman, thanked me for my concern. She said she had never seen a man of such goodness. She asked me to wake her up when it was time; she was very tired, she needed to rest. I remained looking at her, appreciating the nearness of her presence. I saw the buttons of her dress, a prediction of all the warmth that lay underneath them. My blood increased in urgency. At the same time I was assailed by fear. And what if the Master was to catch me with his lady there in the middle of the grasslands? All he had to do was aim the dark muzzle of the gun and shoot at me. It was this fear of being gunned down that put the brakes on me. Just by looking at the woman on my lap I became delayed. That was when the dream began, once again, to flee from me. Do you know what I felt, Father? I felt

as if she didn't have her own body: she was using mine. Do you follow me, Father? Her white skin was mine, her mouth belonged to me, her blue eyes were both mine. It was as if one soul had been allotted to two conflicting bodies: one male, the other female; one black, the other white. Do you doubt me? You must learn this, Father, the opposites are always the most equal. You don't believe me, look: isn't it fire the one that looks most like the ice? They both burn and it is only through death that man can cross them both.

But if I was her, then my second body was dying. That's why I felt weakened, all given-up. I fell to her side and the two of us stayed like that, without moving. She with her eyes closed. I trying to ward off sleepiness. I knew that if I closed my eyes they would never again open themselves. I was already too much inside it. I couldn't go down any more. There were times when we looked very similar to the dead and it is this similarity which gives strength to those already deceased. They can never forgive this: us, the living, being so similar to them.

And do you know how I saved myself, Father? It's all because I thrust my arms in the warm ground, like the dying miners did. They were the roots that tied me to life, they were what saved me. I got up, all sweaty, full of fever. I decided to leave that place without delay. The Princess was still alive and made a gesture to detain me. I sneered at the request. I returned to the house, still feeling the same bewilderment of that time when I had forsaken the survivors in the mine. When I arrived I told the Master: I found the lady already dead under a tree near the station. I accompanied him so he could see for himself. The Princess under the shade was still breathing.

When the Master reached closer to her she grabbed his arms and said: 'Anton!'

The Master heard that name which wasn't his. But even then, he kissed her forehead tenderly. I went to fetch a wagon and when we lifted her up she was already dead, cold like 'things.' A letter fell down from her dress. I tried to catch it but the Master was quicker. He looked at the envelope with

surprise and then peered into my face. I waited in dread, my chin on my breast, for him to ask. But the Master crumpled up the paper and put it inside his pocket. We went to the house in silence.

The following day I ran away to Gondola. I'm still there now, working for the railways. Now and then I come to Manica and I stop at the old cemetery. I kneel in front of the lady's grave and I tell her I'm sorry; I'm not sure I know for what. No, incidentally, I do know. ask for forgiveness for never being that man for whom she waited. But that's only pretending to be guilty. Father knows that this kneeling of mine here is a lie. Because when I'm there, in front of her grave, I can only remember the taste of her body. That's why I am confessing this bitterness that steals the love for life away from me. There isn't long to go before I leave the world. I've already asked God permission to die. But it looks like God doesn't listen to my requests.

What do you say, Father? I shouldn't speak like this, all given-up? It's the way I remember myself, widowed from a woman I never had. I feel so small already. Do you know what is the only happiness that warms itself in me? It's when I leave the cemetery and go for a walk on the dust and ashes of the old mine of the Russians. The mine's already closed down; it died with the lady. I walk alone in there. Then I sit on an old tree trunk and look behind to those tracks I had walked over. Then, do you know what I see? I see two different types of footsteps, but both of them come out of my own body. Some from a big foot, a masculine foot. The others are the tracks of a smaller foot, a woman's one. These are the footsteps of the Princess, the one who walks by my side. They're her footsteps, Father. I have no greater certainty than this. Not even God can alter this certainty of mine. God can withhold me forgiveness for all my sins and I can be at risk for the destiny of Hell. But I don't even care: there in the ashes of that Hell I will see the tracks of her footsteps, always walking on my left side. 

Translated by Luis Rafael

NEW PHOTOGRAPHS FROM

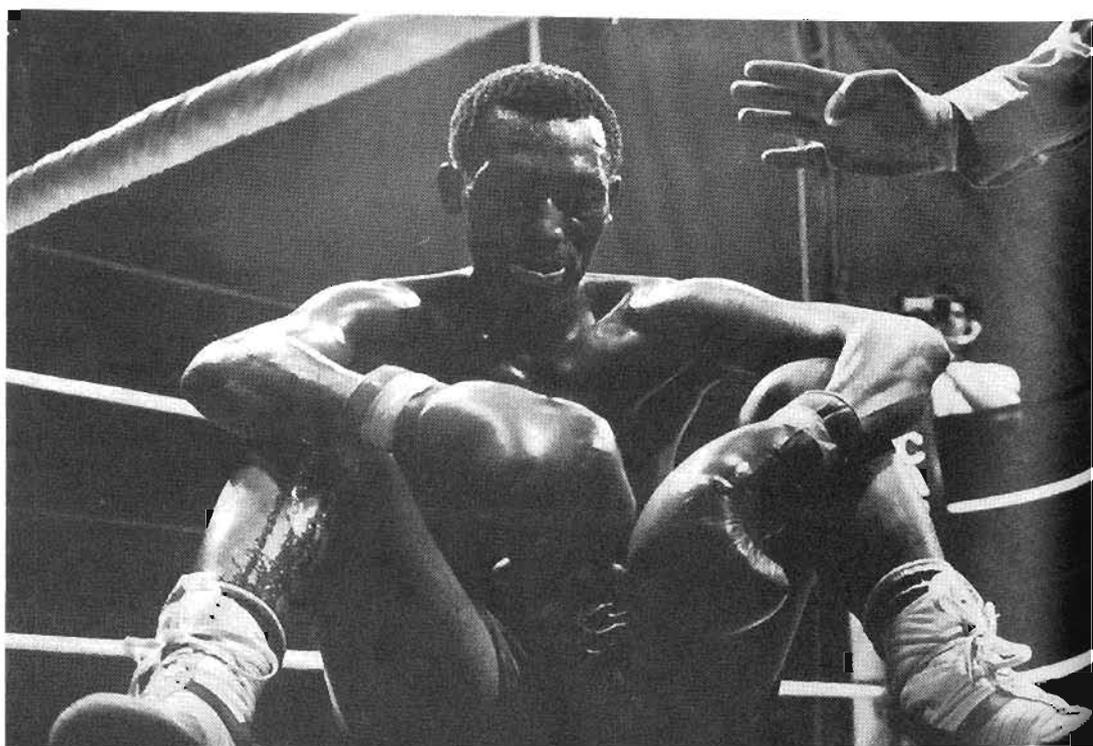


THE
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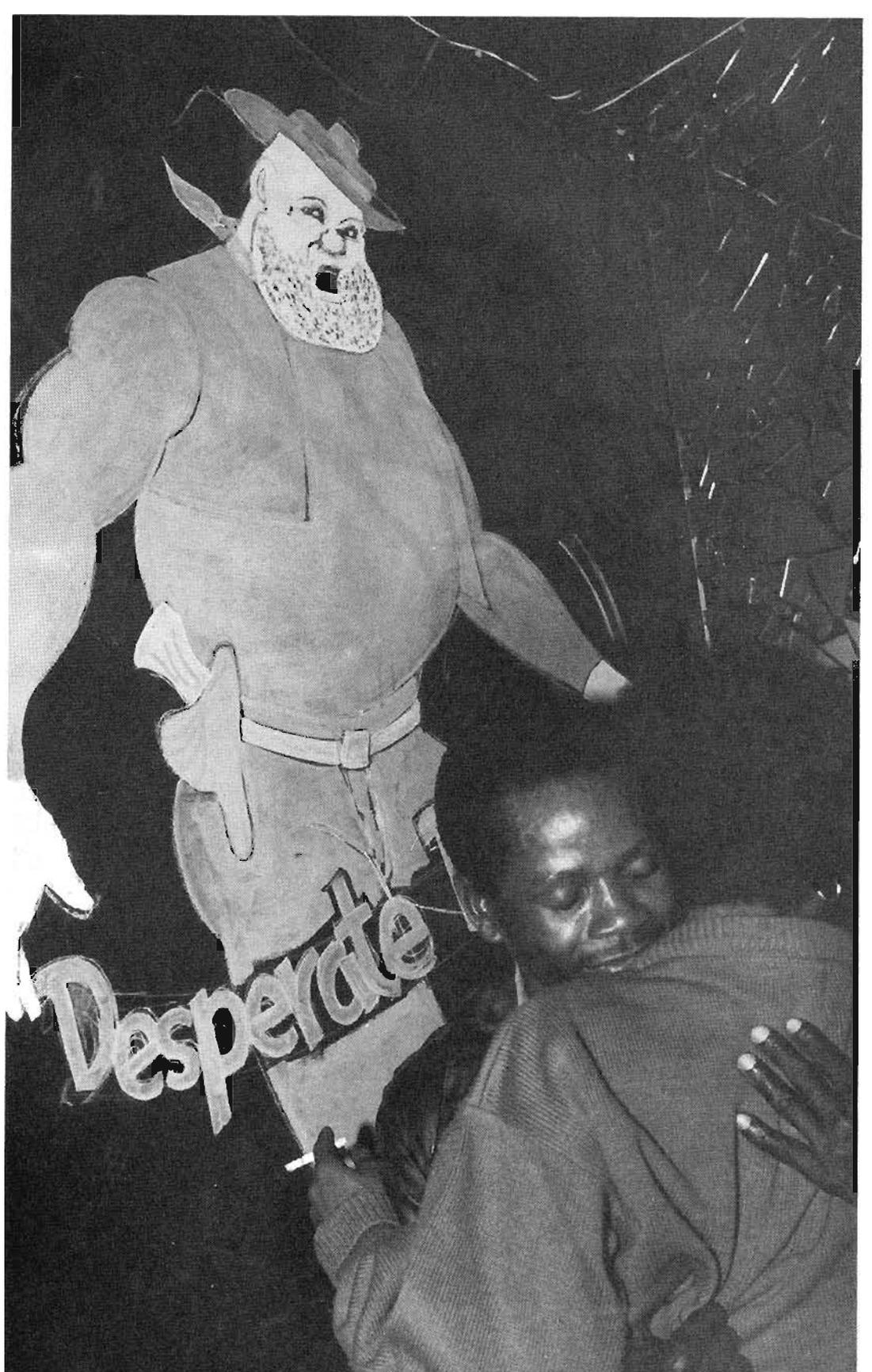


Above:
Yeoville Afternoon,
Nic Hofmeyer

Right:
Taking the Count,
Boxer down at
Portuguese Hall,
Botswana
Jodi Bieber

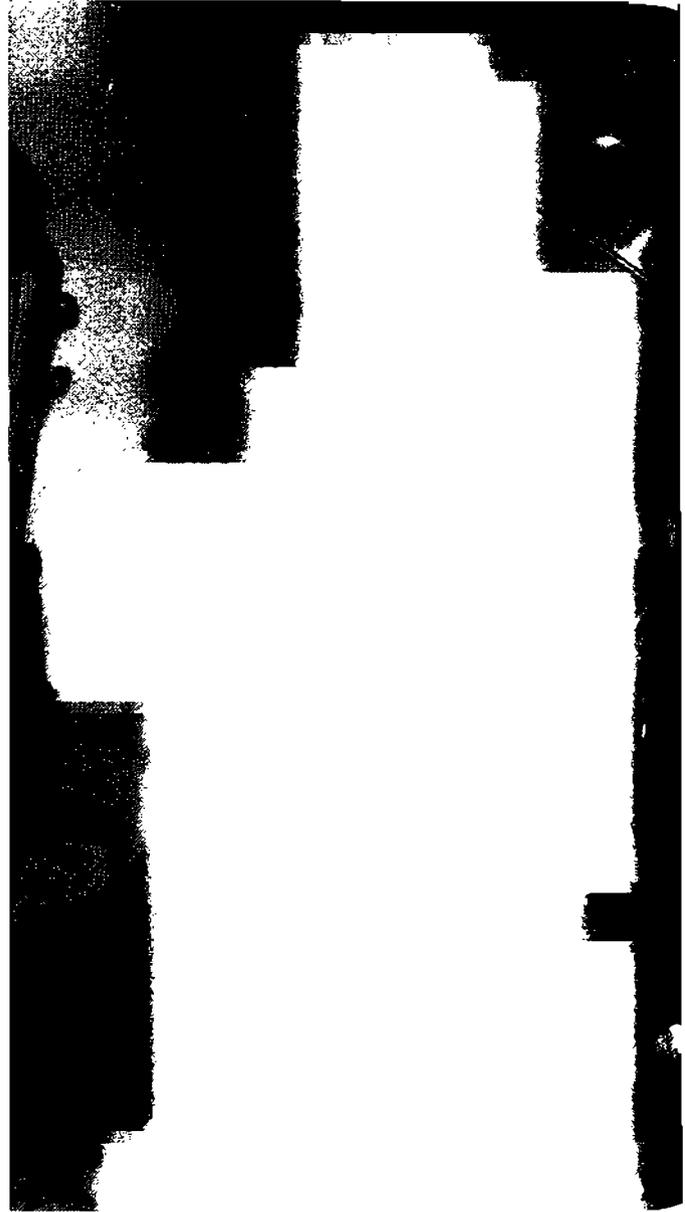


Previous Page:
Boys to Men,
Themba Hadebe

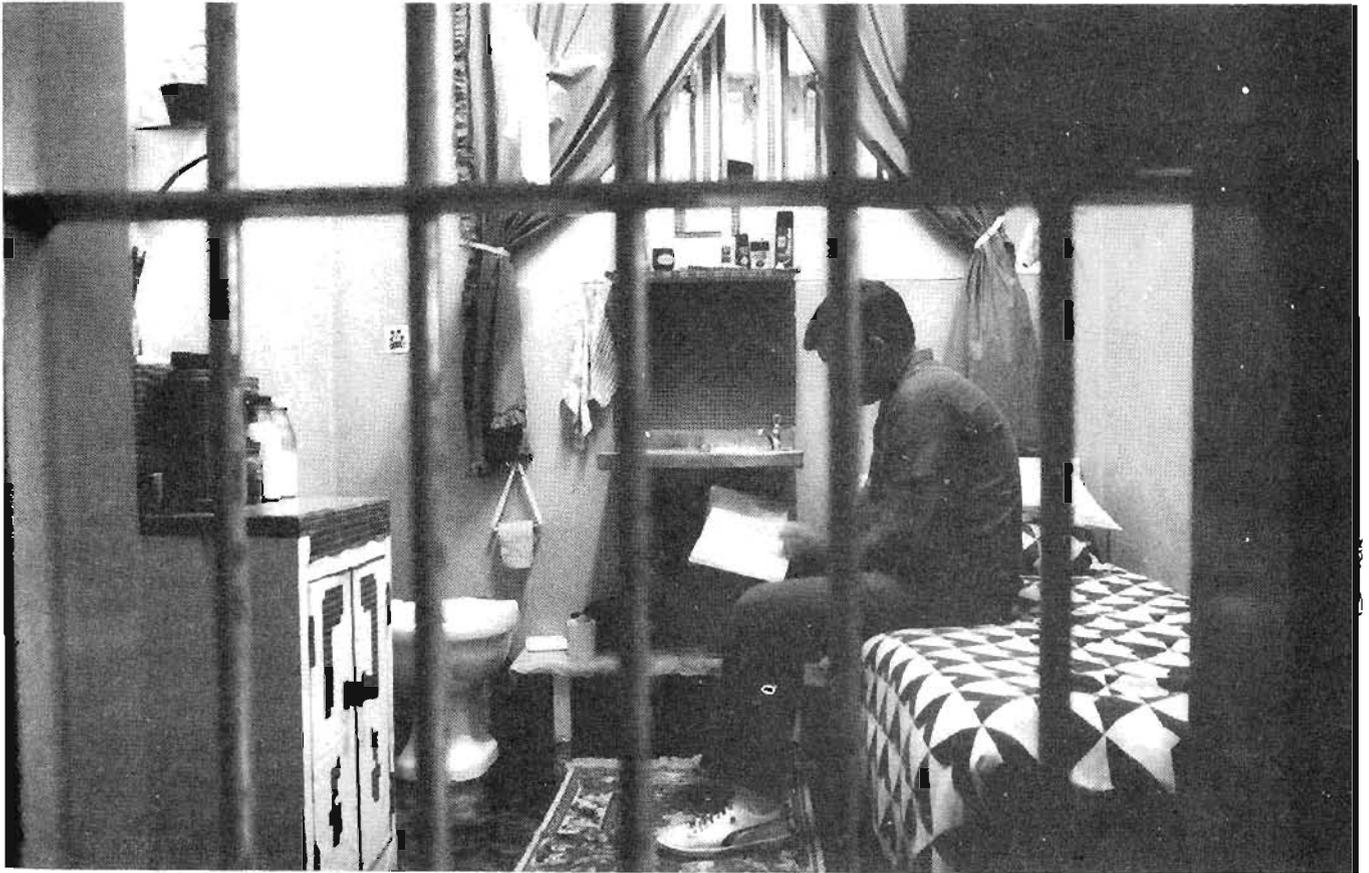


Right:
'The Bulb' Night-club,
Francistown,
Botswana
Jodi Bieber

Right:
Perm and Set,
Rosebank Hair Salon,
Natasha Pincus



Left:
Sky Walkers,
Jody Bieber



Above:
Johannesburg Prison.
Some prisoners make their
cells as homely as possible.
Others say if they enjoy their time
too much they could be tempted back.
Hans van der Veen



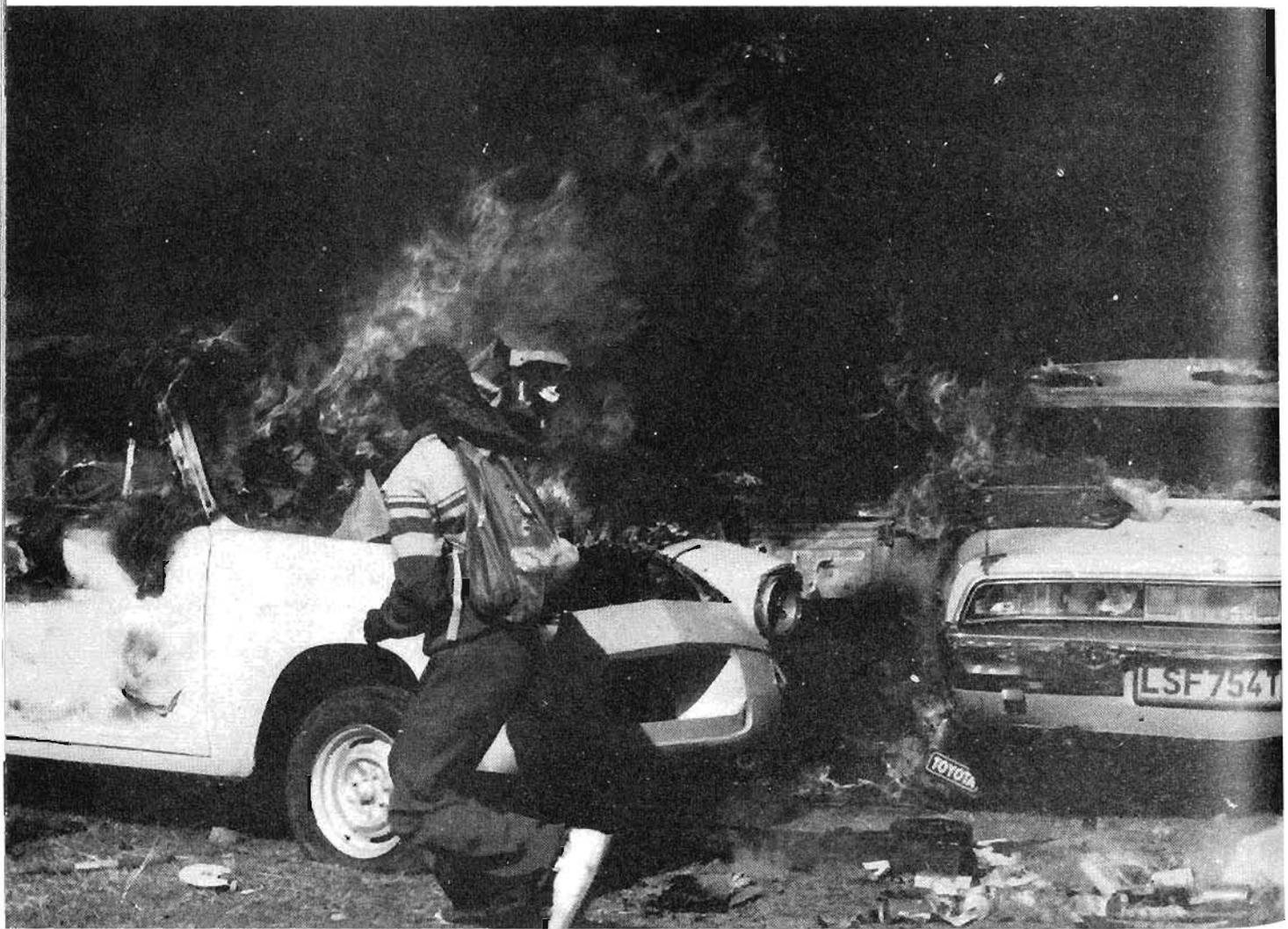
Above:
Hand Made Gun,
Thokoza Self Defence Unit
Nashon Zalk

Below:
Shattered...
Onlookers crowd around an ambushed
police van in which a constable was killed,
Gary Bernard





Right:
Melanie,
Neil Spence



Above:
Looting of Houses Outside F.N.B Stadium
during Chris Hanl's Funeral,
Johnny Onverwacht

Poetry

The Man

an almost forgotten acquaintance
was in town recently
i noticed that it started raining
just as he ambled in

i remember him as a simple man
growing up, we all wanted
to be doctors, lawyers & teachers
so the blood could ebb out of the village

my friend had much more sober dreams
he asked the heavens to grant him
the imposing peace of the blue-gum in his backyard
and that all the poor send him their tears
so he could be humble like the sun
so the red wax of the stars would not drip onto him

i remembered that man today
and all i think of is his unassuming radiance
like that of a blushing angel

as for his dreams
he tells us
whole forests invade his sleep at night
so that there's only standing room
for the dreams

Seitlamo Motsapi, South Africa

Movement

With
the graceful movement
of a full-moon light
on a clear winter night,
The pale gloss disturbs
my wee-hour
moments.

Sometimes
I've dreamt
of Mount Turquino
— where I've never been

Mafika Pascal Gwala, South Africa



Dog-thoughts

Stray dog I am;
 nothing wrong about me.
 If I was of my lordfriends' kind
 vagabond I'd have been called.

Stray dog I am —
 nothing wrong it's me!
 But please don't poke your butt
 into my silent arse,
 you never know ass
 I too have tempered urges
 stored up tight in my rabied self.
 So take care!

Right I'm right who is me:
 don't gagge my doggerel
 with that stunned oohing and aahing!
 For story guts is me am here
 So never bully a fellow so
 never trust a stranger;
 TAKE CARE!

Nhamo Mhiripiri, Zimbabwe

Okombahe

i remember the
 warm nights
 in which the
 river glowed like a silver snake
 and my feet finding their way to it

standing in the lukewarm
 water which flowed past my feet
 looking up at the moon and stars
 and the date palms waving
 in the fine breeze
 and me feeling so warm and safe
 in the soft darkness of the evening
 lost in the magic of water, sand and stars
 till mother's call would
 come surprisingly to my ears

to draw me away
 to another world
 of never-ending stories
 in the little hut near the river

Elizabeth Khaxas, Zimbabwe



The Pythons Are Dying

Reuben Mowszowski

South Africa

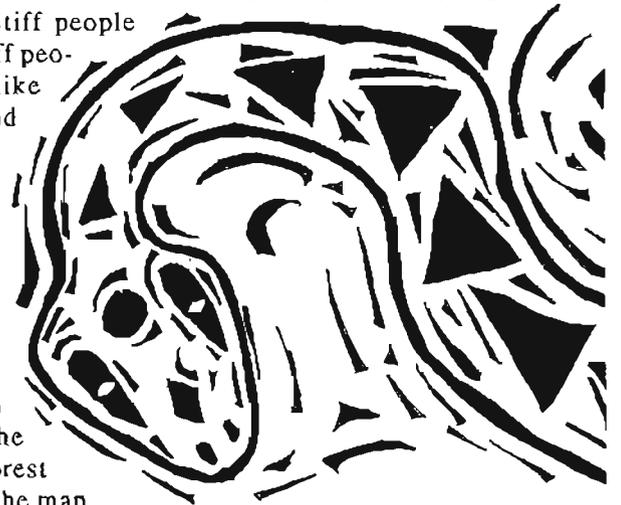
6.55 am. I am stiff. The cafe opens at seven. Good. Mrs Portuguesa, I owe you five cents from yesterday. Are you still dreaming of palm-trees? Stuck here in a cheap cafe with old fruit and sacks of smoky wood? A cheap cafe with space games and black people leaning homeless against the wall? Can you give me a rand, brother? I'm hungry. Sorry my friend, this starving writer is out of work. He has spent his last coins on a paper, looking for news. This is the news: MAN BITES PYTHON. THEY FALL INTO A DONGA. Fourteen people are thrown out of a train window. Three die. People thrown out of train windows collect in dongas. Cultural weapons and AK 47s clatter into dongas. Dongas are where pythons live. A

python wraps itself around a man. The man bites the python. He doesn't choke on his teeth. His teeth don't slip down his throat while he sleeps. This is a strong man with big white teeth, African teeth. Teeth for biting pythons.

Teeth for crushing cultural weapons and AK 47s. This python can bend and twist, it can squeeze. This man can bite, he can chew. Thrown out of a train window he falls into a donga. He chews through pythons, cultural weapons and AK 47s. He wants to eat, this man does. He wants food. He is hungry. Brother, do you have a rand? the artist outside the cafe says. See this drawing I am making? It is of Africa. Traditional houses. Conical hats. The people in the drawing are stiff. They don't move. He can't make them move. There is a museum down the road of stiff people in glass boxes. Stiff people

that fly out of train windows. Stiff people with arms at their sides. They lie like sticks, mixed up with cultural weapons and

AK 47s on the bottom of dongas. They have become a home for pythons. Mrs Portuguesa is thinking of soft ocean. Her husband has not time to shave, her children are tired. They don't like these black people who lean against their wall. They don't like the piss on the streets. They work and work but there is not enough money; for the children, for the house, for the holiday. The artist draws black people. Stiff black people. Mrs Portuguesa is herself becoming stiff. Her arms have stopped bending. She stands away from the till. Her children have become stiff. They can no longer brush their teeth. Now the python is rising. It rises among stiff people. It rises through a forest of stiff people, cultural weapons and AK 47s. It rises to find the man who is still supple, who bends and twists, who laughs and perspires. The man with shining teeth, African teeth. They are in a donga. The python is twisted around the man. The man bites the python. The python is dying. It has become stiff. The man cannot move, he is no longer supple. He is caught in the shape of the python. They are in a donga. The donga is full of stiff people, cultural weapons and AK 47s. The donga is full of pythons.



The pythons are dying.

In discussing a topic such as this, it is first and foremost appropriate to think back on the many valuable contributions that have been made in furthering literary debate in this country over the past two decades by progressive and left-wing artists, activists and intellectuals who have struggled to shift decision-making about how literature should be viewed and evaluated away from the small, white, liberal literary elite whose judgments held absolute sway up until the early 1970s. Although this liberal clique has certainly not disappeared — indeed, it seems to me to be at present in resurgence — the Black Consciousness activists of the 1970s, and the activists of organisations such as Writers' Forum, AWA and COSAW who have followed them, have gone a long way towards displacing literary power away from this group of Eurocentric aesthetes towards a more appropriate and representative set of opinions about South African literature. In criticism, one has to acknowledge in particular the contributions of two people: Njabulo Ndebele's ongoing presence and critical interventions since at least 1983, and Albie Sachs's more recent contributions.

Sachs was, in my opinion, accurate to criticise the manner in which the radical political art and literature of the early 1980s had got stuck within what he called 'support art': a literature which allowed expression only to overtly political themes and concerns. This occasioned an art which, to quote Ndebele in turn, remained content with allowing mere recognition of the horrors of apartheid on the part of the reader, without encouraging deeper insight, analysis or understanding; and which indulged in fairly uncomplicated and easy polemics

The Role of the Writer in a Time of Transition

Kelwyn Sole
South Africa

and sloganeering. While there are of course some differences between their positions, it seems to me that both Sachs and Ndebele were, crucially, stressing that writers should pay attention to gaining useful skills and techniques to further their craft: that writers and other artists needed to pay attention to the formal quality of their work, rather than just continue to believe that their work would be valuable as art if it appeared to demonstrate the 'correct' political attitudes and ideology.. In this regard, both Sachs and Ndebele have furthered the debate on appropriate form and content matter of local literature — and of course the appropriate position and role of the writer — considerably.. They have freed South African writers to explore the many and varied dimensions of human life and conduct; they have, potentially at least, freed writers to explore, learn and experiment with new techniques of expression without having to feel apologetic and irrelevant for following these concerns.

The debates should not stop there, however. Neither critic would wish their respective interventions to be seen as final, completed 'truths' about literature that are in no further need of refinement, debate or, indeed, criticism... Both positions have weaknesses as well as strengths; and it is a matter for concern how little disagreement there has been from the writers and activists who come from the various political, ideological, and socio-economic tendencies that can be discerned in as broad an 'umbrella' organisation as COSAW. For disagreement and diversity in cultural matters is, surely, a sign of health; a sign of dynamic strength, flexibility and movement.

Both Sachs's and Ndebele's positions, in my opinion, emerge out of a humanist, but a radical rather than a liberal humanist, way of thinking. Consequently it is necessary to point out that the varied philosophies of humanism, as they apply to and seek to understand social life, are systems of ideological and political power like any other. What lies behind humanism's empathetic, inclusive pretensions — its apparent appeal to a broadly conceived and embracing 'humanity' rather than

specific constituencies of authority and interest — is the fact that it informs a system of power like any other ideology. The appeals humanism makes to 'human nature', to our everyday emotions, experiences and to 'common sense', disguises the fact that it is a philosophy that imagines and constructs society in a certain way, and thus has certain political and social effects. . .

Therefore one cannot view Sachs's, or Ndebele's, interventions apart from the effects (and limitations) of their own ideological viewpoints and visions. Neither can one view them outside of the context out of which they have emerged. It seems to me that the radical humanism they espouse is linked to the present phase of change in South African politics; a period of transition where a new, hopefully more humane and more democratic, country is in the process of birth. Thus, they stress the human, empathetic ties that, hopefully, will come to bond all individual South Africans together more and more as a nation in the years to come. To characterise people as tolerant, rational individuals who have freedom of choice is, of course, relevant to the need to empower a democratic, critical and self-critical civil society in a future South Africa: Sachs and Ndebele therefore appeal to South Africans' human sensibilities, identities and tolerance as potential individual citizens of a new country. This also explains their stressing the need for writers and performers to explore the everyday human foibles, beliefs and viewpoints of their fictional characters more thoroughly and more articulately in their stories, theatre and poems; in order that these writers can demonstrate and analyse (and thus, hopefully, get their readers and audience to imagine and think about) individuals struggling to understand and transform themselves in this changing society. This is especially clear in recurring statements by Ndebele: he believes that in South Africa 'if it is the entire society that has to be recreated, then no aspect of that society can be deemed irrelevant to the progress of liberation'. He believes that the problem with the use of direct political exposition in previous black South African literature is that it

has restricted the 'social imaginative compass'. In its place, he argues for a literature which will focus on a wider range of social issues and processes in everyday life in the community; thus emotionally and analytically involving its readership to allow for what he calls 'meaningful knowledge acquisition'. Literature, because it explores problems of personal and interpersonal intimacy, 'helps us to come to terms with ourselves. This essentially fair-minded aspect of literature is central to the democratic ideal ... to accommodate the subjectivity of others as we pursue a common goal'. In this manner literature is seen as a powerful tool of individual, and wider social, democratic transformation.¹

Yet there are several issues of concern that can be blurred over in such a formulation. The seductive face of humanism — whether this humanism is radical or liberal — is that it denies its own structures of power and its own biases, at the same time stressing that alternative ideologies and political positions are inhabited by powermongers, or by people supposedly without the sensibility and refinement humanists have. There is a price to pay, therefore, for any facile acceptance of a radical humanist position as the best and only way into a new South Africa, just as there is a price to pay for unproblematically accepting more familiar liberal humanist positions. Both Ndebele and Sachs (in their different ways) exhibit a reluctance, in their rapt contemplation of the potentials of the human spirit, to look at the cleavages, schisms and contradictions which are to be found in all societies. Sachs's humanism constructs its own power in such a way as to deny, or at least downplay, the social and economic cleavages which bedevil this country: Sachs seems to believe that in a future South Africa the incorporative gesture which will allow a dominant political organisation — in his thinking, of course, the ANC — to achieve a hegemony in society will be easily accomplished. In its turn, what is striking about Ndebele's thought is its strong reliance on philosophical abstraction and the radically absolute nature of its opposite, racially

defined, cultural and intellectual poles. This brand of African humanism allows Ndebele, by using a sweeping and somewhat idealised dialectical view of history, to focus on the need for a racial transformation of power and authority in South African society, sometimes at the expense of focussing on other important sites of antagonism and conflict. The gaps in political analysis which may result from such an ideology are especially noticeable when Ndebele turns his attention to countries in which the racial dynamic is not as insistent as in apartheid South Africa. For example, in his discussion of street violence and retribution in recent Lesotho politics, it is noteworthy that he uses explanatory terms — 'the mob', 'the victim' and 'the public' — which do not speak sufficiently to wider issues of class, political affiliation and the ongoing battle over scant resources in the country.²

The political price to pay for accepting uncritically either of these world-views is that they downplay those issues which will not be solved by a simple transfer of power from white hands to black hands in the chambers and corridors of Parliament — issues of class, gender and region inequality; issues concerning control of the economy and distribution of land, and many more. While I am not suggesting that Ndebele or Sachs are completely blind to these issues — Ndebele's critical work, in particular, maintains that in a future South Africa tolerance and expression must be allowed people with differing viewpoints — they do not, in my opinion, stress them nearly enough.

In this period of transition, the analysis of South African cultural and literary forms is also changing. A situation exists where, to my mind, simple and dualistic notions of politics and culture — black vs white, oppressor vs. oppressed — are becoming less useful; and, once one-person-one-vote has been achieved, will have even less relevance in the present form they are conceived and expressed. It is to issues of class and gender oppression, regional and economic imbalances, and specific minority political questions and interests that political writers will have to turn their attention. It is these other

concerns, surely, which must remain with writers of a more progressive inclination throughout this transitional period and into the future; and it is to such areas of concern that some writers at least will want to begin to focus their attention and artistry now. It is, indeed, unfortunate that so little emphasis is placed on these questions by the radical humanists I have mentioned above. For, as the Nigerian novelist Kole Omotoso warns us:

I wanted to tell my fellow writers from South Africa that before they begin to write the novels of disillusion with political leadership, they should note that we had gone through the same process and slogans. We had sought and found the political kingdom but the economic power had eluded us. We had then vilified our politicians through our poems, our plays and our novels because they had not been able to add those other things we had all psyched ourselves would be ours, like the animals in *Animal Farm* ... South African writers should know more about their economy than we tried to know about ours.³

It is accurate for Sachs and Ndebele to note (again, in their different ways) that literature that is content with mere support of established and well-worn political positions has a limited potential for further development in South Africa right now. They are also correct to criticise the tendency for some writers to blur the necessary distinction between a writer's political attitude and his or her use of form. For while these are intertwined in the final work of art, they are not simply the same thing; and Ndebele's insistence that writers' expression of the horrors of apartheid was not enough to render their work technically proficient has been salutary in this regard.

II

Yet Ndebele's criticism, and that of Sachs, has enabled an unfortunate corollary to emerge — that

writers should downplay the political side and urgency of their art, both in relation to how they write and what they should write about. I cannot agree, for instance, with Ndebele when he says that 'mastery over one's craft allows one return to social and political issues with far greater freedom, understanding, insight and comprehensiveness'.⁴ Here he is simply standing the equally problematic Black Consciousness equation on its head: where some writers in the 1970s had presumed that form was secondary and dependent on political attitude, Ndebele appears to be saying that political attitude is secondary to and dependent on form. It can be stated on the contrary that literary skill does little to the sophisticated and insight of one's political position. Thus, while there are certainly a large number of writers internationally who have successfully married progressive politics with literary skill — on our continent alone one can think of names like Neto, Honwana, Mia Couto, Ngugi and Ousmane Sembene — they are not necessarily inseparable. What about the American poet Ezra Pound, for instance? The fact that he is generally considered one of the most influential American poets of this century cannot hide the fact that he was an active supporter of Italian fascism in the Second World War. What about Eliot's, or Yeat's, ultra-conservatism, or that of the exceptionally skilful contemporary South American novelist Mario Vargas Llosa? Did Leopold Sedar Senghor's ability as a poet prevent him from assisting the continuation of Senegal's neo-colonial exploitation by the French? Did Pablo Neruda's anti-colonialist views and poetic expertise warn him against writing poems, in his *Canto General*, which appear to praise Stalin?

The equation that better technical skill will lead to better politics is demonstrably false. There is no inflexible connection one can find between skilful writing and politically insightful writing. Rather, if one agrees that there is still a political dimension of expression necessary in this fraught, divided country, one can say that (if they are to start moving beyond slogans and pats on the back to their favourite politicians) politically-motivated writers need to

start not only refining their artistic skill but also refining and increasing their understanding of the nuances and subtleties of politics and power, in order to combat abuses of these in a future society. For the antagonisms and seductive lures of power will not disappear by magic in the new South Africa that is agonisingly, bloodily, being willed into being at the moment. Surely, in the future, those people who still feel disadvantaged will feel the need to continue politicising their constituencies around political issues, and continue putting forward their own, sometimes controversial, political views and beliefs as individual artists as well? Surely, there will be those writers and performers who will still feel the need to take up issues and problems connected to political power — either overtly or implicitly — in their work? While I do not believe that either Ndebele or Sachs is consciously suggesting this, the result of their respective guidelines might well be to assist a depoliticisation of literature in a new epoch; at a time when political (as well as literary) acumen might be needed by writers and performers as never before.

III

Although technical skill and ideological attitude in literature are not exactly the same thing, they are intertwined in any finished work of art. Moreover, there is an important degree to which form and technique have their own politics. Formal literary choices are at heart a type of politics. When writers choose a style they are also choosing a means to make their views as convincing to a reader or audience as possible. In this manner style is always a means, not only of facilitating one's own expression, but also of manipulating one's reader or audience into accepting what one has to say. This is surely a species of political activity, albeit of a different kind to a writer's outright political attitude or activism: and it must be stressed that there are various approaches and answers to the problems the writer sets him or herself in this regard. Different writers will make different kinds of formal

choices, which is all to the good in a climate where the transition to democracy must, of necessity, ensure that different types of literary expression and opinion will be forthcoming. In terms of specifically formal concerns, the gains, and not just the mistakes, of the 1970s decade of radical literary theory and of black writing in South Africa needs to be acknowledged. Among the enduring lessons that emerged from this period are that literature is a part of (and affected by) the struggles which take place in the wider cultural and political milieu; that the writer or performer thus has an active, undeniable role in society; and that existing notions as to what constitutes 'good' literature and art need to be subject to constant debate and reformulation. In particular, it was in this period that the 'commonsense' notions of literature Sachs espouses (coming principally from liberal thinkers of the time) were subject to detailed scrutiny and criticism..

In this regard, Sachs's views on what constitutes good 'art' are both pedestrian and outdated. Eve Bertelsen's criticisms are cogent when she says, in an open letter to him:

I recall the dismay I felt on first-reading your paper. Could it be possible that you were seriously offering as solution to our cultural dilemmas the very ... commonsense that a generation of radical research has been concerned to expose for its collusion with the status quo, now resurrected as a curious hybrid, shot through with personal sentiment and party slogans? ... Could it be possible that two decades of radical cultural debate (the politics of language, discourse and power, postcolonial culture) had somehow slipped your attention? Nowhere could I find any trace of its central question, namely: which of the many modes of counter-hegemonic production effects the most radical displacement of dominant codes?⁵

Both Sachs and Ndebele do not seem to be questioning more traditional, pre-Black Consciousness

Kelwyn Sole, *South Africa*

models of what constitutes formal skill in literature in any systematic or meaningful way. Instead, they principally explore how an overconcern with themes of political protest, and the transmission of direct political messages and statements, has influenced South African art and literature in the past to its detriment. There is no sign, for example, of an acceptance of the jumble of 'poetry, drama, newspaper reports, memoir and speech' which Brennan sees as symptomatic of the third-world novel in its attempts to escape metropolitan assumptions and deal creatively with local issues.⁶

It must be stressed that radical theories of literature cannot exist in isolation from radical approaches and experiments to the ways in which literature can be produced and distributed. Writers and critics cannot afford to get bogged down in any notion that literature is an isolated activity; nor can they afford to get bogged down in the belief that there is only one mode of literary relationship between writers and audience; nor, finally, can they afford to get bogged down into accepting wholeheartedly existing humanist norms as to what constitutes good writing and the appropriate position and role of the writer. Therefore the obvious must be stated: Ndebele's, and Sachs's likes and dislikes are merely one approach to the vexed question of formal choice in literature. I think the practical results of both Sachs and Ndebele's positions are, paradoxically enough, finally disadvantageous as regards the emergence of new techniques of writing; that is to say, as regards the formal side of art and literature. Both are stressing that writers learn to use tried and tested methods of art and literature.⁷

IV

In this regard the manner in which literature is being linked to education, empathy and knowledge acquisition among writers and readers in COSAW circles at the moment is noteworthy. This is seen as a priority because writers in this country, and black writers in particular, have historically been disadvantaged by the lack of literary education in the

schools they have had to attend in a racist and unequal society. Such a viewpoint believes that young writers need to learn greater technical skill in their writing. In this way, writers will influence their readers more subtly and wholeheartedly by ensuring their enjoyment and participation in the stories being told and the social situations being dealt with.

There is much to be said in favour of this viewpoint: developing writers must work on their technique and skill, and workshops may at some stage in a young writer's career have a beneficial effect. It is certainly important for writers to educate themselves by reading, and practising and thinking about their craft, as much as possible. Yet writers cannot afford to trust completely in a belief that learning to become a writer is simply a matter of attending workshops and learning skills from the accomplished writers in their midst. This could degenerate into an attitude such as that displayed in that obscene advert that appears from time to time in local newspapers: YOU'VE ALWAYS HAD THE RIGHT POLITICS: NOW YOU NEED THE RIGHT SKILLS TOO. It can never be that simple. In this transitional period writers need to keep on exploring the viability of new techniques, forms and approaches in writing; just as they must, I believe, continue to deal with and explore afresh political issues in their writing as well as in their various writers' organisations.

While literature does to some extent serve as a useful tool of education and means of extending human empathy, one can overstress its potential as a means of political liberation in this regard. In my opinion too much faith is being placed on a belief that 'good literature' can serve as a means of indirect education; as a way, in other words, by which writers can fashion readers to become rational and tolerant citizens through reading and a love of books. Before one accepts this is a truism, one should note that this is an idea that has been freshly discovered. In many ways it is an old, well-worn belief.

The problem with theories which empower

reading with this type of effectivity is that they are not quite as humane, expansive and democratic as they seem. For the beginner, reading is, first and foremost, learning to read; in other words, being educated into certain reading habits. Readers are taught, through the practice of reading, to have specific expectations of what formal attributes they should be looking for to admire in the books they read.⁸ In other words, in such a view literature is seen as a means of instilling 'specific kinds of value, discipline, behaviour, and response in human subjects'.⁹ In its seemingly all-inclusive embrace, such a view of literary education still seeks to amalgamate, bind and — if thought necessary — exclude. It has historically been used to fashion certain types of individual behaviour and consciousness. In this scenario, learning to read and write creative literature have been used as:

the means by which the 'self' that the individual brought in from a problematic social environment could be exposed to a normalising regimen ... It was by absorbing these disciplines that English was able to emerge as a powerful ethical technology characterised by four attributes: a special ethical privilege which it acquired as the inheritor of the socio-moral disciplines ('closeness to life'); a pedagogical strategy characterised by correction through self-expression; a purpose-built teacher-student relationship combining identification and correction ... and a new relation to the literary text in which the immediacy of its surface lured the reader into the unfathomable depth of the norms he was corrected by.¹⁰

The fact that Ndebele's critical beliefs are not simply a result of the weighing up of formal skill, but develop out of his desire for a certain type of human nature to prevail in South Africa at the moment, can be clearly seen (for example) in his review of the novel *Bones* by the Zimbabwean Chenjerai Hove. Ndebele dislikes this novel be-

cause 'it is as if the feeling of moral and human triumph being sought reveals in the characters an almost debilitating submission to fate'; he believes the book exhibits 'an uncomfortable patronising sympathy with people whose human worth is revealed at the same time we are made to see them as incapable of changing their unfortunate circumstances. *The narrative style begins to work against the humanistic intention of the story*'¹¹ (my emphasis). Ndebele's evaluation of the novel is not at issue here; I largely share his ambivalence about this work. What is significant, though, is the way in which (when one looks at it closely) he is not only evaluating Hove's artistic skill in his pronouncements on this novel. Characteristically, he is judging not only its formal aspects but also its approach to the depiction of what constitutes — or should constitute — human nature. Ndebele is simultaneously making a statement about appropriate literary form and a statement about what he regards as appropriate and inappropriate forms of human consciousness and behaviour.

Attempts to fashion consciousness through literature have been made again and again in world history. Frequently, such views have been put forward and used in periods of nation-building of redefining people's ideas of what constitutes a specific nation (such as 'the new South Africa'). They are ways of socialising people and changing their consciousness in order for the 'symbolic legitimation'¹² of a particular social order to occur. One thinks of Ralph Waldo Emerson's criticism and views in the United States in the nineteenth century, and Matthew Arnold's criticism in England in roughly the same period, as examples of similar cultural legitimising practices. In the class dynamics of industrialising Europe and the United States, education in literary forms was seen as a way in which the masses could be drawn into reading as means of pleasurable instruction. This notion of books as a means of sensitising people and transmitting and generalising ideas about social life through 'experience' and 'empathy' was transferred by English-speaking African

intellectuals to this continent at the time of independence:

the critical condition from Arnold to Leavis was dedicated to a view of literature as a national possession, even the 'vital centre' of the nation's cultural wealth . . . the way literature was read, was predominantly empirical and organicist . . . It is this tradition, with its unifying and experientialist categories, which provided a model for African criticism in its development.¹⁹

While Sachs's assumptions are less self-conscious or incisive in their attempt at an Africanisation of South African culture, Ndebele in particular in his criticism seeks to transform these European critical orthodoxies so that his version of a theory of reading can be directed towards the community — rather than ending in the cul-de-sac of the private, 'cultured' individual reader, as has effectively happened with Arnold's, Emerson's and Leavis's notions. Yet, while he wishes to combat the cultural imperialism of European modes of thought and offer a creative answer to present white colonial hegemony by means of provoking writers to explore black creativity and experience, the usefulness of Ndebele's assumptions must, of course (like any critical statement) be open to discussion and disagreement. My own view, in this regard, is that his specific notion of literature as a type of education in areas of human experience and conduct, begins to mimic not only the concerns but also the contradictions and silences of his models.

The desire to form certain types of individual consciousness and perception are not as obvious in Ndebele's and Sachs's statements as in the criticism that preceded them, but they are nevertheless there. Their expansive humane gestures hide this fact. Therefore, the version of society Ndebele and Sachs envisage is simply one version of the way in which South African society may develop. A belief that the instillation of reason and self-knowledge into citizens is sufficient means for them to cohere into

a tolerant, harmonious nation — where authority will stem from rational understanding and agreement — is, in the late twentieth century and in a society as fraught with political tensions as South Africa, wishful thinking (14). Therefore, while all South Africans hopefully desire a future political dispensation based on democratic, rational decision-making as well as an understanding by government of the population's interests and needs, the conceptual weaknesses and political silences of Sachs's and Ndebele's own views are crucial to focus on: that is, the absence of any concentrated attention given by them to those social forces which divide human beings and position them in antagonistic groups within the nation.

V

There are two points which need to be made in summary. Firstly, that the humanist version of what constitutes skilful writing is simply one of several possible aesthetic stances, and is open to debate. Secondly, that while it can be granted that reading books might indeed increase a reader's knowledge and empathy, too much focus on the political potential of reading literature as the only way a writer can act politically begins to blur the continuing necessity for writers and readers to remain active in those wider areas of cultural and political life in which literature is embedded and from which it emerges. The humanistic vision of reading literature will not, on its own, be able to meet the requirements and ideals of writers who wish to assist the creation of the culture of an equal, tolerant and democratic society. And this is not only due to the low literacy and English-proficiency levels in the country (although this fact seriously brings into question the widespread effectiveness of such a theory of education-through-reading). In this transitional period a process of formal and political questioning, experimentation, dissent and criticism in South African literature is as important, if not more important, than ever before. It is precisely in such a period of transition — a period where positions and alterna-

tives for the future are being debated and fought for — that the political role of the writer, in all its forms, should be highlighted rather than diminished. The struggle over cultural identity, over literary techniques and priorities, will remain an ongoing concern every minute of the day. Writers cannot afford to leave 'politics to the politicians', now or ever.

Writers must, obviously, increase their own ability so that they are able to effectively express themselves in any manner in which they, as individual writers or groups of writers, may see fit. Of course there will be disagreement, and different decisions about form and content will be made by different writers. Writers need to explore the alternatives, and diversify their own literary techniques and ways of expressing themselves. There is no one correct way to write well. To a limited extent, writers can be given an idea and basis in writers' workshops about some of the finer points of how to write. But it is only a beginning. Further than that, writers must become aware that there are many different techniques and standards by which literature can be judged; that there are many different ways to write well. If readers are to be schooled in reading, in their turn, what needs to be made available to them are the different assumptions about, and theories of, how literature can be evaluated.

One of the prerogatives for writers is to 'make it new', in Ezra Pound's words; and no one else can do this on a writer's behalf. The crux of this is that, when all is said and done, aspiring writers have to trust in their own judgment, and the direction in which their own particular priorities and vision are taking them. Eventually, it is the writers themselves, as they struggle to develop identity, direction and technique, who will have to choose how best to express their chosen concerns. **S**

NOTES

1. Quotes taken from N. Ndebele *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture*. COSAW, Johannesburg, 1991. pp. 15, 27-28, 55, 69, 139, 'Literature as a tool for reconstruction' *Akal*, October 1990. pp. 5 and *Writers from South Africa* ed. R. Gibbons *TriQuarterly Series on Criticism and Culture* No. 2, Chicago, 1987. pp.2-2.
2. The sense one ends with is, therefore, that if all individuals in Lesotho were reasonable people, there would be no cause for conflict. This is obviously inadequate. See N. Ndebele 'Living with Disagreement' *Index on Censorship*, 17, 1, 1988.
3. K. Omotoso, 'Is White Available in Black Now?' *Southern African Review of Books*, 4,2, 1991. pp. 15.
4. A.W. Oliphant, 'Njabulo S Ndebele: The Writer as Critic and Interventionist' *Ten Years of Staffrider*. eds. A. W. Oliphant/I. Vladislavic Ravan, Johannesburg, 1988 pp 343.
5. E. Bertelsen, 'Phasing the Spring: Open Letter to Albie Sachs' *Pretexts* 2, 2 1990 pp 133.
6. T. Brennan, 'The National Longing for Form' *Nation and Narration*. ed. H. Bhabha Routledge, London, 1990 pp 51.
7. In particular, in Ndebele's case (Sachs has already been mentioned in this regard), techniques are essentially part of a European-derived realist school of fiction writing. See the discussion of this in M. Vaughan 'Storytelling and Politics in Fiction' in *Rendering Things Visible*. ed. M. Trump, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1990.
8. This is what Lennard Davis calls the 'prestructure' of a text. See L. Davis *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel*. Columbia Univ. Press, New York, 1983. pp. 12.
9. Terry Eagleton, quoted in T. Bennett, *Outside Literature* Routledge, London, 1990. pp. 173.
10. I. Hunter, *Culture and Government: The Emergence of Modern Literary Education*. MacMillan, London, 1988. pp. 214.
11. N. Ndebele, 'Bones' *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 16, 2 1990. pp. 377.
12. F. Moretti, *The Way of the World*. Verso Books, London, 1987. pp. 229.
13. D. Attwell, 'The British Legacy in Anglophone African Literary Criticism' *English in Africa*. 11,1 1984. pp. 97.
14. In this regard, Kwame Appiah believes that the notion of history as a progression towards rational authority is part of an ideology which the West has insisted is applicable to the whole of humankind. K. Appiah, 'Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?' *Critical Inquiry* 17, 2 1991. pp. 343-4.

THE TURTLE EGG

Louis Sterling

South Africa

She was late this morning when she squeezed her salty body into the patio chair. Her father barely glanced at her, but continued to butter his toast with those large, hard hands — the hands she knew and feared so well. She looked away. Her mother smiled at her in that distant way. 'Where do you disappear to every morning, darling?' She longed to tell her mother. The turtle eggs and Robiero and the sun rising on the sea. But he was there and this was her (private) secret. 'Just walking' she shrugged. 'You really are a mysterious child' murmured her mother.

It had become a daily ritual. With the first glimpse of morning she would spirit herself from that bed and join khaki-clad Robiero in



his tramp along the damp, cool sand, where the mother turtle, drawn shorewards by the warm Agulhas current, had flappered her great bulk from the dark water. She scraped the sandy surface to expose a hollow of grey veined eggs — easy prey for imported crows or a change of diet for local villagers.

Robiero's job — and hers now — was to move the nests from the exposed shoreline to the tangled disguise of the beach scrub vegetation. This is what had drawn her and Robiero together, the sense of each others' quiet caring for the eggs and the life which would come from them. The small egg resting in her palm was so fragile. She loved to feel part of protecting the young turtles. When the baby hatchlings edged from their homes and scrambled towards the sea, many would be killed or eaten. She knew she could not protect them then, but now it was different.

This was her own private world — the beach sand warming under the sun and Robiero's silent steady walk. Sometimes she would run through the waves and belly-flop into the shallow water. Or lie with the sand under her tummy, until the sun consumed the watery drops on her skin and hair. When the trail of fishing boats pulled in their cast nets for the return to shore, she would shyly give her rehearsed Portuguese good-bye to Robiero and trail reluctantly back down the beach to the hotel.

At night, in her hotel bed, when she heard the door handle turn at her father's touch, she would hold tightly to her memory of the bright safe morning and the turtle nests. Then she could push out the feel of his hands under her nightie and his harsh

breath and murmured threats. She would hide that fragile, vulnerable part of herself where he couldn't reach it — just like she hid the eggs from the crows. And when she lay still and scared after he had left her, she would watch the long hours of darkness until they turned pale and she could make her escape.

Later as she crouched over a new nest, her daylight refuge was broken by an angry shout of words she could not understand. An older man, dressed in marine guard khaki, pushed Robiero aside and motioned angrily for him to move along the beach. Then, turning to her he said stonily, 'Your mother is waiting. You come with me.' She looked for some affirmation from Robiero, but their communication of animal and sky were of no use here.

In confusion, she followed the guard around the rocky outcrop which led back to the hotel. When the hotel was in sight she turned and made one last wild shout to Robiero's retreating back. 'Tata ate logo, Robiero — bye till next time.'

On the hotel veranda, her parents were waiting. 'Mrs Dos Santos told about your mornings with the coastal guard, Catherine,' her mother said. 'You are turning into a very attractive young girl and you can never be too sure with these locals, sweetheart, even if they are employed by Marine Conservation.'

'But...' she stammered. 'You don't...it was just Robiero, and we were saving the turtle eggs.'

'Well, darling, in future you can have your turtle-hunts with your father or myself. You'll be safer here with us.'

In her dismay, the girl hardly noticed the stain of yolk and shell inside her clenching fist. **S**



Stephen Gray

South Africa

Three Poems

Postcards

I

X means a big hug
O stands for a deep kiss
Missing you; wish you were here
By Air Mail First Class

II

Deer Public Enemy your rap
Rimes Apartheid with Nowhere to Hide
I hear ya 'nigger call' 'Nigga
Come 'n get me 'cause aam on your side. . .'

III

Cheap Booze, Cheap boys, pumped up
Steroid blonds, rough rear entry, rude
Sex *dirty* talk. What does a true Scot
Wear under his kilt? — a condom, prude . . .

IV

Went to my born church today I must confess
To view the meaning of architecture,
The shaven congregation wore pink triangles,
No plaques for them, or for gypsies and Jews.

V

I've joined the Anti-Nazi League
For 30p. my badge admits me to a die-in,
Add £1 to cover postal expense:
For a little more they disconnect the gas

VI

Don't let your children
Suffer your parents' crimes;
Recall: X O is no genetic code,
Means hug: hug: kiss: at all times.

The Poet Laureate Saves the Rhino

Black one, built like a clad camper,
Horned in on the privileged feast —
Having served the royals his forceful gift
He turns to save the rhino, doomed beast.

Never has he seen one in its habitat,
Does not know they come in female and young too,
Exhibited in Venice in a velvet cage
Sprayed the masked courtiers in rhino-poo.

His libido of long dumb puritans
Mistakes the prick that grows between the quarters
For the instrument of self-defence upon the brow —
Ships the Zulus called them, masted in muddy waters.

Does not know how they go extinct -
With land, climate, language, wars and men
Lost . . . Africans must bite this bullet — meat,
their debt to Europe — hack with more than a pen.

His manuscript at Sotheby's he'll raffle
With a lot of racial phobias besides,
Pray God he's the last of his kind now,
Rhino are finer tuned, know more of their rights.

Slaughtered Saints

a row of graves in the veld, bar-code of death
at Sharpeville again — black coffins before
a soccer stadium of mourners —

this recurs as the great South African ceremony:
public weeping, no compensation, together
only in the mass shuffle of their united end

what then, once the chants and sermons are done,
the body-count of liberation, the victims
guilty of their innocence, their reduction to dust?

who worked out how many it takes?
do they signify, either way?
— did anyone consult with *them*?

the late martyrs of Boipatong — mother and babe
elbow to elbow in the winter grit — able-bodied
certainly had other hopes for their different lives —

and if they said they wished to speak to us
what then? and who would listen?
what would we offer in return for their few, honest
words?

would they then set about to kill their killers?
mass with sticks and stones their dreadful regret,
rampage against their lack of fortune?



take by the throat the privileged few,
scoop from the mouths of others' children
a spoonful of porridge, a nub of meat on the bone?

this early death hath only made them hungry
for the life they never had: girlfriends,
fast cars, for shopping from huge supermarkets

and the greedy needs of the dead do not end:
they want impossibly: music and song,
they want padding and waterproof, comforts

next thing they'll want mod cons,
to watch themselves on TV getting mowed down
by private armies, presidents of all

parties and denominations come to mourn them;
what they'll demand next is bullets
(just wait!) and their own rolled razor-wire,

keep the predators out, flowers on their tombs . . .
but no one asks the blood and ashes, nor ever will.
what would happen them would only overkill . . .

don't anyone consult with them; bury them,
the lonely martyrs of Boipatong,
lest the slaughtered saints recur, recur.

Morakabe Seakhoa

South Africa

Two Poems

About Changing Titles

Get in the boots of a mother
who's lost either a son or daughter,
or worse still, get in the boots of a mother
who's just given birth
to wake up to a child not hers.

Or, let's use another analogy:
of parents naming a child,
(and) either of them returns to find
the child's name changed.

Or, check this metaphor:
you're booked to have your tooth removed,
you wake up and the arm is gone!

What do you do?

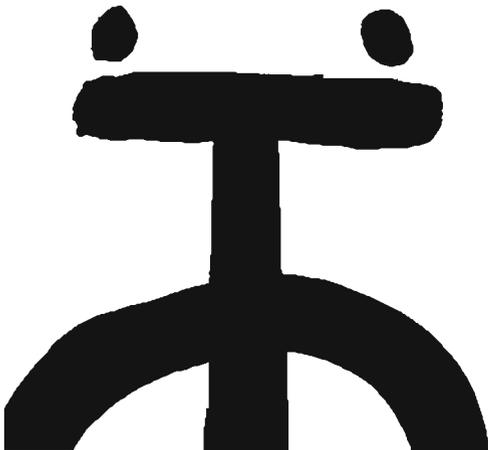
Trapper

Forever calculating, plotting;
Like a snake forever watching an unsuspecting prey,
So skillfully ensnaring the victim ever so closer,
Taking time focussing on the target,
Awaiting a moment to strike

Like a spider weaving a seemingly invisible web
And me like a slave of habit
I rush into the beckoning of friendly warmth
I ease into the relaxation of comradely comfort.

Just like a boxer relaxing his guards for a flittering
respite
I swing with the heavenly din of comradely joy,
And, like a thunderbolt from nowhere
I'm floored so brutally & swiftly like a feather

I wake up like a baby just born,
To learn anew the less-known mysteries of the human
sort,
And my trapper: he's walking away pregnant with
satisfaction.
Like a snake or lion with the conquered prey in his
belly.



Mbulelo Mzamane
South Africa

CHRISTMAS

IN CENTRAL PARK WEST

Zweli's apartment in Central Park West had come to assume the status of South Africa House. Students from various colleges come to collect their stipends from the United Nations Education and Training Programme for Southern Africa or the African-American Institute, or simply on vacation in New York with no place to stay, college drop-outs, fellows fallen out with their girlfriends or families, all stopped over at Zweli's place. His apartment started to get particularly crowded from Thanksgiving through New Year's day and after.

Mashile was the first to arrive from up-state New York. He came at Halloween.

Mashile was in his third year as a freshman. In his first year, he'd been sent to Rochester. Midway through his first semester he dropped out of college and was soon back in New York, living off the remainder of his fall stipend. He collected his spring semester stipend himself instead of having it mailed to him, as was AAI procedure, without anyone being the wiser to the fact that he'd stopped going to school. He was at the AAI again shortly before the second semester ended, without sitting his exams, to request a transfer to some traditionally

Mbulelo Mzamane, *South Africa*

black college. He complained that in Rochester he'd roomed with a white racist student whose parents had at one time phoned Mashile to ask him why he didn't go back to South Africa and leave their son to enjoy the facilities their country offered in peace. He'd complained to the school authorities, he said, but they didn't seem prepared or able to do anything about it. He couldn't study in Rochester under the circumstances.

At the beginning of the second session he was sent to Lincoln but was soon back in New York as before. He collected his stipend for the whole year but AAI told him that, unless he produced his transcript at the end of the second semester, they would not renew his scholarship a third year. They did, however, when he brought a letter from a doctor who was treating him for depression.

He moved to another college in New York State to stay with his African-American girlfriend whom he'd met in Rochester. He didn't go to school himself. She grew tired of him, showed him out of her apartment and told him that she was through supporting self-pitying parasites posing as African revolutionaries. Now he was back in New York for Halloween.

—They think they can just send you to colleges of their choice as if school was a jail sentence, he complained.

He also told Zweli that he'd come to ask for another transfer, this time to a college of his choice. Harvard.

—What are you going to tell them about Lincoln? Zweli asked.

—Actually, the blacks in this country treat us worse than whites. At Lincoln it's black-on-black violence, metaphorically speaking.

—Who is going to believe you, I mean about Lincoln, where so many other African students are doing better than in any other American university?

—Kanti, on whose side are you?

—It's not a matter of taking sides, Mashile, Zweli said. Labantu bafuna ama-facts.

—And you think I'm fibbling, is that it?

—Hay', bengibuza net, just asking, Zweli said.

Forget I said anything!

Hot on Mashile's heels came Duma, bringing with him a battered typewriter. He'd had to be fetched from Port Authority, where, despite their conversation of the night before, Zweli had had to pay for his bus fare from Atlanta.

—This situation is driving me nuts, Duma said over the phone from his home in Atlanta. I've got to move out of this hole, at least for a while. I'll be coming over, if it's alright with you.

—Come over, chap, there's no problem, Zweli said, hypertension building.

—There's one little snag, Duma said. I can't tell my folks I'm moving out.

—Are you moving out or just coming for a visit? Zweli asked.

—I can't discuss the matter over the phone, Duma said. But do you think you can send me a ticket to collect at the greyhound station in Atlanta? I catch the 8.00 am.

—No way. Find yourself money elsewhere.

Duma phoned again, collect, from a pay-phone, shortly before his bus pulled out from Atlanta.

—How do I get to your place from Port Authority? he asked.

—You've been here before, Zweli said.

—Yes, but I couldn't find my way again, Duma said. Why don't you fetch me? My bus arrives at 10.00 am.

—I can't do that. Besides, I'll be at work...

—I can't hear you. The bus is making an awful noise. Oh! It's pulling out already. See you tomorrow at 10.00 am then. Please, fana, I depend on you to pick me up from Port Authority. Manhattan is an awfully complicated place. Sorry, there goes my bus.

—Duma, listen to me... Duma... Duma...

The telephone went dead.

Zweli met Duma's bus, as arranged.

—What a relief to see you, fana! Duma said. I didn't have enough money. The driver only took me because I told him that my people would be meeting me. Can you pay him?

—I've no money, Zweli said.

—I'm expecting some money in the next coupla days from my mother. I'll pay you back, honest goodness!

—Thought you said you couldn't tell your folks you were moving out!

—The situation changed.

—Jy lieg, Duma man! Why can't you tell the truth for once?

—Die Here hoor my. Hier's my kruis, the money'll be coming, Duma said, making the sign of the cross with his fingers and kissing them.

The driver approached them and demanded the busfare from Duma. An argument ensued.

—You can blerry well take me back then, Duma said. I've a good mind to tell my cousin not to pay you! Have you no manners?

—Mister, do you want me to call the police, or to sort you out myself?

The driver drew closer, his expression full of menace, like an impending southern storm.

—Kyk, die moegoe sal ons moer, dan roep hy die gatas, Duma said to Zweli. Gee hom die chinney, fana. Jy kry hom as myne kom. My ma hoor my!

Zweli paid and they left.

Halloween passed and Thanksgiving came and still no money from Duma, who asked every day Zweli came back from work:

—Any mail for me today?

—No.

—When are you going to pay me? Zweli eventually asked.

—You can't trust your own people, Duma said, warming up to his favourite subject. As someone once said, I'm glad God did no more than give us relatives but that we can choose our own friends. Take my case, for example. My own mother assures me she'll be sending me money. I borrow from friends in the hope of repaying them when the said amount arrives. You know what I think. My topi! He's behind all this. You know, mos, we don't get along. He's very influential with Mom.

Zweli knew Duma didn't get along with his parents. Hadn't the subject become like a litany every time Duma opened his mouth? What Zweli

couldn't figure out was how Duma's quarrel with his parents imposed on him an obligation to look after Duma, who exasperated his parents, as he did his friends, by his steadfast refusal to go to school, his excessive drinking and, of late, his experimentation with drugs.

His family had left home to settle in the US. His father, a journalist, was a special correspondent with the Atlanta Constitution and taught Journalism and African Studies at Emory University.

—He's writing a book, about me, Duma said. I needed time off to reflect and compose a suitable reply. This apartment's like a writer's paradise.

Duma surveyed the living room with a practised eye. He was also working away at his typewriter.

—Zweli, do you think you can bring me a new ribbon for my typewriter when you come back from work?

—If I remember, Zweli said on his way out to work.

—When did you become a writer? Mashile asked. Duma ignored him.

—Wat skryf jy? Mashile persisted.

—My reply. Only, I can't make up my mind whether to use the format of a diary, or to employ satire or invective with no embellishment, or what.

—Eh?

—It's too complex to explain, Duma said.

—Is that why you never seem to go beyond the first page?

—Writer's block, that's all. My father's always talking about it. It'll pass.

—Writer's block! Mashile giggled and went into the bathroom, still intoning, Writer's block!

They'd just woken up. Every morning Zweli left before Duma and Mashile got out of bed, although Duma sometimes got up before everyone to type and went back to sleep. They usually slept until past midday, then woke up to listen to jazz. Shortly before Zweli came back from work Duma began working away at the typewriter. Zweli usually brought back a six-pack and Duma stopped and joined the others. Later, friends might drop by, as they often did, with more six-packs and Zweli

would start to prepare dinner for his friends. With so much distraction, Duma lamented, he found himself having to start a new page each day, pausing however, predictably, with Zweli's entrance.

—You know what's wrong with you, Duma? Mashile said one evening as they were drinking. You're afraid that if you ever completed that reply to your old man, you'd have nothing else to live for. I read about a character like you once in a novel by Camus.

—People who can't proceed beyond first-year have no right hurling stones, Duma said.

—You talk as if you had a Ph.D.! Mashile said.

—I wasn't cut for academics. Here's my career, Duma said patting his typewriter.

—If you ever become a writer, Mashile said, I'm certainly going to make it some day, as an astronaut.

—Mashile, thank your lucky stars you left your family behind in Rockville. You've absolutely no idea what persecution by your family can do to you. Take my case as an example of what parental pressure can bring on to...

—Oh! Duma, we've heard that one before, Zweli said from the kitchen. Shut up both of you.

But the boys did keep him entertained.

Zweli earned a handsome sum from his job, translating material from the UN. He was fluent in several African languages spoken in east and southern Africa. The struggle was his life. He'd worked hard to get to where he was. In the early days, in rain, snow, or blistering heat, he used to stand outside the UN distributing pamphlets from the liberation movement to diplomats and visitors, describing the grievances of the African people and calling for the diplomatic, economic, and military isolation of the apartheid regime. He became a close friend of a young diplomat from east Africa, who was being hailed as his country's next President and who'd discovered that Zweli could speak the diplomat's language fluently. Through the diplomat he found part-time employment at the UN. When the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid was established, he was taken on permanently. Now that he was established as an international civil servant,

with a flat in Manhattan, other children of the diaspora naturally looked up to him to support their profligate life-styles. Intwana yasedladleni, mos, was the operative phrase — the local boy who'd risen to the top and was expected to provide for those of his people less fortunate than himself! That was his cross, which he bore stoically.

—At my old man's place in Atlanta they're probably preparing their Thanksgiving turkey now, Duma said.

—Turkey's such dry meat, Mashile said. I'd rather eat chicken.

—Turkey's for Thanksgiving, that's the tradition.

—I wonder who started the lousy tradition? At home people would be slaughtering sheep, just like they do at Christmas. I haven't eaten real mala le moholu in a long time, and I don't mean the stuff they sell here that smells of bleach!

—That's because they've no Thanksgiving to celebrate at home!

—Thanksgiving for what? That would be like celebrating Dingaan's day, when our people were slaughtered by the Boers at the River Ncome, which the Boers spitefully renamed Blood River? Do you think we should revert to all the old names after independence?

—There's fresh turkey all over Manhattan! Duma said, imitating Stanley Holoway's movements in *My Fair Lady*, which Zweli had taken them to see on Broadway.

Zweli only listened half attentively to the conversation, while he washed the dishes from the night before and prepared dinner.

At Thanksgiving he bought the boys turkey. Duma's face glowed, Mashile expressed regret at the fact that you couldn't buy and slaughter your own sheep in Manhattan. They all stuffed themselves silly and washed the turkey down with endless six-packs of Beck's beer.

Christmas brought the usual crowd to Zweli's. Teddy came from Syracuse, Shakong from Milwaukee, and Dingaan from Bridgeport. The two-bedroomed apartment became as crowded as the Dube hostel and when, in addition, the boys brought

their girl-friends, picked up from various night clubs, the place began to feel like some Soweto shebeen, with loud music, dancing and drinking all night along.

Zweli said he knew a place in New Jersey where they could buy a sheep to slaughter. A delegation was chosen to go and being the sheep. Zweli left with Teddy and Shakong in a car Zweli had borrowed for the occasion from his friend, the diplomat from east Africa. They found the sheep alright, but the farmer insisted on slaughtering it himself.

—We're students, Teddy said. We need it alive for a Zoology practical.

—Even then you'd have to produce a letter from your institution, the farmer said, smiling.

—We want it for a pet then, Teddy said.

—That one, too, has been tried before, the farmer said.

—Be serious, gents, Shakong said in SePedi. Where would we slaughter a sheep in Manhattan? Why don't we let the man do it for us?

—Because, then, we can't slaughter it according to custom, Teddy said. Do you wonder why our ancestors have forsaken us?

—What do you care for your badimo? Shakong asked.

—It's our custom, Teddy said. We're on alien soil and we can't take chances. We must slaughter it accordingly.

—You're taking chances right now, Shakong said. Anyway, who among us knows how to slaughter a sheep?

—Dingaan once told me he grew up in the farms in Pietersburg.

—He grew up in Lady Selborne and Marabastad, in Pretoria, Shakong said.

—Anyway, I used to watch folks slaughter sheep in Pietas and Crown Mines, Teddy said. I can do it as well as anyone. You go for the jugular vein, like this, and you use your fists in this way to skin it.

Teddy was demonstrating the craft.

—Don't make me laugh! Shakong said.

—Shakong is right, Zweli said. We should let the man slaughter the sheep.

But after the sheep had been slaughtered, the farmer told them that he'd have to bury the innards.

—But that's ridiculous! Teddy said. We bought the beast, didn't we? We're entitled to everything, skin and all. Whose business is it what portions we want to eat?

—That's the law, the farmer said.

Zweli pleaded with Teddy that if they continued to argue they'd be at the farm all night. Better leave with what they could get. They hadn't been charged for the portions being thrown away. If the farmer wanted to lose money, let him. They'd seen him only weigh the parts they were taking away. They had enough meat. It didn't really matter.

But Teddy was far from mollified.

They watched the farmer dig a hole and bury the innards along with the skin.

They drove back to Manhattan with the rest of the meat.

—I smell mala le moholu, Mashile said, sniffing the air, as they brought in the meat.

—They wouldn't let us take the stuff, Zweli said.

—What! Mashile and Dingaan exclaimed simultaneously.

—It doesn't matter, Zweli continued, we have enough mutton here for several days. Look at this baby!

—What happened? Dingaan asked.

Teddy narrated the story.

—It isn't right, Dingaan said.

—It's right for this place, Shakong said. Where do you think you are, in Pietersburg? Anyhow, what's this Pietersburg stuff, when you grew up in Pretoria?

—I used to go there sometimes during school holidays, Dingaan said. My father's people come from there.

—And you learnt to slaughter sheep?

—Who says?

—Teddy.

—At home people are slaughtering sheep for Christmas, Mashile said. I haven't tasted real mala le moholu in a long time. We must go and retrieve

Mbulelo Mzamane, *South Africa*

the stuff!

—Are you crazy! Shakong asked. The man buried it.

—We'll dig it out! You say you saw where the man buried it? Mashile asked Zweli.

—I'm not going back there, if that's what you mean, Zweli said.

—Kyk hier, Zweli, Dingaana said, you bought the sheep, right? It's not like you're stealing from anybody. Besides, no one wants the stuff. What's wrong with digging up stuff no one wants? We have different eating habits, haven't we?

—You're proposing to desecrate some dumb animal's last resting place, Duma said.

—Sharrup and finish the first page, Mashile said. Writer's block!

—There's the small matter of trespass, Shakong said. It's buried on his property, you know!

—And you plan to warn him we're coming, right? Dingaana put in. Zweli, do we ask you to come with us and dig out the meat yourself? No. Just to drive us there and show us where the stuff is buried. We'll do the rest ourselves.

—Like some real treasure hunt! Duma said. Why don't you bring along the skin as well, for the living-room?

They ignored him this time. He was like that when he'd been smoking.

—You've no spades, Shakong said.

—Shakong, monna oa batho, are they asking you to go with them? Teddy asked. The man had a spade. You saw it yourself.

—If you're too much of a situation to perform the job, Shakong, let those with less delicate noses

do it, Dingaana said.

—Dingaana, who are you calling a situation?

—Well, you're always situating yourself above the rest of us, Dingaana told Shakong.

—It's not anything we should end up fighting about, Zweli said.



Another delegation was chosen to go and bring the buried meat.

Zweli left with Mashile and Dingaana.

They drove up to the gate and walked the rest of the way to the point where the meat lay buried. They couldn't find the spade. But the soil was soft. Mashile and Dingaana scooped out the soil with their bare hands and retrieved all the meat.

—Do you want the skin? Mashile asked Zweli.

—No!

—Happy Christmas!

Mashile shouted repeatedly. Happy!

They cleaned the meat at the hydrant across the road from Zweli's flat, then cut it up and put it in a large pot on the stove. They opened the windows while it cooked.

Interesting smells floated across Central Park.

—At home people have slaughtered sheep like this. I haven't had real mala le moholu in a long time, and I don't mean the stuff they sell here that smells of bleach, can you smell the cooking?

Mashile sniffed the air like a man transported.

Duma announced, moving away from the typewriter, that he'd take a break and continue his reply later.

When the meat was ready, they all stuffed themselves silly and washed down the mala le moholu with endless six-packs of Beck's beer. **S**

Die Geskakel

Soke jive-ass halfwits het gebed
Om te sê ons moet eers pla
 dan moet ons soebat
met die makhulu baas
maar onse timers en tannies
het lank gefail aan daai style
almal was befok
met die donder se bangte in
net soos met 'n vriend by die ghetto joint
wat qho aan peaceful amandla gesels
en speel political dice
each time daar's 'n strike by die werk
hy's die tipe wat
nog nie van Nicaragua en El Salvador
gehoor het nie want hy koop die koerant
net vir die sports page en horse racing
nog toe dink dat die boerboys
mag hom skop aan sy agterkant in
nou hy moet bewaar wees
dat mense skiet in die donker
hul' praat net by die vigil se prayer meeting
om te se 'die was onse broer'
onse bras het nou ideas
wat deur die hittende wolke
van die Kaap se plase dwarsloop
onse ander bras moet take care

Mafika Pascal Gwala, South Africa

Gloria De Sant'Anna

Mozambique

Four Poems

Translated by Luis Rafael

Drawing on the Sand

Over the light pale water
the whelk has arrived in splendid nacre

(What slow broken sentence,
what tenuous and odd word could that be?)

Over the light and white sand
the whelk has been emptied of its life.

(What broken smile is that,
or what shattered destiny?)

Whelk that is of nacre, and the rose,
the colour also of dead pearls,
and the sun and the light and the shadow
and even the moon and the dead hour;

arrived from the calm and translucent water,
the entangled sea-weed and the foam,
the remembrances and worries,
the memory and tenderness.

Forgotten
in the light pale water.

Brought
to the tepid white sand.

(Sing your secret message
in my ear.)

From *Livro de Agua*, 1961

Condition (Comdicao)

Walking over the clear and see-through whelks
and over the slow-moving sea-weed,
the black woman unweaves her tranquil steps.

Searching for shell-fish
next to the wet and immersed rocks,
the black woman lets out a tired gesture.

(Coming from the depths of time, the black woman
bends
over the restless water
and over her round basket
of woven straw.
The black woman bends over the blacked-out horizon
of the afternoon,
and the gesture is both ancestral
and tired).

Walking over the clear and see-through whelks
and over the white shells,
the black woman is speechless and her gait bent.

Stars were born from within the dark water.

Walking black woman,
what do the stars that guide your steps have to say?

From *Livro de Agua*, 1961

Nocturne

The night sleeps a drawn-out and invisible slumber
inside the slender fingers of the still trees

next to the dainty birds with absent eyes
in that clear daybreak about to emerge.

The fullness of the blue silence spreads its presence,
and a quivering breeze that doesn't even exist pretends to stir,

(and it would draw the contours of the still and faint walls
without daring to reach that secret and impenetrable intimacy of the stones).

Everything is inside the fixed mark of its own boundary.

Only the sea rises up and restlessly reflects
the useless and tired vigil of the stars.

From Um Denso Azul Silencio, 1965



Second Poem On Solitude (Segundo poema de solidao)

I shall be as secret
as the texture of the water

and so light

and so beyond myself that I allow the whole landscape
to flow through me

and so, too, the careless sin
of gesture, presence or word

and when your hand detains me
you shall see that I am not there;

I shall be water

From Desde que u Mondo, 1972

White Oshakati Night

since the war, the wire
round the fine white powdered town
is down, stripped and rolled away.
the land, flat as a runway,
stretches round the flashing tower
that sent its ladder into the siren sky.
passwords no longer bark at the guarded gate
and the soldier who hid
under the grid like an avid mechanic
probing the guts of cars and lorries,
has left his sweat with the foxhole litter.
those who foraged with the force
have left their lean-to sacks
cemented against houses.
the ex-airforce mess offers
à la carte under makalani palms
as locals drift in on soft evenings.
an old squadron badge with scratched insignia
flaps its metal against a garden fence
where a toddler crawls
in the hide and search dug-out,
under sandbags for a sibling.
in the patch of dust, a white moon rising,
her father, no longer looking at the sky,
lets in a little of the river
and strikes his greening hoe.

Dorian Haarhof, Namibia

The Ombalantu Boabab

the tree, dumped from heaven
 whole and upside down,
 raises it's trunks
 above flat sands.
 a millenium of lovers, shamans
 travellers, vandals,
 warriors and ivory tusks
 carved her crossroad trunk.

a kingdom of creatures have sought
 its succulent gravity,
 its rope bark and healing leaf.
 at night, fruit bats suck
 luminous white blossoms
 from palm and fingers.
 by day, animals crack pods
 in search of monkey bread
 while buffalo-birds weave nests
 and web sticks in song.

if, in the beginning
 people came forth
 leaping to life from a stump,
 then this is Eve of trees.



a village replete with cattle
 hid with grain in its hollow
 from spears and burning sticks.
 letters wedged in crevices
 telling of death, ceremonies and wages,
 passed along this postal route.

casspirs in low-lying Africa
 burning in a border war,
 cooled in its knotted shade.
 the bowl now serves as chapel
 with arches, wooden pews,
 and the cross of a mother's loss.

I stand in the shade
 among these cryptic myths.
 girthed like a goddess
 with sub-saharan womb,
 this Boabab roots the fertile sky.

Dorian Haarhof, Namibia
 Feb 1993

Poetry

Sipho Sepamla

South Africa

Two Poems

Song of Hope

I heard a voice this morning
didn't know it came from the tree
didn't know it came from where the rafters meet
but I heard it say
 if you've been crying all these years
 and you were given a hope of life
 why do you do those things make you cry all
 the time

I heard a voice this morning
didn't know it came from the tree
didn't know it came from where the rafters meet
but I heard it say
 if you've been hurt for so long
 and a hand took away the pain from you
 why do you do those things will make the
 hurt come back

Oh I heard it for sure this morning
didn't know if I was dreaming
didn't know it was the rain on the roof
but I heard it say
 if you've been yearning for days
 and someone gave you a chance to ease the
 ache
 why do you do those things will lead to
 yearning all
 over again

Oh yes I am going to take time off
I'll go to church
I'll go to football
I'll go to the jazz do
but I'm not going to take along week-day blues

The Silence of the Gods

I need to know
if the mowing down of
a father a mother brother and child
kneeling at a night vigil
is the silence of the gods

I need to know
if the hacking of
a man's body with pangas and knives
under the eye of the sun
is the silence of the gods

I need to know
if dying in the streets
amidst the screams and yells of taxi commuters
terrified by gun-fire
is the silence of the gods

I need to know
if the years of struggle
the pain of the widow and orphan
and the tossing around of the ordinary man
is the silence of the gods

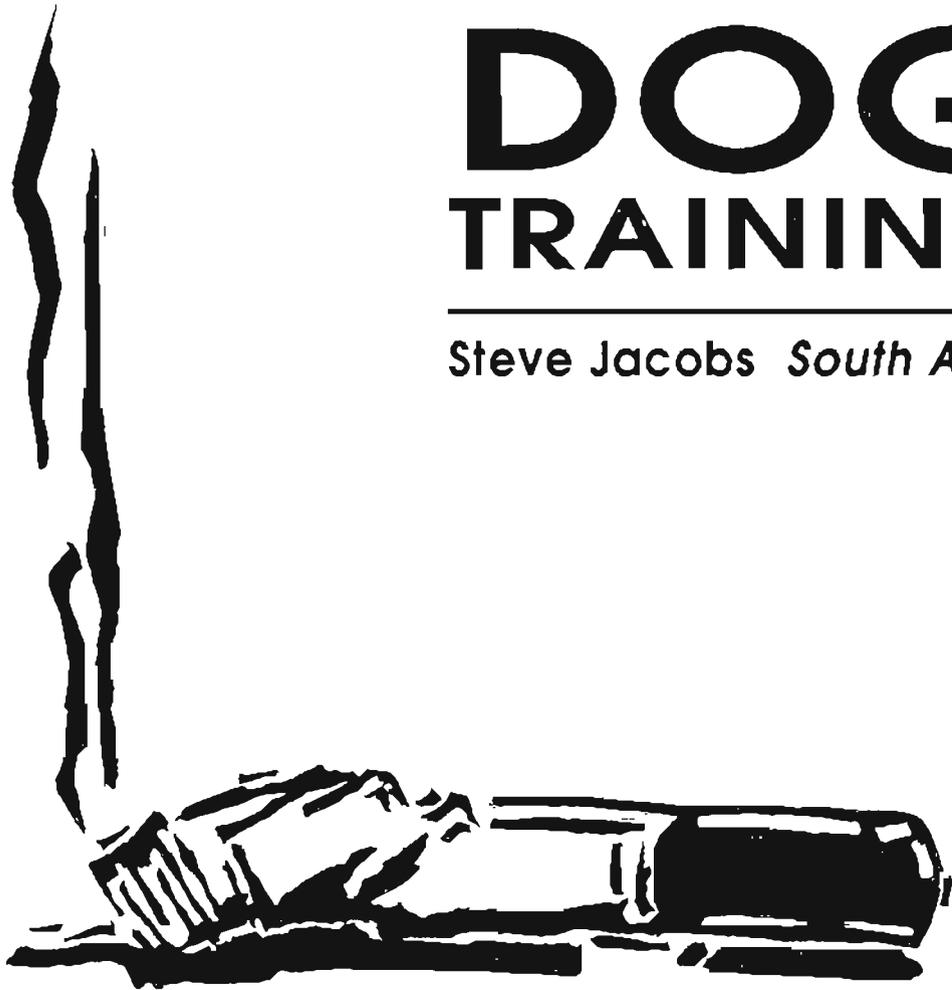
I need to know
if my blackness
is a licence to transgress the law
while shoulders shrug
is the silence of the gods

I need to know
if I'll ever have my heart back
after the sprouting of these seeds of violence
for so long
or I'll ever dance in fire

Is the silence of the gods
Is the silence of the gods

DOG TRAINING

Steve Jacobs *South Africa*



had to shoot him,' Eddie said, locking his fingers together and squeezing his knuckles until they were white. 'I didn't have a choice. It was him or me.'

'Then you can't blame yourself,' Maria replied.

'It was war,' Eddie explained. 'He was a terrorist. I don't blame anyone.'

Maria stole a glance towards the bedroom as if someone were in there, but he knew she was alone. 'I didn't expect you to come,' she said. 'You should have phoned first.'

'Why?' he bristled. 'I'm not exactly a stranger.' His big hand hugged the beer-can she had found in the fridge for him. 'I know I've been away for nearly a year, but I'm not a stranger. Am I?'

No, of course not, Eddie,' she said but she did not go on and, in the stillness, his mind began to wander as it used to in the bush. He saw again the startled expression on the dead, black face before the horror of what he had done drove him puking out into the burning village.

Steve Jacobs, *South Africa*

'We met so long ago,' he said and his mouth was dry despite the beer.

'You were still at school,' she replied, using the word like a hammer to nail up the past.

'And you had just left your husband.' He grinned, crookedly, triumphantly. 'You loved me then, didn't you?'

She nodded and reached for a cigarette. The top of her gown fell open and Eddie shivered with desire as he imagined her small breasts beneath the coarse red fabric.

'Didn't you?' he demanded, conscious of a swelling in his crotch.

'Yes, Eddie,' she answered nervously, pulling her gown tighter as if she were drawing a curtain.

'It's not my fault I had to go into the army,' he grumbled and he tipped his head back, pouring the bitter liquid into his mouth. 'For two bloody years,' he gurgled, 'and it's still not over.'

'No it isn't.' Her face was pinched and there were a few more lines around her eyes. 'But it's been hard,' she said, 'for me and the kids.'

'Why? Hasn't he paid the maintenance?'

'Some months he pays. It's just hard being a single parent. I don't like to leave my babies alone all day.'

'Why don't you get a babysitter?'

'A girl comes in ...'

'Well that's okay then.'

'No it's not,' she snapped. 'I worry. You don't have children. You don't know what it's like leaving them.'

'Ja, I can imagine,' he said to mollify her.

'No you can't,' she retorted.

Squirming at her sudden hostility, he tried to bury himself in the armchair. He stretched out his long legs and surveyed the sparsely furnished room. A sliding door led to a balcony which overlooked the beachfront. On the sideboard stood a photograph of a boy and a girl, taken on the beach: the girl was laughing, the boy squinted into the camera. He had his mother's frown.

'Where are the kids?' Eddie asked, looking around.

'They've gone to my mom for the weekend.'

'Oh?' he raised his eyebrows. 'I'd have thought you'd want to be with them.'

'I was tired,' she said. 'I had a hard week.'

He shook his head miserably, trying to believe her.

She pulled on her cigarette and blew out smoke. 'You're still in uniform,' she commented as if she had only just noticed.

'I came straight over. I wanted to see you.'

She bunched her fists. 'That's nice.'

'We left Pretoria yesterday morning. We drove right through the night.'

'You must be exhausted.'

'I could get into bed,' he hinted, but she did not take up the offer. They had not touched, except for the brief kiss at the door when he smelled smoke in her hair, and later when she gave him the beer and their fingers grazed.

A helicopter clattered outside and Eddie leaped up; he reached the sliding door in two strides, pulled it open and stepped onto the balcony. Maria followed more slowly and stood next to him.

The beachfront was dressed in yellow for battle: police vans, mobile dog-cages, even a Casspir, mingled uneasily with the holiday crowd.

'It's those bloody agitators,' she muttered, screwing up her eyes in the sharp sunlight.

'Ja, I know. There was a road-block on the freeway, The police were stopping all the blacks.'

'They've got their own beaches. Why must they come here and cause trouble?'

He shook his head and put his arm around her. 'We went to the border because that's where the war was. Now when I come back, it's right outside your flat.'

For a moment she leaned against him. 'A bomb went off in a toilet down there last night.' She pointed and he felt a tremor ripple through her thin shoulder.

'Is that why you sent the kids to your mom?'

'Ja.' She nodded slowly, evaluating this explanation.

'Well it's all under control now,' he said.

From the glassy edge of the water up to the road, the white sand was deserted except for policemen and their dogs. Red and white striped tape cordoned off the entire length of the beach and on the shower cubicles were notices: DANGER — POLICE DOG TRAINING.

'It's a bit of a joke,' he said. 'Dogs aren't even allowed on the beach.'

'Who's laughing?' she asked sourly. She pulled away and his arm dropped uselessly to his side.

On the beach, a line of alsatians, tails flicking excitedly, faced a line of men. At a hidden signal, the dogs strutted over to their handlers, heads high, lolling tongues pulling back their lips in laughter. The policemen then marched away in step, or pretending to get into step, dogs at their heels.

Maria glanced at her watch as if she were expecting someone to return and Eddie suddenly felt very tired. He noticed the statuette of an African woman, carved out of a dark wood, that lay neglected on the rusty veranda table. The woman's breasts were uncovered. It reminded him of the bush. But the sharp smell of the sea brought him back to the present.

'I've hardly slept for two days,' he said, rubbing his eyes, 'We drove through the night. I wanted to get back to see you.'

She did not answer, but seemed to become smaller. Her mouth was a grim line; the skin of her forehead wrinkled in a frown.

'I was in the bush for months,' he said, 'and it was hard for me also. But thinking about you made it easier. Here, I've got your picture.' He fumbled in his top pocket and pulled out a wallet. She accepted the photograph with uncertain fingers and

studied the younger, smiling woman before handing her back.

'I spoke about you so often,' he said, 'that the other guys used to mock me ...'

'Eddie,' she interrupted, sliding her feet in and out of her slippers, but she could not deflect him.

'You kept me going. What else was I in the bush for? For this? Nothing's changed. It's getting worse!'

'Don't shout. The neighbours will hear.'

'I don't care about the neighbours! You didn't write. Didn't you get my letters?'

He leaned over the parapet, almost too far, and her eyes widened with alarm.

'I got them,' she replied in a calm, measured voice.

'And when I phoned from Pretoria there was no reply. What's going on?' he asked harshly, drawing back from the edge and standing up straight.

She looked directly into his eyes for the first time.

'I'll tell you what, Eddie. Last time you were here...when you left, I was pregnant.'

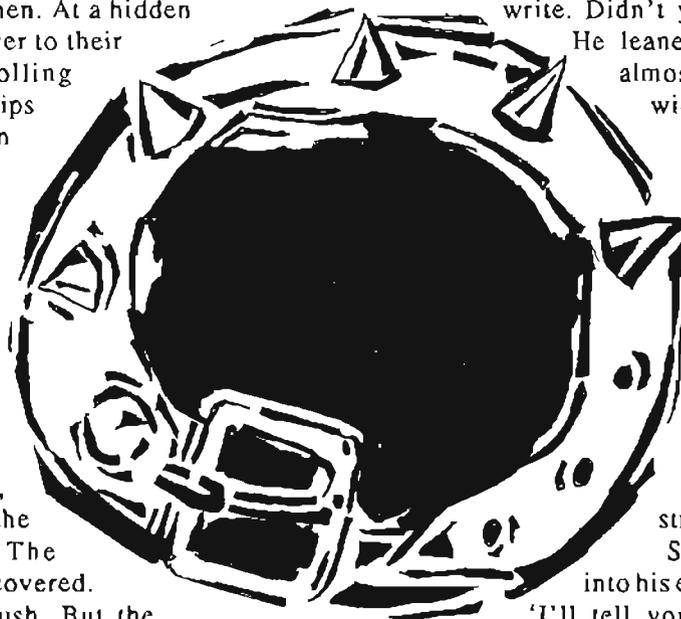
He was on the point of putting the beer-can to his lips but his hand froze, then fell. Inside the flat, a fly buzzed futilely against a window pane, trying to get out.

'But you were taking the pill,' he said weakly.

'I stopped for a while to give my body a rest. It doesn't matter now.'

'So what happened? Why didn't you tell me?'

'What was the point? I lost the baby. I was in hospital for a few days.' Her eyes were green, accusing. 'What would I have done with your baby?'



Steve Jacobs, *South Africa*

You couldn't have supported me and a baby anyway.'

He slammed his fist into the wall and she winced.

'What was the point of telling you? I lost it anyway.' There was a hard line around her eyes.

He turned again to the events below, watching absently, trying to fit together the information she had dropped like a grenade into the space between them. His fist was numb and he wondered if he had broken it.

An elderly black man, a lonely determined figure, strode up to the police cordon. A ragged cheer from the protesters lifted him over the tape and carried him across the ice of the sand without scuffing it, to the water's edge. As he passed the BEACH: WHITES ONLY sign, he spat.

Policemen and their dogs swivelled in anger and people, unshackled, spilled out of restaurants and cafes. Dressed in T-shirts, calling for non-racial beaches, waving toy buckets and spades, they flooded the dry white sand.

'How did you lose it?' Eddie asked. 'The baby. What happened?'

Maria was rubbing the bare place on her finger where she used to wear a wedding ring. Her hands jerked when a loudhailer blared: 'This beach has been reserved for dog exercises. You have five minutes to disperse!'

Eddie swallowed the last of the beer and hurled the can at a young white man running with the blacks. 'Fucking Commie!' he yelled. His hand was beginning to hurt as the numbness wore off and he turned on Maria.

'Why didn't you tell me about the baby? I had a right to know!'

'It wouldn't have helped.' Her face settled then as if she had reached a decision and she stood taller

than before. 'Eddie. I'm sorry. But you must go now.'

He rubbed his eyes; the dead feeling in his hand had gone to his brain. He was not sure if he had heard her correctly. 'But I've only just got here,' he said. 'Where must I go?'

Anxiety raised the pitch of her voice. 'You must go now. Martin is coming any minute.'

'Who?' he said in disbelief. 'Who's coming?' Panic raked his stomach as it had done when he kicked down the door of the hut in that faraway village and he found himself staring into the hollow eye of an AK-47. His fingers sought out and fastened on the statuette of the African woman, and he gripped it like a club.

'Eddie put that down,' Maria said firmly. 'You don't want trouble.' But her lower lip was trembling and she reached in her pocket for a cigarette.

'Who is he?' Eddie panted. 'Has he been around long?'

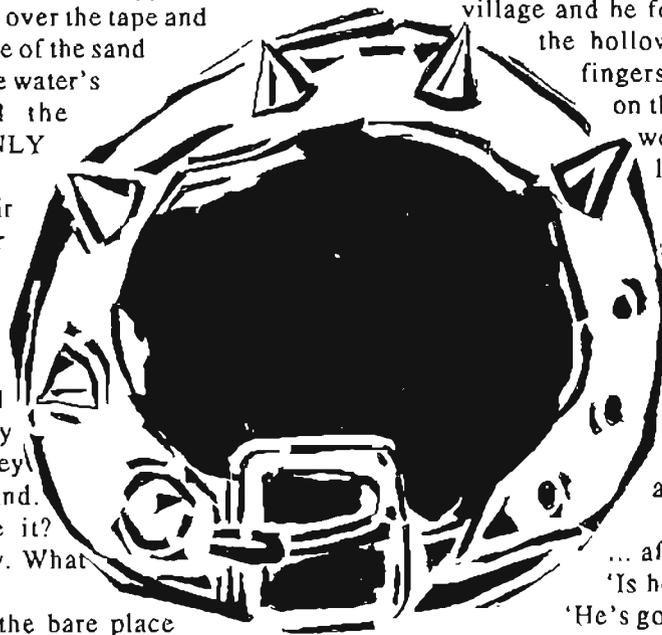
'He was very kind to me ... after I lost the baby.'

'Is he a doctor?'

'He's got a job. He's older, Eddie. Older than you.'

The helicopter whined past again and Eddie blindly took in the beachfront chaos. The police were wading into the almost-picnicking crowd, quirts flailing, faces smiling with the pleasure of contact. The burly men fell over one another, competing with their dogs to get in first. The protesters scattered as a policeman with a video camera captured their faces for his files and the helicopter squatted on the beach, sending up gales of sand.

Eddie lowered the statuette and leaned against the wall that he had punched. He was white around



the mouth and his shoulders slumped.

'When's he coming back?'

'Any minute.'

Plastic buckets and spades and sandwich wrappers and picnic baskets rose into the air in a whirlwind created by dogs and policemen and frantic demonstrators.

Eddie sighed. 'How could you do it, Maria?'

'Just go.' Her eyes were frightened although her voice was firm. Her mouth was obscured by smoke.

But Eddie flexed his wrist, rocking the statuette back and forth, beating its head into the cupped palm of his free hand.

'I sat in the bush for you,' he said simply. 'I don't really care what I do now.'

'Don't be mad!'

'You know what?' Eddie smiled bleakly. 'After I shot that terrorist I felt so much power. I'd actually killed another man.'

Maria stepped back. 'But Eddie, that was war. You're allowed to in war.'

'I'd been bothered about why he didn't shoot first. He had me in his sights and I still had to bend to get into the hut. I thought maybe he didn't want to wake his kids. You know sometimes you think nonsense. But when I checked, I found he didn't have any bullets. I shot an unarmed man.'

'You didn't know.'

Tears were streaming down Eddie's cheeks. 'But I loved it,' he cried. 'It was good.'

'Eddie, this isn't war.'

Down below, a series of sharp reports pricked the tranquil morning and a cloud of teargas spread like sea mist over the beach. People were sprinting away from the crying fog, drooping jackets and sunglasses as they nursed their wounded eyes, while on a lamppost a National Party election poster pleaded: GIVE FW A CHANCE and the bald party leader beamed down on the disappearing street with his enigmatic smile.

And then the teargas from the war to keep South Africa white drove Eddie and Maria back into the safety of her flat. His fingers curled like a wedding band round the naked statue's breasts. 

Poetry

Martin Luther King

For the life he barely lived in the United States
and the martyr's death they gave him in Memphis
in two or three centuries' time
I suspect that Martin Luther King
will have languid blue eyes
long blond hair
a Nordic white complexion
and the surname of God.

It's bad enough that Jesus Christ
no longer suits them.

and how much will death's sting
from the wasp of lead
be worth
at that time?

Fable

Fat boy bought a balloon
and blew
he blew the yellow balloon with much strength.

Fat boy blew
blew
blew
the balloon filled up
filled up
and burst open!

Thin boys picked up the scraps
and made small balloons.

(From *Karingana ua Karingana*, 1974)

José Craveirinha

Mozambique

Five Poems

Translated by Luis Rafael

Land Canaan

No, Israeli pilot.
It is useless to search among the raging fires of Beirut
and the innocent bodies mutilated by burning shell splinters
for the beautiful words of the Song of Songs.

And fly lower on the ground.
Fly swiftly downwards in your fighter-bomber.
Fly lower on the ground. Fly even lower, Hebrew pilot.
Down towards Eichmann. Fly to the depths of loathing.
Speed up until you and the motors and match-stick bombs
eagerly kiss the sacred ground.

Was it for this holocaust that you survived
your own genocide in the days of Naziland?
Is this really your desired Land of Canaan?
Is this really the way you achieve peace in the Promised Land?

Canticle of the Blue Bird in Sharpeville

Thin men like myself
don't ask to be born
or to sing.

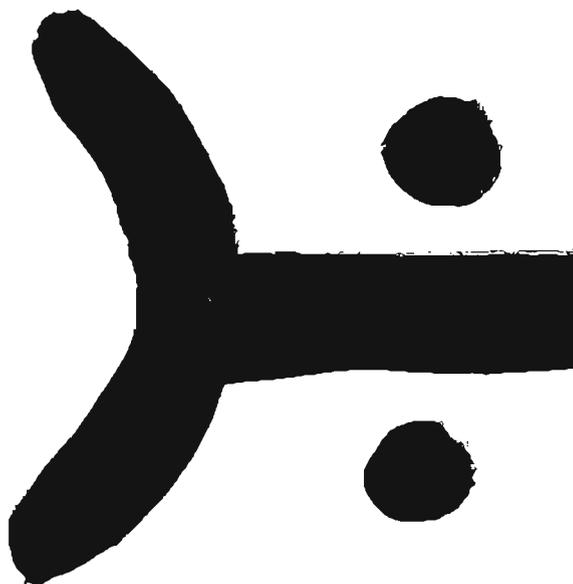
But they continue to be born and to sing,
and our voice is the incorruptible voice
of dragged-out steps taken in old plots
and of anguish that has no voice.

And if they sing and continue to be born,
thin men like myself with deep black rings under the eyes,
it wasn't as if they asked for the blasphemy
of a sun that wasn't the same
for a black child
as for an Afrikaner boy.

But we're all men,
all with the same magnificent delight
at the children we create.
Here we are
with the vigorous desire to live out the song we know
and also to change our lives,
the life of "volunteer" we never asked for
and don't want
and despise, from the African nankeen we're forced to wear
to the ration of mealie pap we're fed with.

And with the seeds of the Ronga,
the wild flowers in the hills of the Zulus,
and the dose of pollen from the machine-guns in the air of Sharpeville
a blue *xilotonguana* sings in the arms of an *imbondeiro*
and the sorceries of these skies raise the
terrible beauty of our flight.

From *Karingana ua Karingana*, 1974



Communique from Cuito Cuanavale

*To Jacinto, Luandino, Pepetela, David Mestre and Mito,
to whom I dedicate this humble attempt of mine to be closer
to them in that place where they are most at.*

Your Ze (Jose) embraces you.

I

From under the throttled skies of Cubango-Cubango,
searching in vain to give play
to their drunken lunacy,
infested birds plant their eggs of evil
on the holy ground of Cuito Cuanavale.

The Pretorian disgust of the Impalas has been detonated
now as in the days of Shaka
the heavy blood of the land
with its mythical roots
cannot be vanquished.

II

How fortunate is the destiny of the boere seun
delighting in his own ideological suicide
in the Mirage that traps him
in the laughter
of its flames?

III

Isn't it one less soldier
that is to walk the streets of Hillbrow
in civies?

Or is it some irrevocable fate thrust on the Afrikaners,
a Rand Show of last rites,
a typical Springbok jol,
a funeral service picnic
on the pastures of Cuito?

IV

was it to keep vigil on the son's coffin
that the fallen pilot's parents
gave their vote to the bragging dogma
of Satan?

Or was it for the grieved to file past
in the afflicting ring of bugles
and in the booming echo of unexultant
customary salvos of the funeral?

Is it merely to earn a bier
that, in the absence of Mandela, the Mirages
defile the ground of Angola with their rockets?

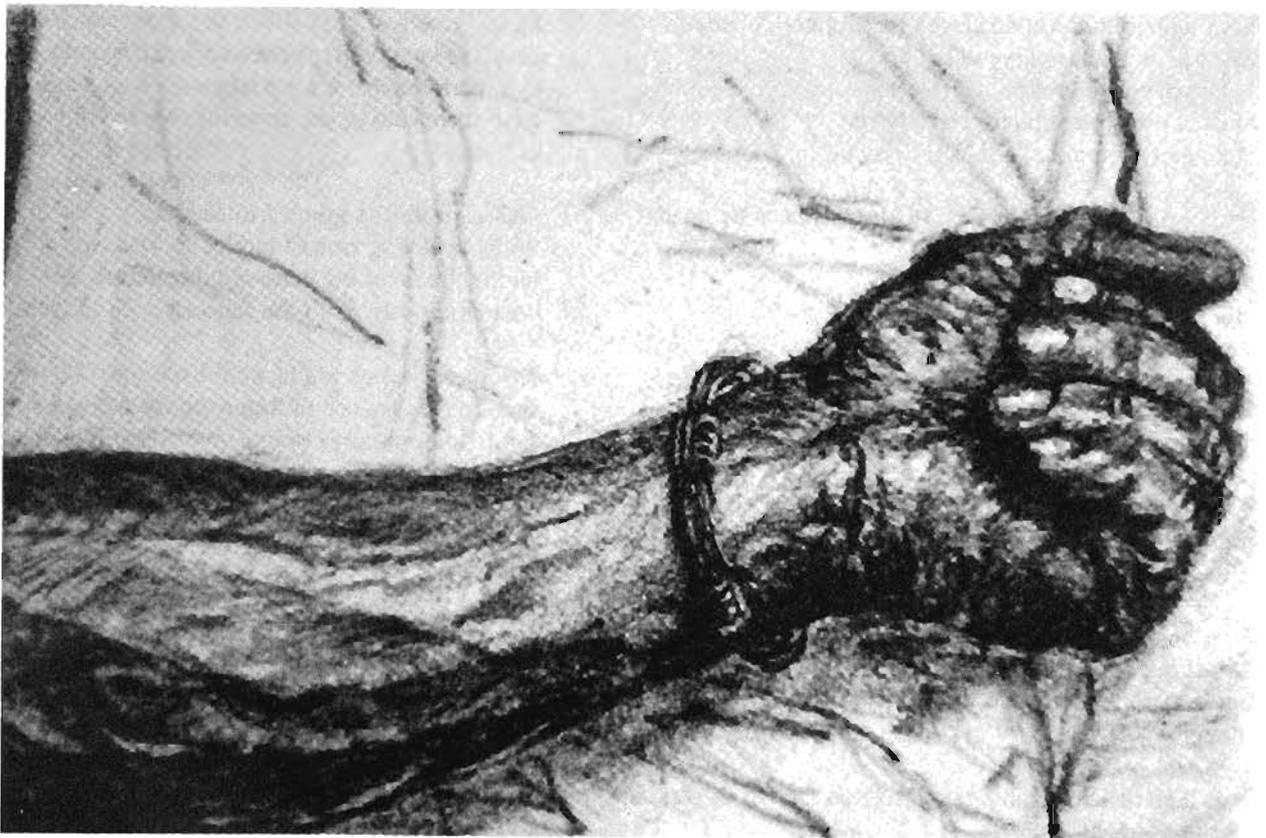
Questions this missive asks with indignation.
But let no one reply.
It's unnecessary.

In Cuito Cuanavale,
with all life's strength,
the dead reply!

(Uncollected, nd)

Translated by Luis Rafael

R E S T I N G F I S T
A S E R I E S O F L I T H O G R A P H S



P A O L A B E C K











A MAN CALLED

JB

Dede Kamkondo, Malawi

We used to call him JB. He was tall and walked without a stoop although I'm sure he must have been on the wrong side of sixty. His eyes were perpetually sad and he wore the expression of a man who believed the world hadn't treated him fairly.

He was JB to us because whenever an opportunity availed itself, he would walk into any class — be it Form one or four — and deliver a monologue on JB Priestley. And by the end of the lecture, half the class would be asleep. That's how he earned himself the name JB.

JB's real name was Alfred Christopher Heywood and he came from Sheffield. A strict disciplinarian, he had served in the British Army and fought in the dense jungles of Burma. After his retirement, he decided to come to Africa. And there he was: Headmaster, Chichiri Secondary School.

Everyday, we would go into the assembly hall at 6.30 in the morning and spend thirty minutes listening to JB preaching the Gospel. In his safari suit, he would stand on the dais, unsmiling, and preach the



Dede Kamkondo, *Malawi*

Word of God with such euphoria that the lady teachers up-front would stare at him, open-mouthed as if unable to believe that he was the same person who never hesitated to use the cane on any one of us if we broke the school regulations. So captivating a speaker he was.

You could come late to class and JB would retaliate by merely giving you some sort of punishment but if you came late for the assembly, you were in for it. Even the teachers didn't dare be late for the assembly. For to annoy JB was to utter a curse on yourself.

One day, I missed the assembly. I arrived at school just as everyone was coming out of the assembly hall. Maybe I should have returned home and come back the following day with the excuse that I had been sick or something. But then I couldn't go back because we were having exams that day. I prayed to myself: God, give me strength...

For a while I thought God had listened to me. Eight o'clock...nine...ten.... No word from JB. Lord, don't forsake me now, I muttered to myself, JB's favourite hymn resonating in my ears: 'Stand up, stand up for Jesus'.

I looked out of the window and for the first time that day I noticed the grass around the school, a wide expanse of green. And I noticed the butterflies floating in the air like multi-coloured leaves falling from a tree. And I noticed the groundsman put his rake down in order to roll a cigarette while darting furtive glances over his shoulder in case JB materialised from round a corner. I sighed as the tension left me like water from the bladder.

I shouldn't have relaxed, for a moment later I saw a familiar figure hobbling towards our classroom. It was that of Thomo. Nicknamed MD, short for Messenger of Death, Thomo enjoyed his task of summoning wrongdoers to JB's office. He would hover outside the office, rubbing his hands in anticipation until he heard the whips land on the victim's bare buttocks. Then he would chuckle with relish and return to his cleaning duties in the General Office, grinning widely.

MD knocked on the door.

'What do you want?' snapped the Geography master who always sweated cats and dogs as if he found teaching strenuous.

'Dan Nyirenda.'

'Can't you see he's in class?'

'The Head wants to meet him now, now.'

The master grimaced, shrugged and turned to us.

'Dan Nyirenda — to the headmaster, at once!.'

'Yes sir.' I swallowed heavily. I avoided looking at my classmates for if I saw the pity in their eyes, I was going to cry.

I took out a dictionary from my desk and walked out of the room like a scalded puppy. Already, I could imagine JB's whip tearing the flesh off my buttocks. I could imagine him snarling at me to go and dig a huge pit, 10ft by 10ft. I could imagine his pointed shoe stabbing me in the shins. I could imagine him pulling my ears before ordering me to go and scrub the toilet floor.

Instead of going straight to JB's office, I went to the back of the administration block and sat down to prepare my 'defence', making sure it was well spiced with the kind of English words which matter.

'Dan Nyirenda?' JB snarled at me coldly from behind his pince-nez the moment I walked into his office.

'Yes, sir,' I swallowed audibly...

'Why didn't you show up at the assembly this morning? Explain!'

I closed my eyes briefly to recall the carefully rehearsed speech I had prepared.

'I'm sorry sir, but the wheeled traffic my person embarked on this morning was cunctatious. Nevertheless, I cooled my heels and stood as dead as a doornail until the public convenience ... I mean ... the public conveyance dropped anchor at the station. When I looked at my chronometer, I discerned that there was retardation....' I stopped to draw in breath. Then I looked at JB. The man's lips were twitching. Then ... you can't believe it ... he burst out laughing.

After a while JB regained control of himself and said, 'What's your name again?'

'Dan Nyirenda, sir.'

'All right Professor Nyirenda, don't you spend time looking up words in a thesaurus if you don't know how to use them... is that clear?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You can go. Next time be punctual.'

'Yes, sir' I turned and shot out of the room. Phew! That was a very narrow escape. Who had ever entered JB's den and left without a scratch?

From that day, JB and I became buddies. He took personal interest in my career and advised me to read literature if I went to college.

Sometimes, he would call me in his office and ask me to dust the shelves.

Then he would sit down and pretend to be engrossed in a novel. Once or twice, I would steal a glance at him and our eyes would meet. It was as if I knew something about him which I could never disclose to anybody, not even to him either.

JB left unceremoniously when I was about to sit for my Cambridge School Certificate exams.. He left without a word of farewell to us. I understand he had to be rushed back to England because he had to undergo an operation.

His departure made me feel helpless and empty. I missed his captivating sermons in the assembly hall; I missed the ruthless sound of his voice. Above all I missed the human understanding there was between us. I was probably the only person around who knew that beneath JB's ruthless façade was the soul of a weak man, a man who believed that the world had conspired with God to rob him of the ability to enjoy life ...

The day before I wrote the exams, I received a huge 'BEST WISHES' card. It was from JB in England. No sender's address though. At the bottom was a P.S:

'Remember what I told you professor: Read literature.' But when I went over to Manchester University the following year on a British Council scholarship, I enrolled for a BSc in Economics. But, I tell you, I almost changed courses because at the back of my mind was the nagging thought: 'Remember what JB advised you to do'.

A couple of months later, I went to the British

Council offices and managed to get JB's address from an old file. Excited, I wrote to that address.

The reply was prompt and crisp: 'Please come over. Tell us when. If you're coming by train, tell us the time. Can you also tell us the kind of clothes you'll be wearing? (if possible, that is). Sorry we're not on the phone. Yours, Eileen.'

I didn't tell them about the clothes I'd be wearing. Instead, I sent them a photo of myself.

So that Saturday afternoon, my coat collar up, hands in the pockets, I got off the train in Sheffield. I was hovering around like a lazy grasshopper when I saw this tall, thin woman with overflowing hair bouncing towards me. As she came nearer, I saw that she was smiling. I smiled back. Could this be JB's envoy?

'Hello there! Dan Nyirenda, I presume?' she said, her voice husky. She was in her thirties and wore the expression of a social rebel — so carefree she didn't give a damn about what the world thought of her.

'Yes, I'm Dan.'

'I'm Eileen,' she said and we shook hands.

She told me their house was a few minutes walk from there. But soon the five minutes turned to ten. Then fifteen. That's one thing I've learnt about the English. They've a distorted sense of direction and time.

We finally arrived at the house thirty minutes later. It was a small house, partly hidden by a neglected hedge. The door was opened by a younger woman — Eileen's younger sister, I was told. Her name was Sonia.

Eileen brought me a frothy beer. Boy, it was too early for a beer, I thought. 'Tell us about Dad,' Eileen said, sitting next to me on the old sofa. Sonia lay on the floor, occasionally stealing glances at me as if she didn't know what to do in my presence.

'Tell us,' urged Eileen. 'Tell us why they called him JB.'

'You weren't with him in Malawi, were you?' I asked.

'No!' It was Sonia who answered, her face contorted. 'That man divorced Mom.'

Dede Kamkondo, Malawi

'Sonia!' Eileen's voice cracked like a whip across the room.

'Oh you!' Sonia jumped to her feet and glared at her sister defiantly, 'You and your liberalism. You can hang!' She shot out of the room and I heard her go upstairs..

Eileen sighed painfully.'I shouldn't have invited you here.'

I didn't say anything. Then she went on to tell me that when their father retired from the public service, he found life at home intolerable.

'The point is, I understood him,' she said, 'he wanted a complete rest but Mom wanted him to take part in local politics, to honour invitations to dinners and so on.' She closed her eyes for a moment. 'Why am I telling you all this? You want know the reason? He told me about you. He told me you made him laugh like a two-year-old.' She was quiet for a moment before saying, 'My dad ... my Dad was a good man. Very kind. All those years in the bush, he used to write to me ... I understood him... But Sonia never forgave him for abandoning us.'

'Where's he?'

'You want to see JB?' Eileen stared at me, her eyes watery. I nodded.

'He's in a public graveyard.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Died of a brain tumour.'

'I'm sorry,' I muttered again.

'I understood him...' she paused for a while. 'Now, tell me about his days in Africa.'

What could I say? Of course, I did tell her why we nicknamed him JB. But what else could I say?

After a while, I stood up to go.

'I'm sorry, Dan, your visit hasn't been worthwhile.'

'On the contrary, Eileen,' I managed to say with a smile.

'How long will you be in Manchester?'

'I don't know... three, four years, maybe.'

'We'll visit you,' she muttered. But both of us knew that this was the last time to meet. There never would be a next time. Just as the memory of JB had brought us together so too would part us.



Four Indian Ocean Poets

Translated by Stephen Gray

Paul and Virginie

Oh God, these stinking colonies!

A disturber of nests, you see,
a bird without wings,
what does Paul get up to now he's alone?
And where on earth is his Virginie?

With You on high, where she need never show her things.

For him and for her,
That planter's feid atmosphere —
For fair young Virginie and for her lovely Paul —
Used to be their parasol.

Raymond Radiguet, Mauritius



Island Words

Beautiful isle
of the pages of poets

there are three
masters of the isle —
and their opening syllable
coloured by their ancient heritage

isle of fragile words
full of overlapping dreams
of paddles of the east
rosewood and sandal

words nostalgic with exile
Nossi-Be crowned with coral
words forgotten since
the depths of the dawn
Diego, Victoire have torn their anchors
words reborn from cyclones overcome
Mahajanga, Toamasina
hesitant words entangled
with children's laughter
ylang-ylang, zozoro
or the suggestive steps
under the whorl
of a stout lamba (or scarf)
valiha (playing the bamboo flute)
in unison

Along the footpath
a sign
ravenala
(the traveller's tree).

Assane Y. Diallo, Madagascar, 1988



Last Journal

*At 9 minutes to 2 on my watch
I take 14 pills of 0,25 grams quinine
to Muffle my head well.
A little water to swallow them.*

At the age of Guerin, at the age of Deubel,
a little bit older than you, Rimbaud Next to Nothing,
because this life for us is too unsuitable
and because the bee has exhausted all pollen,
there is nothing left to argue and nothing left to wait for
and, laid down on the grit or the stone, deep in the grass,
to gaze tenderly
on all those who one day like sheaves will be gathered.
Fixing a tender gaze! The tenderness of absence,
Next to Nothing, Nothing in which I can hardly believe.

But is there a presence more pure
than may be rendered to you, O sweet Mother, O Earth?
We will all find ourselves in your solitude,
as peopled and as empty as the ocean.
And each time up here the wind of the south blows,
down there it will cause survivors.
What roots of flowers we will come to drink then
to calm in the sun such a thirst for the fruit.
Over us will bend the heliotropes of evening
and come to take from our secrets the Row.
This Row, the Noise of humans — the false rumours of shells
for sailors asleep in the slumber of the earth!

The Noise, the human Row, always the same in all ages
which only among the dead undresses some small part of your
distress.

But already I sense the odour of dust
and of grass; already I hear the call of my girl;
ah! slowly forgotten her eyes hollow with earth,
of us she may dream in our tranquil cave!
And that which is not ready to shed tears
before our door closes in silence!
What may one think if there is no longer any charm,
some day, to be guided by us into that immense end...

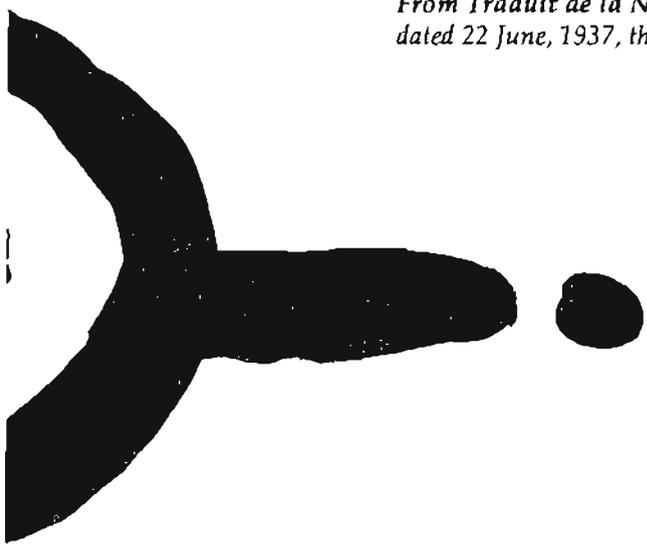
At 2.37 on my watch.

*The effect of the quinine is now felt.
Soon in a little sweetened water I shall take
more than 10 grams of potassium cyanide.*

— I stroke the family album. I send a kiss
to the works of Baudelaire which I have in the other room.
— 15.02. I will drink — I have done. Mary, my children,
to you my thoughts — my last.

I swallow a little sugar. I suffocate. I am going
to stretch out.

*Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, Madagascar
From Traduit de la Nuit (1990 edition),
dated 22 June, 1937, the day of his suicide.*



Zebu

Arched like the towns of Imerina
 clear on the rocky hills
 or cut from the very slopes;
 humped like the gables
 the moon sculpts on the soil,
 here is the powerful bull
 crimson as the colour of his blood.

He has drunk from the landings of rivers,
 grazed on cactuses and lilacs;
 here he crouches before manioc
 heavy still with the scent of the earth,
 and before the stems of rice
 that reek strongly of sun and shade.

Evening has dug down everywhere
 and the horizon is no more.
 The bull sees a desert that stretches
 right to the frontiers of the night.
 His horns are like a crescent
 moon rising.

Desert, desert
 desert before the powerful bull
 who strays with the evening
 in the kingdom of silence,
 what do you recall in his half-sleep?
 Is it his kind without the hump,
 and are they red like the dust
 their passage raises,
 these, the masters of uninhabited lands?
 Or his sires the peasants fattened
 and led into towns, adorned with ripe oranges,
 to be felled in the King's honour?

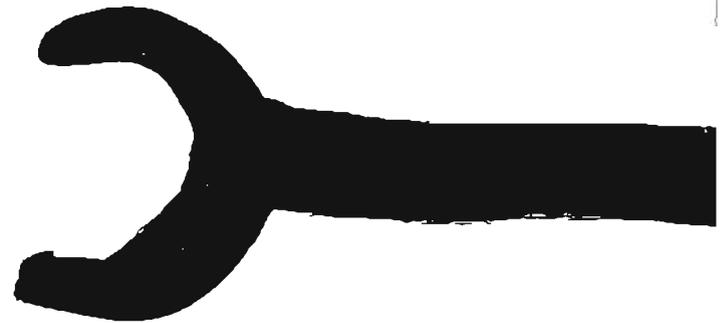
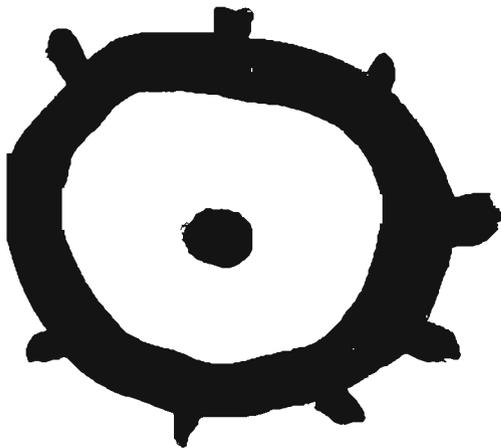
He leaps, he bellows,
 he who will die without glory,
 then he sleeps again as he waits,
 resembles a hunch of soil.

Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, Madagascar
 From *Presques-Songes*



We're Closing

The end of the world has begun.
We have killed off the past
Without creating the future,
Brought the caveman back to life
In the laboratory where
Planetary death is germinated.
— Why flower, rose? Nightingale, why sing?
Why then — O verbena — give yourself the trouble
Of embalming the fragile garden?
All's provisional and utterly condemned.
Why flourish — O young girl —
And shake in the wind your sunny head of hair?
O pale adolescent, flesh for cannons, there is
Legal slaughter of large lads from in front,
So why trouble to learn your Greek
And the art of building your own hearth?



The night without stars is coming, the tides of dark
Unfurled beneath funeral gods
Of the Tribe, of the Fatherland and Mortuaries.
Under the leafless trees
Sombrely they return,
All the crows in mourning.
The cathedrals are shaken,
They sense the coming of the wind of death
And the Acropolis may only mock
For it is no longer protected and the sombre silk
Is marked with a secret sign.
Perhaps Charures will collapse on our heads.
The Parthenon has been notified...
Since man is more cruel than the outrage of time.
And over the sepulchre of Christ
The bomb insults with its grand emptiness.

This is the time of scientific savagery:
Atilas of the university, atomic Tamburlaines.
This is a good time to die,
To achieve the end silently
Because the human voice may no longer win
Over the deadly trump of this Jericho.

Robert-Edward Hart, Mauritius
From *Plénitudes* (1948)

Brentpark March 1990

1

How write the country
 how cry out arm in arm
 row upon row fluttering before your mission-toga
 the steel wall yellow vehicles
 bandoleers with finger-thick bullets
 dogs frantically barking at our ankles
 his eyes gleam as he drops the chain imperceptibly
 a chill blacks the wind

my heart tolls faintly like an over-ripe pear
 on a casspir a man from my neighbourhood
 his teeth press his lips spit venom
 (Another one - pure child
 hurls open the van door
 and curses us for whites)

slowly a demonstration
 a march in silence
 a whole landscape stops breathing
 towards the little bridge fringe of the residential area
 merely 50 metres

how speak the realisation that all things precious
 cost blood that we know't
 are even prepared for't
 but in drab quarters blood can
 worthlessly slurp dust for
 children carry knives hands strangle an artery
 drink shuttles from door to door
 shells pop unhindered from vans
 buy blood rarely anything better

a march a revolt a standing-together
 a walking-arm-in-arm a power heard surging
 look:
 we march
 thefore we merge
 with new skin the parade sings

2

Softly we sow our different routes
 loiter in strange streets first
 to return one by one cautiously
 to the place of the crime
 sit behind the derelict school
 to re-remember the march
 each telling their own eyes
 like me above
 uttering their own fear
 spelling out alternative scenarios
 we laugh and shudder
 over and over we touch each other

a march with hundred eyes hundred terrors
 and so recounting
 our tongues banner
 collective memory

Antjie Krog, South Africa
 Translated by Deela Khan



Life in Limbo

Our children are graduating
in brothels
this is the progeny
of stinking civilizations
embracing the bitterness
of so-called third
world repercussions.

We cannot compose
content songs
from the constant anger
of limbo life.

Yet life is life
whether for a dollar
or rand
Pain is pain
whether razor-bladed
or machine-gunned
The destination is one.

Ours is as cheap
as this country's
whoring rand.

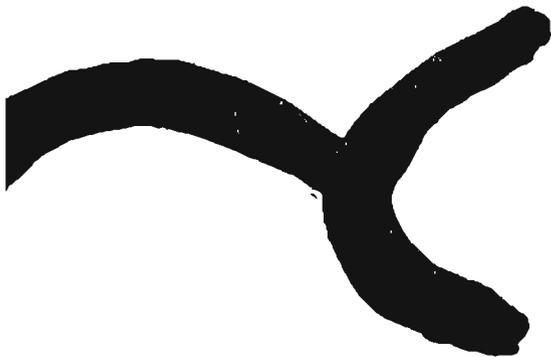
Money is like
a prostitute
It lands in every hand
dirty or clean.

Yet we are daily
sold by our
window-dressed mongrels
who display Azania's
false buttocks
and call it revolution.

Limbo life is in Zombiland
where we dance
around tongues of fire
and lick the dirt
of this ruthless whirlwind.

Where only the Dutch god
survive in infernostroika
With us ululating
hallelujah!
On the burning cross.

Maritso Makhunga, *South Africa*



Lucifer on War

Lucifer declared war against me
because i said give ma trousers back
he told ma brothers not to follow ma tracks
he told ma sisters not to follow ma tracks
because i was influenced by the devil
because i was the worst criminal that ever lied

he ordered his police to search for me
but they failed to find me
commanded his army to search and kill me
they also failed to kill me
searched in every corner of the country
searched in every bush in the country
searched in every village in the country
but failed to arrest me
but failed to kill me

this made him run here and there
looking for someone to help him
in search of me
and still he failed to arrest and kill me

this made him run here and there
looking for someone to help him
in search of me
and still he failed to arrest and kill me

Lucifer used every kind of tactic
he knew to finish me off
but failed
he forced ma brothers to join his forces
he forced ma sisters to join him in killing me
and again he failed

in a mirror he told people that
i disappointed him because i failed
to kill those who threatened him
because i failed to kill those who wanted him dead

Bryan Sanzilla, South Africa

Luis Carlos Patraquim

Mozambique

Four Poems

Translated by Luis Raphael

Summer

and it was now that I wanted to be with you,
merely two entwined bodies
in the logic of being what they asked to be
and what they say they are

the moment was now,
gazing out from an open window on top of the house
while the leaves tremble with the wind,
the annunciation of the voice of the rain

the music would then merge with the metaphors
and the poem would be crystal and the limpid afternoon,
this essence of the Indian Ocean driving us
into laden and sensual exaltation

because now was the time to be with you,
dancing inside the monsoon

Uncollected, 1979

‘I think of your hands as gills inside the sea...’

‘the world rests entirely on your eyes’
Paul Eluard

I think of your hands as gills inside the sea
your hands that breathe sounds
and I think I’m within a shoal of moving fish
everything I see are islands in movement
and you arrive, country in inauguration
stripped naked of all leaves
rising from that land of shifting obsessions
to the multi-coloured pulse
with which the tendons are spurred
O what gills that do not breathe, your hands
that drive the river into wildness
and carve out the geography of the world

From *A Inadiavel Viagem*, 1985

Song

For Paula

I will arrive, my love, with the trees
rusting to the sound of blood itself
at the cathedrals of unadulterated touch
with the scream and the sea-birds
inside the very syllables
I will arrive with hands on your hands
in that short-lived rising of the foam

I will arrive, my love, with the swords
at the pith of the hunger
the fruit in your eyes
green belt of sand in the plains
beloved, wind, awaiting for the
world’s atom of sex, the nerve centre
of the water where I will arrive

I will arrive, my love, in the mornings
sweaty with the voice set free
by the nocturnal wave of the poem
where the sea-birds inhabit the scream
if only in the form of a sea-echo
I will arrive at the exacting root of the
crystal, death to meet your death

I will arrive, my love, next to the silence
that empties itself into the rivers
I row to dazzling songs
I will arrive with you at the beginning

From *A Inadiavel Viagem*, 1985



Carnivorous Elegy

to Samora Machel

'Because I not hope to turn again'
TS Eliot, Ash-Wednesday

because they make us into neatly-packaged bundles of flesh
to be hurled into the night, I utter a howl of blood
into god's sluggish shadows on the road,
for we're fast in the night now
and we no longer drowse in that sleepiness of dogs,
and a few of us return, hidden among the shadows
of god, in Tsalala merely a name.
At an hour in the dawn we are as god
until the outline of the houses rudely awakened us,
the temples pulsated in flight of visibly
exhausted birds and we go through the poem. Open!
We no longer die under the hands
of the playing two-year-old child
who killed himself because he didn't want to man or even god,
or even under questions that like flights portend
useless metaphysics on Sunday's daybreak,
at an hour in the dawn.
Mother, give me a laughing green boat
and a river inside my bones and a road
of clean flesh, not god's offal
or even the night slobbering up in the mouth, Mother!
Let us knock. Open those magnificent stadiums
inside all the orifices! Spit on us
with the fire that kills! Open!
At an hour in the dawn, my god.
So few in the South, clean and far away
from the country of hyperboreans. They've got nothing now
and there's a large heart of ideas
setting itself alight in the amputated groins.
We return, in that lost gasp of ours,
we who lose our way — the original suicide
of god in the rubbish heap —
with con-man videos setting our style,
with our electric rainbow-coloured ulcers.
Give us our lungs black-marketed in Tsalala,
the ecstasies we had in Polana

in those, the gum of days!
We demand everything: the very viscera of the wing,
the intricate biblical combing for
the sparkling book of open psalms,
and also the vomit of god
and fear and rage and blood and dogs,
and the dead abortions that still stutter, o my god,
the night-vagina-mother, slipping into the *chigubo's*
awaiting bayonets of ecstasy!
At an hour in the dawn, my neatly-packaged bundle
of a country, machine-gunned flesh of this poem.

Silence! I embrace an agonized body
of intermittent, assassinated words.
Look at the guts of all the gods
strangling us. What fragrance is that shit
which they set for us on that first night?
In what black hulls were the ancient animals?
Where did the *mafurreiras* drown?
Who among us sobs to himself a name
of salt and semen in Tsalala?
What do we return as? At an hour in the dawn, my god.
Behold the scrotum sac: the shoulders tired
of holding the world, the rhythmic sounds of the water
in tales of hyenas, the haemorrhage of fear
in the eyes of cane, the memory of the land
sucking itself in the avenged aortas.
My god of all of us, why do we return without
the two-year-old child? For he was no neatly-packaged bundle
to loiter among the veins of a sky of iron,
not even the flesh of the poem devouring itself in the shout.
At an hour in the dawn.
The crickets over the flowers become like glass
in this night of a night of silence
for we return, howl for howl,
from the multiplying succubus which we aren't but aren't
but are and begat us.

ALL POEMS WERE BEHEADED!

Maputo, December 1985

From *Vinte e Tal Novas Formulações e uma Elegia Carnívora*, 1992

D O N ' T D E H O R N R H I N O S

R A D E A P A N I

Z I M B A B W E

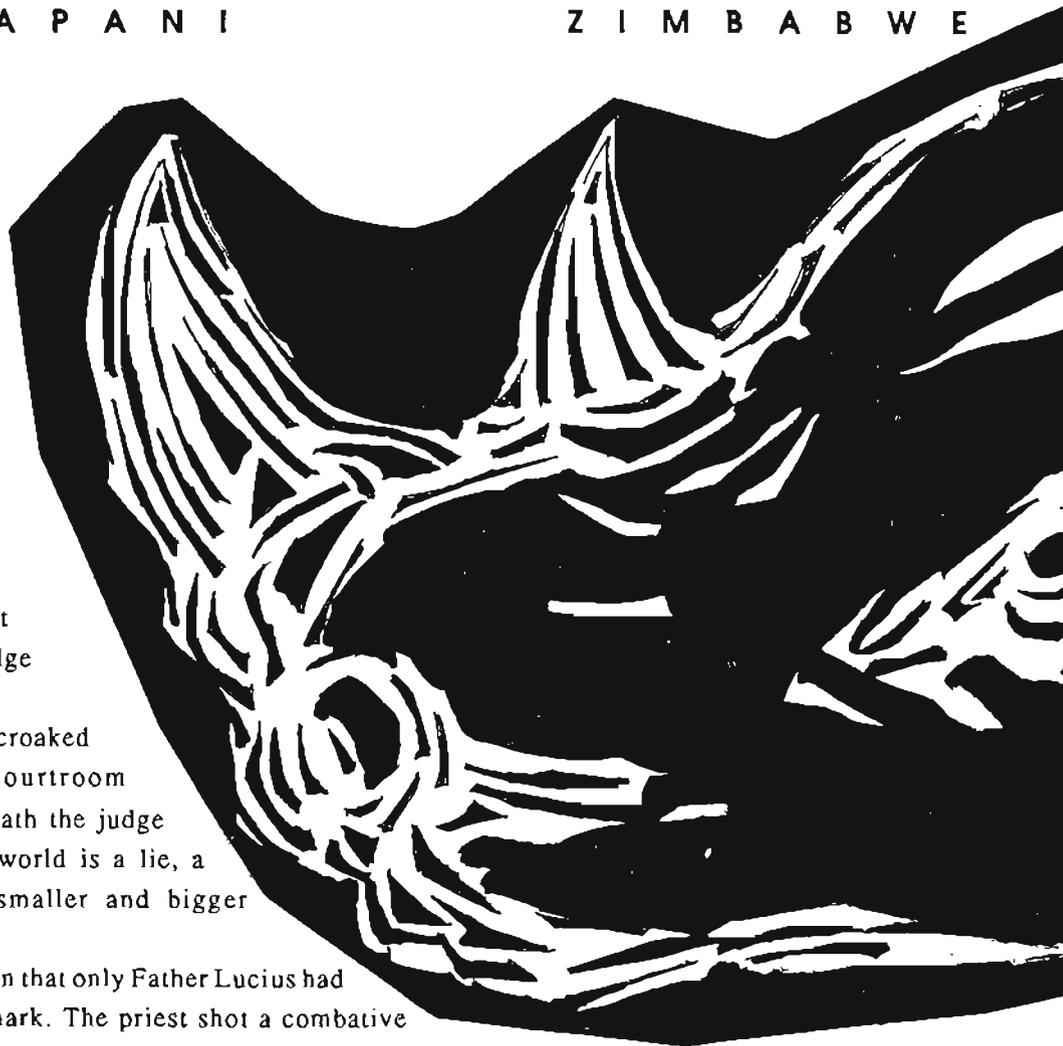
The case had reached a critical stage. Benjamin watched the judge, an Englishman in a wig and took a private bet, four to one, that in the next minute the judge would touch his tie.

'Court's in session,' croaked the judge and the courtroom huddled. Under his breath the judge muttered, 'The whole world is a lie, a jigsaw composed of smaller and bigger twisted pieces.'

It seemed to Benjamin that only Father Lucius had noticed the judge's remark. The priest shot a combative glance at the judge but controlled himself, hung his head and only his beads started rolling faster in his fat fingers. Then the wigged judge touched his college tie like a talisman.

Why does he do it, thought Benjamin. There must be an English *ju-ju* in that tie, something to give him strength to stand the trials in the overheated courtroom and keep his head afloat in Africa. But tie or no tie, frankly speaking, what does any Englishman know about Africa?

The judge was evidently willing to learn. He glared at Benjamin. 'Look at the exhibit, prisoner



Benjamin Ndlovu and tell us what it is.'

All eyes in the courtroom turned to the specimen, a dark piece of flesh which emitted a hint of decay. Only Mr Smith, the plaintiff, averted his eyes as if finding something extremely interesting in the shabby, bare walls of the courtroom, with the peeled curly paint showing the patches of previous colours.

Benjamin feigned surprise. 'This is a sow's ear, your Worship.'

'Why did you sell Mr Smith the sow's ear embalmed in the powder which the government analyst found to be kitchen salt?'

During the ensuing pause someone somewhere banged a door and it echoed dryly in the hot August air.

'I understand this is a free country and there is nothing in the law prohibiting the sale of sow's ear, in the salt or without it...' He added graciously. 'your Worship.'

The judge jerked awake and studied Benjamin as if for the first time. Had he been prepared for this in college or during his early stint in England?

Puzzled, the judge asked: 'Did the buyer know what he was buying, Benjamin?'

Benjamin was careful to coat each prickly statement with ever more honeyed reverence.

'If I may humbly suggest to his Worship to ask the buyer.'

The judge snapped at him: 'Please, prisoner Benjamin, try to answer the question. Now, state briefly your occupation and duties.'

'I am a liaison officer between the agency for game protection in Zimbabwe and the game rangers.'

'What does your job involve?'

'My job is to ensure the smooth and effective dehorning of rhinos...'

'Why on earth do you do that?'

'To preserve the rhinos. A rhino without a horn is not interesting for poachers.'

'So you are dealing with rhino horns, not with sows' ears?'

The sarcasm reeked, thought Benjamin, worse

than the sow's ear.

'Yes... your Lordship.'

The judge accepted the stepping-up of his rank with a meek smile and his harsh tone mellowed.

'I need for the record a brief description of your job. Do you understand me?'

'Yes, your Lordship. The poachers from Zambia come to kill our rhinos...'

'Why from Zambia? Haven't we got locals experienced enough?'

Benjamin had always felt a bit slighted in his national pride when he thought about the matter. Why Zambians, indeed?

'I don't know, sir. There is something which I fail to understand. Talking about it, the Zambians say there are no poachers in Zambia except those coming from Zaire. The Zambians believe themselves to be good, God-fearing people. But as soon as they cross the border — usually at night-time, across Zambezi, they turn bad. According to our, Zimbabwean press, Zambians are evil poachers and we Zimbabweans are God-fearing citizens until we cross Limpopo...'

'Stick to the subject, please. You said Zambians...'

'They kill rhinos and cut off the horn and sell it on the markets. So far our gamewarden have killed 26 Zambians who have come poaching...'

'Why not just arrest them?'

'The Zambians used to come with AK 47, usually Soviet or Yugoslav models.'

'All that to kill rhinos?'

'No. AK 47 is for rangers. The law of the valley is: shoot first.'

'And rhinos?'

'They kill rhinos with shotguns gauge 12... Mostly Browning ST 100 from Belgium, double-barrelled, called the Congolese brown beauty.'

'Eh?'

The judge murmured into his left armpit. His face took on a look of patient suffering: 'Listen Benjamin, I am getting dizzy, Please stick to the point. Give us the motives and reasons.'

'Yes, your Worship. One kilo of rhino horn can

Rade Apani, *Zimbabwe*

bring about eight to twelve thousand American dollars in the Far East.'

'Indeed?'

'Money's no object. Rhino horn is medicine for tired lovers...'

That caused merriment in the court's gallery. Chairs creaked under muffled giggling.

'That is still a lot of money.'

'Your Lordship knows that the horn of a rhino is believed to be... to be...' The word had just escaped like a flitting butterfly.

'An aphrodisiac,' boomed Father Lucius, Ben's former teacher and a character witness.

'Yes,' ejaculated Benjamin, feeling a surge of love towards the priest.

The judge cut in, 'Please, Father, please.' The judge seemed to plant an accusation into the second 'please', as if to admonish the clergy for meddling with secular problems.

'Sorry,' said the Father in his brusque German-English which teemed with harsh Rs and Ds.

'You seem to know quite a lot about the racket, Benjamin?'

'I know the case of a man bringing back 20,000 US dollars...they were all shiny notes...and forged...'

He was struck by the coincidence that so many things mentioned in the court were not what they appeared to be.

The murmur rose in the courtroom. At the word '20,000 US Dollars Susan Mhurakurwa, the employee of Mr Smith, started fidgeting. She had been sitting calmly by the window, framed against the golden sun, dark topaz in the green satin dress. Benjamin felt another wave of melancholy drowning him gently.

'What's the saleability of the stuff on the local market?'

'On the local market, of course, it's sold for Zim-dollars because of... the foreign currency act, you see... May I ask a question, your worship?'

Somewhat surprised, the judge said, 'Granted.'

'I do not see any connection between this and my little settlement with Mr Smith.'

'The prosecution alleges there is and it is up to the prosecution to prove it. My job is to find out the truth. Do you imply that you see no connection between the rhino racket and selling the sow's ear?'

Benjamin was astonished. 'I do not see any connection between my service and activity in my free hours. Yes, I sold a sow's ear to Mr Smith but it was on the strict policy of willing buyer, willing seller... Your...'

He was cut by the gesture of the benevolent judge, who seemed to be satisfied with the concentration of the Worship and Lordship in the stifled air of the courtroom. He wrote something down, crossed it out and wrote again.

Father Lucius nodded enthusiastically, approving the line of defence. Facts my boy, stick to the facts, Ben almost heard the deep voice.

Benjamin remembered his last visit to the mission covered with bougainvillea near the big river. He had found the Father dressed in his scarecrow outfit grafting the pears in the well watered, verdant garden. Around the fresh graft the Father had moulded a mud plaster and covered it with an old yellow sock from which the foot was missing. His loving hand cradled the ball of mud and Benjamin could not help but think of our good Lord making a man from clay. In the distance the mission boys were chasing a ball and shrieking at a missed goal.

'I am unhappy, Father,' Benjamin had said.

'Yes, Benjamin,' said the Father patting the mould a few more times while he slowly descended to the world, 'Yes, my boy, what makes you unhappy?'

'Something wrong has happened to the dehorned rhinos.'

'Like what?'

Benjamin felt uneasy as he always had when discussing with the Father anything related to sex:

'The rhino ladies brush the gentlemen rhinos but they seem to have lost all interest.'

'So what do the males do?'

'Only sigh and smell the violets.'

The Father struck his huge hour-glass forehead and cried, 'All your fault! Don't dehorn the rhinos

in the river valley. It's not natural. If the good Lord wanted them to be without horns, he would make them without horns.'

Benjamin felt he was shrinking. It mollified the Father a bit and he added with less accusation, 'If the good Lord wanted contraception he would teach nature about it. Instead he said: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the water in the seas and let the birds multiply on the earth..." I don't know what he said about rhinos but that's general guidance... The Lord came back to the same subject advising Noah how to build the ark of gopher wood. "And of every living of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you, they shall be male and female..." That's God's command to Noah. He did not mention dehorning rhinos.'

Benjamin piped in, 'If we leave the rhinos with horns, poachers will come and kill them.'

The Father chewed his answer before he ventured, 'Stop dehorning them. And tell anybody they are dehorned already.'

'But I need a job and a salary.'

'Keep the job. And tell everyone and his wife you are dehorning like mad.'

Shell-shocked, Benjamin gaped. To tell a lie or omit the truth was a new thing for the Father. Just like a breath on a shiny mirror.

'Is it a right thing to do?'

'Of course it is. You are in charge of the action. Your strategy is to preserve rhinos. Your tactics allow you more freedom in how to do it. You tell everybody and his wife you are dehorning day and night.'

'But...'

'Listen Ben, everybody is mad, starting with your authorities and finishing with poachers and rich sugar-daddies who buy that rubbish.'

Benjamin was subdued: 'But receiving a sal-

ary for nothing?'

'Try to see it in this light. Imagine you are a public relations officer. We are dehorning, we are dehorning! You are paid for your public relations job. You deserve your salary that way better than by actually cutting the horns.'

'Of course. Thank you Father. Yes, but the agency asked me to bring the horns.'

'Stupid boy. Don't you know any butcher? Buy sow's ears to satisfy the sick needs of your agency.'

The Father winked at him. That was irresistible. Benjamin started laughing. He had never heard Father Lucius speaking that way.

'They would never believe in the sow's ear, Father. But, thinking again, they might accept that approach because they will swallow anything which sounds public relations and cost effective.'

He kissed the priest's hand, which tasted of a day spent fishing on the river.

The sow's ear idea started its own life; the agency accepted it, wardens liked it and, Benjamin guessed, the poachers in front of their children for sure used it as a code. Later he learnt that the public at large went along with it.

Benjamin's reveries were interrupted by the rasping voice of the judge, 'I wish you were with us



when I address you, Benjamin.'

'Yes, your Worship, yes Sir.'

The judge fingered his tie: 'Do you, at least, give them an anaesthetic while dehorning?'

'Yes. We hit them with darts dipped in anaesthetic. Then we dehorn them.'

'I understand. Once you have... a specimen... what do you do with it?'

'We preserve it in salt and send it to our agency.'

'Is there any misuse in the process? I mean do you send the specimen each time and all of it? Do people approach you and offer money for a piece of it... and you sell them... which I would fully understand, considering your salary.'

'The people approach us. But we always refuse firmly.'

'Admirable, admirable.' The judge pulled his tie as if to stop all the nonsense once and for all. 'Plaintiff Smith, please come to the witness box.'

Benjamin tried once again to understand that man, Smith. Smith dropped the hand of his beloved wife, which he had been holding during the trial, in the manner of eternal love which only death can tear asunder. Sheepishly he approached the witness box.

'Tell us, Mr Smith, what did the accused sell you?'

'The sow's ear.'

'Did you want to buy it?'

Smith could not speak.

'Answer my question, please.'

Smith's Adam's apple bobbed like a fishing cork. Was the fish somewhere in his stomach in the process of swallowing the line, hook and sinker?'

'What do you need it for? To make a purse or what?'

The court missed the joke; only Benjamin broke into loud laughter. The judge warned him but with a lackadaisical air. He lost much of its initial sternness.

Smith whispered, 'I was under the impression I was buying rhino horn.'

Noise erupted in the courtroom. Red in the face, Mrs Smith growled and Benjamin thought that she

bit the flap of her crocodile handbag. But she only sprayed some medicine into her nose and her breathing became calmer.

'Please concentrate on my question, the three of you: prisoner Benjamin, plaintiff Mr Smith and Miss Susan Mhurakurwa. Be ready to answer it because it is the crux of the matter. Who mentioned first the expression sow's ear?'

Benjamin answered quickly, 'Susan.'

Smith hesitated, 'My personal secretary Miss Susan Mhurakurwa.'

All the eyes in the courtroom turned to Susan as if following a ball which had gone out of bounds. The girl sat in an intricate manner revealing most of her crossed legs and doing her nails all the time. Her profile, with her puckering lips, sharp and embellished with curls, looked like carved ebony against the daylight. Benjamin felt an old sting in the ribs, dulled by the passing of time; that was his dream girl, but the dream never came true.

And the said Susan hung her head.

The judge insisted, 'What's the problem, then, Mr Smith?'

Finally Mr Smith squeaked, 'But that was the cipher, the code, your Worship. The code for the rhino horn. I had developed ... eh, ah, ... circulatory problems and eh... ah... and selling me the sow's ear was the same as if someone had sold me false penicillin. Like in the Third Man. Haven't you seen the film?'

'That's not your business!'

Music. Heavenly music for Benjamin's ears.

The judge shook his head once again, perhaps questioning the audacity of the plaintiff or just stating that watching films was not an appropriate pastime for a man with his job. He dictated for the record with distaste.

'The sow's ear was sold to Mr Smith but he was under the impression he was buying rhino horn.'

Mrs Smith stood up and, turning to face her husband, she spat out, 'God is my witness he needs it.'

Then she marched out of the court with such resolution that even the judge did not say a word.

Smith stared at his hand, the hand that a few minutes ago held his wife's.

The judge coughed as if he wanted to continue the hearing in camera. 'Susan,' called the judge with feelings, 'Please enter the witness box.'

She knew how to walk. The judge fiddled with his tie but this time straightening it.

'Tell us, Susan, what did take place?'

'Mr Smith sent me to Benjamin to buy rhino horn. He himself did not go because... well, he and Ben had never been on good terms since Benjamin had left us... eh...as the result of a court decision...' The judge seemed to try to recollect but failed.

'Someone advised Mr Smith to try traditional medicine. He gave me the task and I made some inquiries. As you know the market is very secretive, I was advised to ask for the 'sow's ear'. That meant a rhino horn among the dealers. I learned through my contact that Ben could be a suitable man. I asked him and he sold me a smelly stuff which later turned out to be sow's ear.'

'Thank you, Susan. Benjamin, what have you to say... Benjamin, are you an epileptic? Answer my questions.'

'Yes, Your Worship, what questions?'

Benjamin was back in the past thinking of the lovely little perfumed letter which he had received from Susan asking him for a date. Susan had come with some more of the familiar scent all over her body (cedars of Lebanon, said the Bible, was not equal to it). Benjamin forgave her all.

'What a lovely surprise.' He had held her cool little hand.

'Destiny, Ben, destiny,' murmured Susan.

'I thought of everything and I decided to forgive you.'

'I am grateful,' she said with her husky voice and straightened his turned-up lapel.

'But... Why did you give a false statement in the court against me? I was sentenced on three charges, one of them you manufactured?'

'Have you forgiven me or not?'

'Yes, I have.'

'Then it's forgiven and forgotten.'

'Yes, of course. Are you still... going with the old rogue?'

'Mr Smith is a gentleman. But you see, he has a weak heart. Someone told me you can help him.'

'I am not a cardiologist,' said Ben cooling.

'But you are dehorning rhinos. Just a bit of ..."sow's ear" ha, ha.'

'Ha, ha?'

There was a laughter in the distant corridors cascading down the flight of stairs like a rolling tin. It was painful to go through all that again...

'Benjamin, please concentrate on the matter. Were you bitten by the tsetse fly?'

That was the judge again, but there was no anger in his voice, only slight curiosity.

Ben pulled himself back and stuck to his story. No, he was not aware what they had in mind; they asked him for a sow's ear and he produced one. No, nothing unusual because during the short spell of work in Mr Smith's office two years ago, he was trained that eight o' clock was eight o' clock, no matter whether he had a dying uncle on his hands. No excuses, no strange voices, no nonsense. Nothing but clarity and precision. Had they asked for a basket of slugs they would have been sold a basket of slugs.

How did we come to the slimy slugs?

As his testimony poured out, Benjamin slowly realised that facts can be more deceitful than lies. That ghastly discovery made him feel dizzy like after climbing a baobab tree.

There was not much to say. The judge could only call on a character witness.

Father Lucius pulled out his old text, 'Benjamin Ndlovu was our most brilliant student...'

'Yes, we know that, Father,' butted in the judge, 'please be more specific. Has the prisoner ever been involved in any racket or smuggling?'

'No, never. He had always been...'

'Has he ever, to your knowledge, sold a rhino horn to anyone?'

'No, no...'

'Has he ever sold a sow's ear to anyone?'

'No but I share the blame. I gave him the idea

to...'

'We don't judge you, Father and I have no choice but to leave the matter to your conscience. Thank you Father... Well, to sum up: the prosecutor could not prove that the accused Benjamin had ever sold a horn of a rhino to anyone, nor could the prosecution prove that the prisoner had sold any sow's ear in lieu of rhino horn. This vague case leaves us in the hazy land of conjectures and presumptions. The fact that is indisputable is that...'

The judge beamed under his bushy eyebrows to Benjamin.

'... You did sell the sow's ear but on the other hand you were asked for the sow's ear. The plain case of willing buyer and willing seller... Therefore I'll give you, Benjamin Ndlovu, the benefit of the doubt and declare you a free man.'

Everyone congratulated Benjamin but he could not feel rejoicing in his heart...

Later, at the mission with Father Lucius, he drank grape-must. The Father was jubilant, Benjamin subdued.

'Why are you so sad? You are so strange lately. Is it that girl?'

'No, Father. I was a fool, once again. My destiny is to be fooled by that woman.'

'You held the fort this time quite well. You sold

her a sow's ear.'

'Ah, that's revenge for Mr Smith. That was a cruel joke. But it's not that.'

Father Lucius' eyes glistened.

'What is the real problem?'

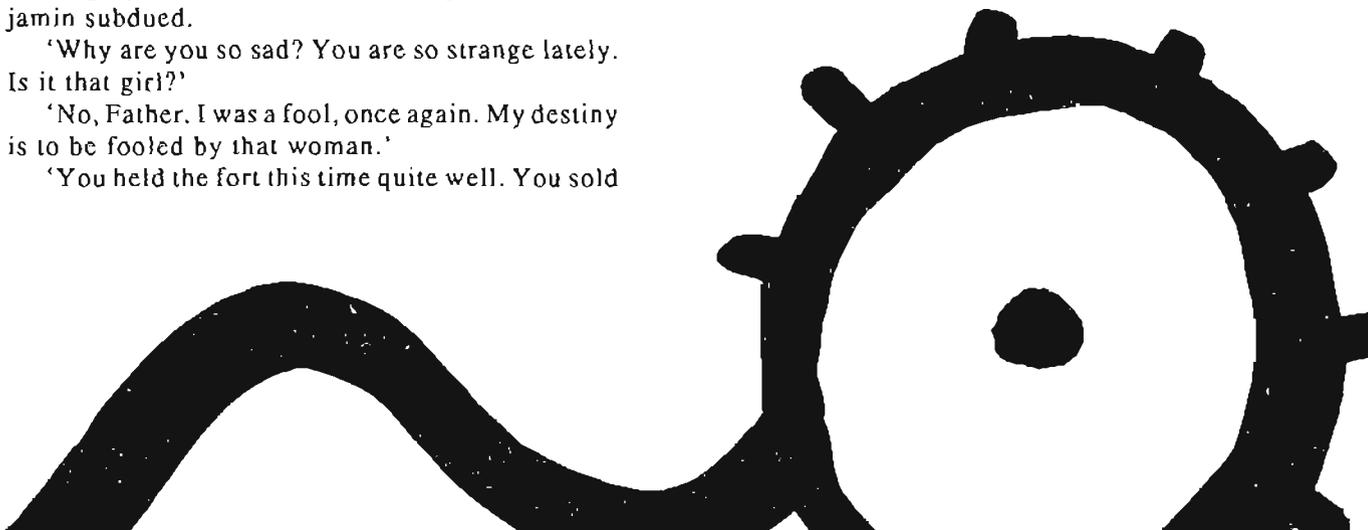
How could he explain to the Father? The breath on the mirror?

Benjamin swallowed his drink. The bubbles cut his tongue. Knowing the Father's condemnation of alcohol, Benjamin wondered whether he should warn the priest but Father Lucius took a deep draught, rolled the remaining content of the jug, sniffed it and voiced his doubts surreptitiously:

'The ambrosia for sure passed the brewing point. Before it was an innocent refreshing drink, now tastes as if touched by the devil.'

Then he swallowed the rest and sighed contentedly.

Benjamin chuckled. 'You are getting more and more an African by the day, Father.' **S**



Diary of a Student Teacher

I s a a c Z i t a

Z i m b a b w e



Friday 5 October

Smoking a 'Polana' I approach a group of students of Sixth-eighteen talking excitedly.

It is during an interval between classes and for the next period I will have this group. My first class. I put my hand in the back pocket of my 'Maputo-jeans', pressing more dirt into the lesson plans I guard there. I nod my head in a mute acknowledgment. The students respond with smiles either making fun of me or sincere, I don't know.

I stand with them, listening to their conversation without offering a word. I lean on my left foot protected by a shoe of clear brown suede, and then with the other foot, balance the whole weight of my thin body. I notice they seem to ignore me and I feel left out. This is even more so when they begin talking in Ronga. Unconsciously I give a silly smile and move away.

The bell rings and the students line up with a certain sluggishness. I smile again in an attempt to be sympathetic but give up when I see that it is of no use.

'Here's a thing!' I think when I am shown to enter.

They enter and then seat themselves without my order. I turn around and angrily order them to stand, 'Well then?' and open my arms in a gesture of expectation, 'Hmmm?'

Without a word they stand noisily shifting their desks. I order them to be seated and see myself obliged to go from desk to desk, re-establishing neatness.

I am finally finished and begin calling:

Isaac Zita, *Zimbabwe*

'Who's absent here? Number what? Five? Five! Is that all? Four? Hmm, who's absent? Number what? Four? Already here! more Twenty four? Ya! More? Thirty? And more? . . . Ai, this group. Who? Sixteen? Nobody else? . . .Hein? . . . Very well then. . .

I begin to give the class, an explanation of the importance of the Portuguese language in Mozambique. Half way through the lesson the Portuguese teacher who teaches this group arrives. The students stand up for him. They seem to hold him in high esteem because they exchange smiles with him.

He greets them with a nod of the head, smiling, but regards me coldly, takes himself to the back of the classroom, where he sits. I admit I do not like these student classes because I am the target of sarcasm when giving the class.

Distrust makes me prejudiced. I am not going to let him correct me in front of the students.

But no further problems arise before the end of the class.

Monday 8 October.

Similar to the first class. I order them to enter and they do so. I am surprised when I note that there is an air of calmness; the bad impression which I had in the first class concerning them disappears.

Then the Portuguese teacher arrives and seemed satisfied because this time, and for the first time, he complements me.

It makes me feel secure to see the students seated and quiet. I begin to walk through the room with my hand in the back pocket of my trousers and deliberately exaggerate the tic-toc of my shoes on the floor.

I feel so much at ease that I forget to do the roll call. I go around the table which serves as a desk, consult the plan and announce, 'My friends, today we are going to do. . . Today, therefore. . .'

Without telling them anything, I pause for a long time.

'Therefore. . . we will read a poem. . . Do you

all have a book? Yes? Who does not have one? . . . You? Why? . . . Don't know? Have it next time. . . '

I open the book on page seventy-four and ask the students to do the same. I surprise the Portuguese teacher who is whispering with students at the back of the classroom.

I begin to suspect that something is going to happen, but I conduct the class, albeit without the same confidence I had to begin with.

'I'm reading,' I begin, 'Listen carefully. . . Pay attention! I am going to read and you accompany me reading silently. . . Do you know what reading silently is, who doesn't know? . . .'

The students shake their heads, not understanding. I continue, 'It is reading with the only action being in your brain. Do you know what that is, who doesn't know? With that cleared up we can leave this biology material, né. Therefore, né, the mouth stays permanently shut and thoughts, the mind, which is in operation, come into action. . .'

I begin to read. It is a poem by Bertolt Brecht, 'In Praise of Learning.' I give the reading, gesticulating and emphasising with my free hand. The other hand holds the book securely. Deepening my voice, I imagine myself on a stage, but am disappointed to note that the students with great effort are trying to restrain their laughter. One of them, after snatching a glance at the Portuguese teacher, stands up and interrupts me.

'Sir, please sir.'

'Hmm?'

'This is frightening, Sir.'

Prolonged and loud laughter explodes. I think, 'I am not completely certain as to their motivation.'

For the rest of the class this continues to bother me. I begin to read badly and change everything. Ei, tsa, tsa! And all of this because of that devilish snake (satanhoco), the Portuguese teacher.

Wednesday, 10 October.

The Sixth-eighteen is slightly agitated.

I understand this in the presence of the Portuguese

teacher who pushes them to this because he glances constantly at me then at the students.

I begin the class as follows, 'Good afternoon!'

'Good afternoon!' they respond in unison.

'How are you?'

'We are seated, Sir!'

They laugh, caramba!

'Am I the reason for this. Do you hear?' I think.

I remember the psycho-pedagogic classes and now, I shrug my shoulders, understanding. It is the student's age, pre-adolescence. Caramba!

But all of this begins to put me on edge. The Portuguese teacher begins to put me on edge, thlá. I think, 'He is not entering my classes again! He only helps in making my life impossible! No, no I am not going to allow this to happen anymore!'

I begin to explain the meaning of the words drawn from the text. After exchanging glances with

the Portuguese teacher a student stands and asks the significance of the word sexagenarian. Despite knowing perfectly I get disconcerted because I can see the Portuguese teacher is looking at me sarcastically.

I try to explain, 'Sexagenarian, it is like saying sixty. A sexagenarian person, as we can see in the text, is a person who is sixty years old. Sixty! Understand?'

The same student stands up and enquires: -

'What is the origin of this word, Sir?'

'Ei!' I clear my throat. 'Let's see. Well then. . . Well then. . . Ei, well then.' I wipe my brow. 'Well then, Né. . . It comes from the word sixt. . . sixti. . . Tsa! Sixteenth!'

'Silence is defeated' someone whispered to a colleague. 'It is the sixtieth and not the sixteenth like he says!'

I note my mistake and try to correct it. But I am so confused that once, instead of saying sexagenarian I say Sexagenarian.

The students giggle while murmuring:

'Silence is defeated! He is well crushed.'

The kids now call me 'Silence!' Probably because I always say 'Silence!' when it's rowdy in the classroom.

Friday 12 October

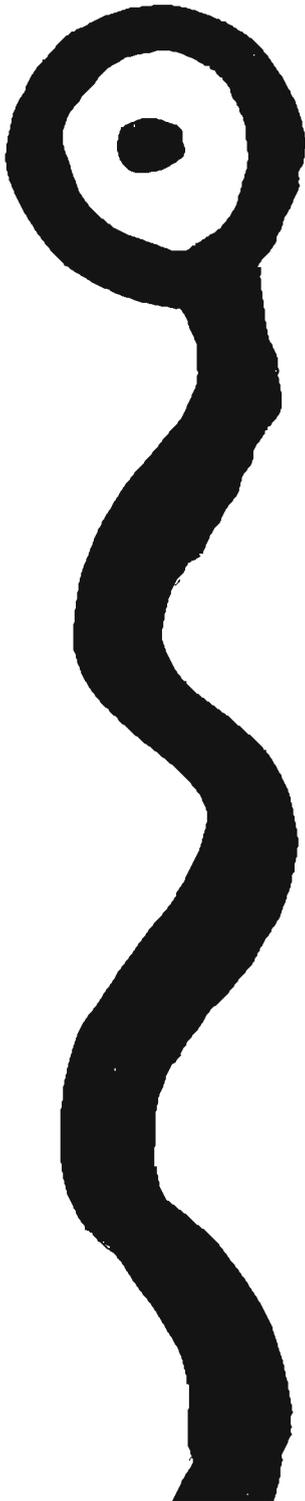
Today I have decided not to allow the Portuguese teacher to enter the classroom. I blame it on the nervousness which his presence provokes. The class goes well apart from reprimanding a few, which led to interruption at a certain point.

Tuesday 15 October

I am quite satisfied. I already dominate the situation in the classroom; ending in discipline! I apply the knowledge of psycho-pedagogy, psychoanalysis and didactics. The kids are calm and participate.

They no longer call me 'Silence!' because I have left off urging silence all the time. The Portuguese teacher, incredulous and admiring, leaves the class half-way through. **S**





This Long Road We Must Travel

1. The Bridge at Umgababa

The bridge is gone
swept off in a flood of windscreen crystals
flecked with their white-bound blood and fear.
Mercs and BMW's shriek beneath —
their metal-tented audiences
seated two by two
in a Noah's quest for safety,
for a fortnight on
where higher trees will frond beside a ski-skimmed river,
beside a brief illusion of deliverance.

The bridge is gone
That concrete rainbow arc from which they dangle
their wind-chime cooldrink bottles fizzing envy and despair.
So simple, so contrary —
The target strikes the weapon.

Whilst they've already scrambled to their hidden look-out post
behind the tattered leaves of smoked-out bushes
The melody of sharding glass a salve on open wounds.

The bridge is gone
Another shattered metaphor
One more dismembered symbol of the yearning to connect,
{Despite all, yes despite it}
to span this arid chasm that holds our needs apart.

The bridge is gone
and, creatures carried off —
uncompassed by swollen flood and fire-storm,
do we yet have the will to re-construct
yet one more allegory?
yet one more hope-speared anchor
to hold us fast against this endless downpour?

11. Headlights over Bethlehem

Oh yes?
And must I be impressed?
That in this noonday sunsweat
You flick your headlights on?
Inspid goodwill message,
Your Christmas gift of low-cost glow
— when what I need most, most of all
Is shade about my naked head.

If you
would show true caring,
consider then what I suggest:
Come leave the comfort of your air-conditioned womb,
And walk a while with me.
Walk weary from a night-shift of metallic factory screeching,
Weary with the five-mile walk
that stretches belly on belly along this stinking tar to
topple mindless on a coarse stained mattress.
Let the sun sjambok down upon our heads together
And let us strain in halting syllables
of caked spittle
to touch each other with our heated thoughts.

But no!
Huh, you go
Taking your goodwill twelve volt message before you
At on-forty kays an hour
And from your clear-grooved tyre
A stone flies up and hits my twice-turned cheek.

And a merry Chrissmis to you, too!

Jenny Robson, South Africa

ROSA AND THE POTS

Cynthia Callard

South Africa

A friendly fire crackled and spat showers of golden sparks into the night. It sent probing fingers of light through the entrance of the hut behind it. They joined the shadows on the walls in a dance to the beat of the leaping flames. A mother and her two eldest daughters, Sophia and Mary, sat around the fire chatting and laughing with some of the other women from the village.

The fire warmed the women, but it didn't stop the chilly winter wind from blowing around their ankles and down their backs.

Inside the hut a collection of pots rested contentedly, side by side against the back wall. They would only be needed the next morning to cook the porridge in.

One old pot was filled with pounded mealie meal ready for breakfast. It was perfectly formed except for a chip out of its

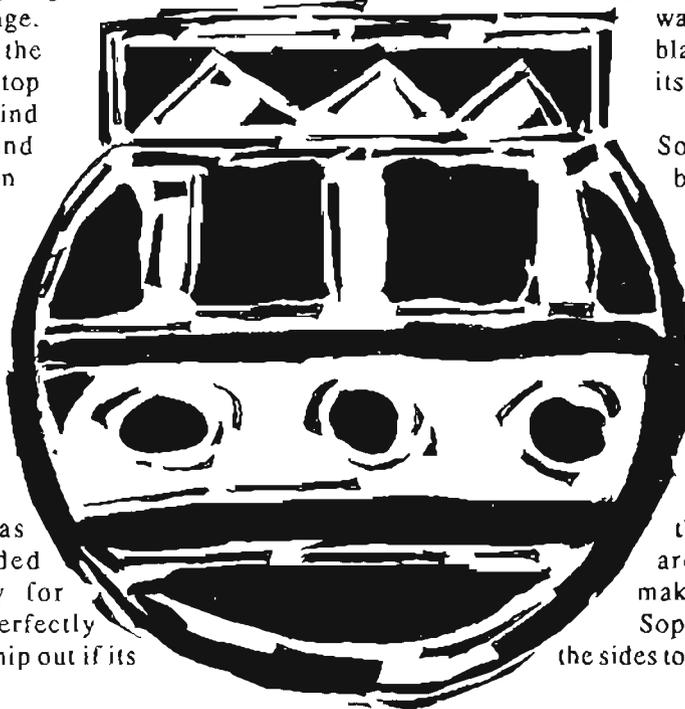
rim. Another pot made of new orange clay was filled with sweet water from the river. Some of them had black marks around their bases, where the hot flames had left their scars. The pots were not alone in the hut. Rosa, the youngest daughter of the family, was already fast asleep on her sleeping mat with a tummy full of milk and porridge. She

was rolled up in her warm blanket like a moth pupa in its silken cocoon.

Rosa dreamed of the day Sophia, her eldest sister, brought clay home from the bank of the river near their village, in a basket she had woven from palm fronds.

She watched her sister in fascination as she made a pot. First Sophia rolled the clay into long snake-like shapes. Then she coiled the shapes tightly round and around close together to make a firm base.

Sophia's deft fingers shaped the sides to swell out like the stomachs



of the pregnant cows her brothers drove out the kraal every morning to find fresh grazing. Then she wound the coils tighter together to form a narrow neck on top of the full round curve. But that was not the end. She flared the coils out again to make a rim so water could be poured out without messing.

Sophia dipped her fingers into a small bowl of water and smoothed the coils carefully, both inside and outside, until the pot was as smooth as a pebble in the river.

The pot was set to dry slowly, in a pit covered with a heap of green leaves and grass so that it wouldn't crack. Later, when it was quite dry it would be fired in hot flames to make it strong.

Rosa stretched out her hand to grab some of the unused clay. It was soft, yet firm at the same time and made lovely squishing noises as it oozed out between her fingers. It reminded her of the fat mopane worms the children always gathered to dry after the rains.

Because Sophia and Mary were the eldest daughters in the family they went to collect water from the river every day. They also collected the red clay to make pots.

Rosa always had to stay at home.

'Your legs are too short and your head is not big enough to carry water on. You'll just spill it and break our pots. Or the crocodiles will think you are a fat, brown, baby buck and eat you,' Mary always teased her.

'You'll have to wait until you are older and your legs are longer before you can come with us.'

The children always collected wood for the fires every day.

Rosa was often alone in the hut when her sisters were outside with their mother preparing food for the family. She would sometimes go over to the big pots left in the hut and try to pick one of them up. But even though she could move them around a little, she could never lift them onto her head. Not even when they were empty.

'It's not my head that is too small,' she thought.

'My arms are just too short to go around the pots. I wish someone could help me.'

Of course none of the adults would do that and Rosa dared not ask her sisters to help her. They would just laugh, and tease her for wanting to work like them.

'Your time will come to work,' they always told her.

Rosa's dream changed. She could see the flames licking around the clay pot that warmed the milk for her supper.

She wriggled in her blanket. She was hot. The flames that jumped up around the pot were so bright. Some were like yellow tongues licking the black bottom of the pot. Others were like great red tongues, reaching even higher. The fire made loud crackling sounds as the flames jumped higher and higher like dancers on a feast night.

The milk gasped for air and sent its breath up to the surface in tiny bubbles. They danced there for a few minutes getting bigger and bigger before bursting and escaping into the cold night air.

Rosa wriggled a little more and managed to get one arm out of the folds of the blanket. She heard voices talking softly. They were not the voices of Sophia or Mary.

These voices sounded different... hollow, as though they were coming from the bottom of a well.

These voices did not belong to her mother or her aunt who lived in the next hut. She could hear both of them chatting and laughing outside.

She sat up a little and peeped over the fold of the blanket to see who was spending the night here in their hut. There was no one there. Was she still dreaming?

Carefully, she slipped her other arm out of the blanket and raised it to rest her head on. She slowly looked around the hut. It would be rude to be too inquisitive, especially if they had guests.

The flames from the fire outside painted lovely colours on the walls. Pink, dark red, orange and a lovely soft yellow, not as bright as the sun but brighter than the full moon.

They danced and moved in a restless way. Sometimes the hut was plunged into darkness as

someone moved in front of the fire. Rosa could still hear the voices. What they were saying?

The blood was rushing in her ears like the waters of the river in flood. She moved her hand so that it wasn't pressing on her ear. Now she could hear better but she still couldn't see anyone. She was very puzzled.

'When were you made then?' asked a pleasant sounding young voice.

'Oh, so long ago that I can't remember. It was during the year the river came down in flood and washed nearly everything away,' said another voice. It sounded much older and very tired, like the old grandmother in the next village.

'Almost all the clay on the river bank was washed away,' continued the old voice. 'The river rose up so high I thought I would be sucked down into those swirling waters as well. Fortunately Sophia, the eldest daughter of this family came to collect enough clay to make me before that happened.'

Rosa shook her curly head and sat up, pulling the blanket around her so the probing fingers of the cold wind could not reach her warm body.

Was she dreaming or had she really heard two pots talking in the hut? Could pots really talk?

The pots stood just as she had last seen them in the shadows at the back of the hut. Rosa leaned a little closer. She heard quite clearly this time, one pot say to the other, 'Well I've had this chip for a long time. You see when Mary was a young girl she always wanted to go to the river with Sophia to collect water but of course she was too small. She could not

carry me because I was too heavy.

'But one day she crept inside when no one was looking and tried to lift me onto her head.'

The chipped pot told the other pots how Mary's arms had still been too short and as she began to lift the half filled pot onto her head Sophia her friend had approached the hut. Mary was afraid and she let the pot slip and crash to the floor.

'Fortunately I was well made so I didn't break into a thousand pieces,' said the old pot. 'The sleeping mats were rolled up and they broke my fall. A piece of my rim chipped out where I fell against a log of wood.'

The old pot explained how Mary had begged Sophia to throw the damaged pot away, but because most of the clay had been washed away by the flood Sophia had saved it.

'Since then I have not seen the river again,' the old pot said. 'But I dream of those days when I lay soaking up the sun and water on the river bank.'

The pots seemed to sway a little as if they remembered the waves lapping against their sides.

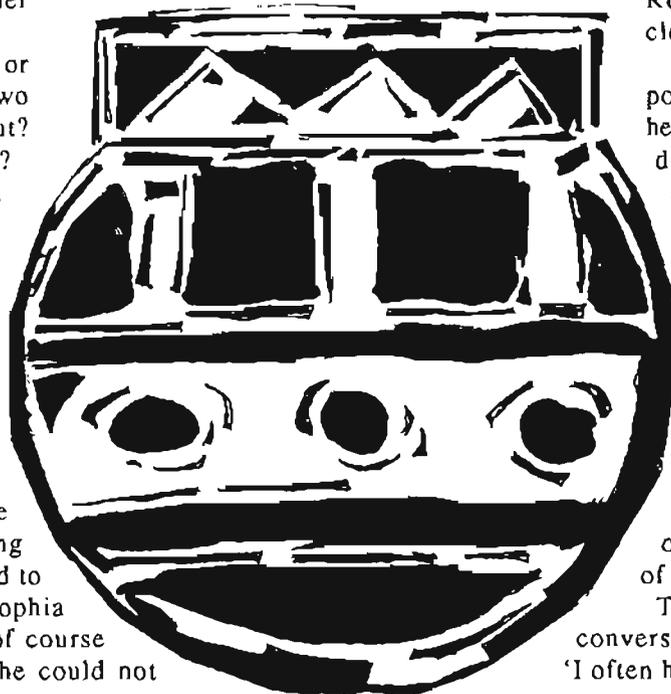
Rosa moved a few steps closer to them.

'Mary hates me,' the old pot said. 'This chip reminds her of her foolishness. She doesn't like that. People don't like to be reminded of their weakness.'

Rosa giggled a little. Mary was always bossing everyone about.

The flames leapt up in the cold night outside and threw their light among the shadows in the hut. They danced entwined on the walls to the chirping of a cricket orchestra.

The pots continued their conversation undisturbed. 'I often hear both Sophia and Mary



teasing Rosa about being so small but one day she will be big and strong enough to go to the river to collect water just like them,' said the old pot.

Rosa was so excited. She asked out loud, 'Do you really think I will be as big as them? Will I be able to carry a big pot full of water on my head?'

There was a sound of gurgling laughter from the pots. 'Of course you will be,' said one of the pots.

Rosa let the blanket fall to the floor. She didn't feel the wind's cold fingers clutch her warm body.

'How long will it take for me to be able to lift you up? she asked.

The old pot was quiet for a few moments; then it said, 'Well, maybe another three years.'

'That's so long to wait,' said Rosa sadly.

'It's not really so long. Only three more times for the fields to be ploughed and three more times for the *mahangu* to ripen and be harvested,' said the old pot.

Rosa thought about that for a little while then she said softly, 'I wish I was big enough tonight. Just this once.'

The old pot rocked a little and then it said very kindly, 'Well maybe we could show you how long your arms will have to grow before you can safely lift any of us up.'

'I know they are not long enough. I have already tried but they won't stretch around you,' she said nearly in tears.

The pots made little comforting sounds and rocked a little on their bases, then the orange pot spoke up, 'Stand next to the entrance of the hut and stretch your arms above your head, Rosa.'

Rosa stretched her arms up as far as they would go above her head.

'Now look at your shadow on the wall. See how long your arms are,' said the orange pot.

Rosa couldn't believe her eyes. Her shadow was much bigger and her arms were so long she would easily be able to wrap them tight around the biggest pot in the hut.

'Can I lift you up now? Rosa asked excitedly.

'No, no, not yet. You must be patient dear little Rosa, otherwise you will always have a chipped pot

to remind you of your foolishness,' said the old pot.

Rosa looked at her shadow on the wall, then she turned and said softly, 'Did Mary really drop you and cause that chip in your rim?'

The shadows danced merrily on the walls while the crickets chirped loudly. The village women talked and laughed around the bright fire outside in the cold night.

'Yes, that's what happened. Not only was my rim chipped but the rest of the water was spilt all over the blankets. Mary was too impatient.

'You will be much wiser, won't you, little Rosa?' asked the old pot.

Rosa thought a little, then she nodded her head, 'Yes I will. Thank you for telling me your story.'

Suddenly Sophia was there. 'Rosa, are you alright?' she asked sharply. 'Who are you talking to?'

'I was talking to the pots,' Rosa said startled.

'Just look at you. You will catch your death of cold running around half naked like that. Quickly, hop onto your sleeping mat and I'll tuck the blanket around you again. You must have been dreaming, said Sophia.

Rosa allowed Sophia to tuck her up in her warm blanket again. She looked up and asked, 'Did Mary drop that old pot and cause it to have a chip out of its rim, Sophia?'

Sophia looked surprised. 'Yes, she did. I had to make another pot to cook in because we were afraid that it would crack in the hot flames.

Sophia remembered how the blankets had all been wet and there was no water to make porridge with the next morning. She'd had to go out early to collect more. The men had all been cross too because they were late.

'You go back to sleep now,' Sophia said. 'No more nonsense about talking to pots or the rest of the family will think you have been out in the sun too long.'

Just before Sophia went out of the hut she walked over to where the pots were resting and murmured softly, 'I wonder how she knew? No one else knows.' 

Rui Knopfli

Mozambique

Two Poems

Translated by Luis Raphael

Ariel's Song

Squalid spidery shapes,
A pitiful sorrow drains itself
throughout the length of their thin shoulders.
This way, immobile and mute, rivetted
to the walls, the stones, the landscape,
they turn their backs to the solid earth,
and deaf they ignore the din of the world.

They are lost in the distance of the sea,
and among reflexes of rainbows and suggestions of sand
lies the melancholic gaze of resignation.
What hidden fascination, secret opium,
draws them to the lower coralline?
To what numbed voice sprung from an abyss
would they be listening?

The clamour that rises from the continent
doesn't disturb or even affect them,
in their faces there is no sign, spark
or glow of the fire raging
in the nearby horizon.
Immobile and ancient, they stare at the sea.
These are not the children of Caliban.

From A Ilha de Prospero, 1972

The Dog of Anguish

His fur is thinned out and bristly
like a dead animal's,
sticky slobber drips from his lips
in great glittering strings of foam.
An ancient and resigned wound
lives on in the dim and bloodied gaze.
Wound, for it can no longer be a dream,
lacerated by the wrath of a pack of wolves.
He walks, hesitating and unsteady,
under the agonized triangle of the muzzle,
performing a lingering and grotesque dance.
All time is his and there just isn't
time to spare to anyone, O dog of no sound,
undercover and shadowy dog,
dog of our own pustulate hope,
enduring dog, indestructible dog.

From Mangas Verdes Com Sal, 1969

The Scar

Taurai Hlekisana *Zimbabwe*

It has begun all over again, but this time it is Juliet; last time it was Nyaro. Will it ever end? What has to be done? I should leave and find a place to lodge far away from here. But what about mother? Surely this would break her but I am so weary. Why, why? Will there ever be an end?

Juliet, my younger sister, failed her O level examinations. She only passed one subject, that being Shona. She said she wanted to supplement. Mother turned to me and I had reluctantly to pay her examination entry fee. However I was not going to pay for the private tuition that she demanded. I argued that she could do all her revision at home, using her previous year's notes. Surely the syllabus had not changed much. Furthermore I was convinced that nothing was done at those newly-sprung colleges. Young boys and girls simply went there to socialise and while away the time. I also added that my pal Simba, who is a teacher at a secondary school would assist her in any way possible. That settled it, although Juliet sulked for a fortnight.

Juliet did seem committed to her studies, unlike last time. The day before yesterday she showed me a couple of exercises she had attempted and had been marked by Simba.

But then, what about the scene she had made last night? I have never seen her like that. Normally Juliet is a cheerful, though at times wilful girl. At that moment, her face was

Taurai Hlekisana, *Zimbabwe*

distorted as she screamed at mother, 'Leave me alone, you are not my father. I know all about you!' She put so much stress on 'you'.

She tailed off as she became aware of my presence. She slunk out of the lounge with a snort directed ostensibly at mother. I had just got back home from work having waited for over two hours for the bus home.

'My son, my son,' mother said in a tearful voice.

'Now Mother, do not get worked up, I will settle this with Juliet,' I reassured her. I swung around to follow Juliet outside.

'No!', Mother explained as she clutched my arm. 'Let it pass, I will handle it, it is nothing, it is that time of month.'

'If you say so,' I replied and slumped into a chair.

'By the way, your teacher-friend was here ten minutes ago and he said you should call him before you turn in,' mother informed me.

Reluctantly I dragged myself to Simba's place, some distance away. When I walked back into the house, a subdued Juliet was poring over her books and mother was preparing to serve the evening meal. After supper, I went to bed. The moment my head touched the pillow, I was already in dreamland.

Up and about I was when the alarm went off at half-four. A cold shower, a weak cup of tea and a piece of bread and I was on my way to the bus stop. I just made it on time after being squashed in a limping bus.

'Well you made it this time,' a colleague sniggered. He was right and I was relieved, for with three warnings from the boss, transport shortage or not, I had to be at work by 7.30am.

At lunch I headed for the United States Information Centre to watch the latest on the Gulf War. Except for pay-day, when I treat myself to a burger and coke, all lunch breaks I install myself in the news room. By 1.45pm and I was back behind the counter. Businessmen, farmers and VIPs with distorted bellies deposited and withdrew thousands of dollars and I intoned like a prerecorded tape.

'Morning sir, afternoon sir, have a good day sir,

sorry sir, your ID, sorry for the inconvenience, have a fine day, sir...'

4.45pm saw me joining the peak hour rush home: another day clocked and nearer to pay day. Tomorrow, Saturday, and maybe I will stroll around a bit with Vimbai. Juliet will be sheepish. I have to get started on that course...

On entering the house, I immediately sensed the tension. Amaiguru was home, all the way from the communal areas. After the greetings and lament on the effects of the most devastating drought, an uneasy silence descended. Amaiguru, mother's elder sister abruptly broke the silence. 'Tawanda, seeing me as you do is not by choice, but I was forced, lest someone says I did not try to...' Mother interrupted: 'Really, Amaiguru do you have to tell it to Tawa, leave him out of it.'

'Let me say what I have come all the way to say for you will never see me, see those feet coming here,' Amaiguru said in a tone that brooked no challenge.

'Tawa, you must be aware that your sister has been 'visited,' like Nyaro before her.'

'Visited? I asked?

With a contemptuous clucking of her tongue, Amaiguru said vehemently: 'You are not only blinded but also deaf. I guess as usual your mother sitting there has been shielding you...me, me hundreds of kilometres away, I get to hear of it, but you, you're here, but ignorant.' She paused, then continued, 'Your sister, this Juliet is lost, and will be forever if nothing is done soon. You as the eldest and man of the family, got to act, and act soon.'

'What are you talking about Maiguru?' I stammered.

'Do not cut me, you call yourself a man? Don't tell me you don't see anything amiss with your sister? Where is she now, do you know where she sleeps some days?'

Mother's head was bowed and for the first time I noticed that she was quietly weeping.

Maiguru simply continued, ignoring her, 'We had hoped that it had all ended when Nyaro was

out obviously we deluded ourselves. Your
et, well, she was found — but she had no
e how she had got to that place. I won't
ie place.'

ier tone, I got goose-pimples.

re twenty-three, old enough to know. It is
did a man's job and didn't listen to that
yours, or else. Now, listen carefully and
'it all began...'

the *pungwe* in the small hours of the
everyone was weary. The leader of this
e guerilas had led the slogans, called for
ent and sacrifice from the sons and
of the soil. He warned the would-be
of severe punishment. After the pledge
lagers of support for brothers and sisters
h, the group withdrew into the bush.

Pa blew out the candle, there was a
lock on the door. A thick menacing voice
a to come out. Pa instructed everyone, in
ig voice, to remain quiet and where they
ocially mother who wanted to follow him.
y struggled into his patchy trousers and
it.

a minuter later, there was a burst of
scream and a shout.

the family of the traitor too has to be

ing torch was thrown on the thatched roof
ig feet receded. Mother sprung into action
ged to take the two girls and boy from the
What happened afterwards is sketchy.

mother found her way to the city and
rned to the village. Come what may, she
e would never go back and would die
nowing where father was buried.

said that the whole village was razed to
d the day after father was gunned down.
ers were rounded into camps. After the
returned, and some knew and something
done...

ru was interrupted by a car screeching to
ront of the house. It was a police-car, and
emen approached the house.

Mother, who had been sniffing in th
while Maiguru narrated, panicked and
meet the policemen.

After establishing that it was Zuma's r
the taller policeman said: 'Mother, your
Juliet is in hospital and you should com
right now.'

Mother collapsed. Maiguru and I drove
to the hospital. And there in the inten
ward, with tubes connected to her, was Juli
breathing. Maiguru got the full details. J
been discovered in a pool of blood in a
wrists crudely slashed. Mother spent the
Juliet's bedside.

When I visited her the following
recognised me and smiled weakly. Be
collapsed in a fit of coughing, she
ominously that mother should not visit he
shocked. A nurse scrambled in and ushere

Mother was just leaving for the hospit
home. I advised her not to, and lied that t
had said 'no visitors'. But she was intent
When she looked at me closely, she wrung
from me. Her care-worn face tortured me
down weeping. Nevertheless, she went
have never seen her so haggard as she was
returned in the night, for I had waited fo

The following day, the worst happen
came to my workplace and I instinctiv
even before he gently broke the news to

During the three-day funeral, I was in
only hoped that Juliet had found peace an
had yearned for. It is said she had torn all
and suffocated herself by pressing her fi
pillow. It is also said she was four months
and people say my teacher-friend, whom
see at the funeral, was responsible.

But it does not matter anymore.

PS. I will be leaving for home tomor
month to attend to urgent and prival
business, once and hopefully, for all. Wi
the best. 

Sérgio Viera

Mozambique

Two Poems

Translated by Luis Rafael

In the Slave Harbour

A Poem Written Next to the Sea,

In This Year One Thousand Nine Hundred and Seventy

Even though the blue is
 limpid
 as it breaks out into whiteness
over the fine sand,
and the wind cuts the deepness of the palms
 with its melodies,
it is still the blood
 that murmurs in the waves;
the wounded screams of slaves
 are shattered against the billows.
On top of old tombs and in the ancient stone fortress
 corroded by salt,
fat lizards drowse in the heat,
still,
 in between the openings
 are echoed, sorrowful as if present,
 the sobbings of children
 and the moaning of brides,
all in tune with the swaying
 of the slave ships.

From *Também Memória do Povo*, 1983

Poetry

When I reigned
over my empire in Mali
our palace was the Southern Cross:
then came the ships,
and they tore out your heart from within me,
and my voice
became hoarse
under the trumpets they sounded
in search for you:
but now,
Eurydice,
our bodies
have found each other,
the mangoes
have become golden
and the bouganvillaea have flowered,
and the blackness
of your naked body
has been clothed
by the acacias.
And the Zambezi
which crossed the whole of Africa
and caressed Eurydice's whole body
has joined up with the Congo
and the Niger
and the Nile
and the whole of Eurydice-Africa

Return Eurydice,
return to us,
and we'll run through the savannah
and offer our souls to the rain
so they may grow,
we'll tumble
in the green grass of hope;
The fruit from our trees,
Eurydice,
are truly sweet,
and the flowers of our land
live out as the fragrance of the air,
in our skies
there are more stars,
in our eyes
there is more light,
and in the throbbing of our liberated hearts
there are many more dreams...
Return, Eurydice, return to us!

From *Tambén Memória do Povo*, 1983



DAVID GOLDBLATT

AND THE ICONOGRAPHY OF APARTHEID



DAVID WISE
UNITED KINGDOM

David Wise, *United Kingdom*

There are some artists and writers, the chronology of whose lives correspond in an almost unerringly significant way with the major historical and social events of their society, and whose response to those events lends their work a charged significance: the Shakespearean moment.

David Goldblatt is such an artist. Born in 1930 in Randfontein, a mining town in the Transvaal, he is a third generation Jew of Lithuanian grandparents who had the anti-semitic pogroms of Eastern Europe. Goldblatt left school at 17 in 1948, the moment that saw the years of resurgent Afrikaner nationalism culminate in the election of the Nationalist Party. The term 'apartheid' (literally 'separateness') was born. Prime Minister Daniel F. Malan promised to his faithful electorate 'to make South Africa a white man's land'. The long process of segregation, violence and oppression of South African blacks through the imposition of a modern systematic, political structure had begun.

As a part of this society and from the beginning Goldblatt saw his photography as a means of protest at the conditions that were rapidly coming into force.

'I was very aware that photography, even in those early days was a way of probing what was happening in South Africa and finding what relation it had to me. I felt a need to protest and tell an unsuspecting world what terrible things were happening here.'

Goldblatt's sense of outrage was directed by the fact of being born a Jew. His father, who ran a store in Randfontein, was a liberal member of the white English-speaking community who were dismayed with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and eventual election of the National Party.

Goldblatt was no stranger to victimisation, expressed as anti-semitism — as a child he was beaten up in racist exchanges between his friends and Afrikaner children. This sense of racial marginalisation obviously fed his sense of injustice and led him to protest against what he saw developing around him.

It is a sense of protest that Goldblatt, through his

photography, has been exploring for over forty years. He has continually confronted the immense and often painful complexities of a society that he says was growing 'obviously insane'. In the rich diversity of his work he has continually probed the nature of his society and revealed what can only be called the iconography of apartheid.

It was with a recognition of this historical background that I met David Goldblatt in the beautiful gardens of a hotel in the suburbs of Cape Town; with the brilliant sun edging down over Table Mountain behind him he looks like one would assume from a reading of his photographs: sensitive, intelligent, with a quiet intensity that underlies an apparent will of iron. (He is courteous and solicitous, offering to change seats with my wife because the sun is in her eyes.) I asked him about the early influences on his work.

In those early days I was very influenced by the great picture magazines, *Life*, *Look* and *Picture Post* and in my early work consciously tried to emulate them. Later magazines from England like *Queen* and *Town Magazine* were important to me. You must remember that we were very cut off here so we did not see a lot of work.

One of the most impressive aspects of his work, for me, has been the diverse range of styles that he has been able to employ, effortlessly shifting between different forms and formats relating to different experiences. I wondered if this was simply expedient or a conscious stylistic decision:

When I first started in professional photography I had a Leica M2 and M3. I hoped that I could get through my photographic life using just these two cameras to do my own work. However, I had a young family to support, and a year after selling my father's business on 15 September 1963, the day that I became a photographer, I realised very quickly I would have to do more commercial work. One of my first commercial jobs was for an architect — photographing a major building project. I recognised that I needed a

5x4 camera for the job. I also soon recognised that this negative size gave me clarity — mainly of gradation throughout the scale — that I could not achieve with other formats. So, naturally I started using it for some of my own 'personal' work. To this day I have stayed with the three main formats; 35mm, 6x6 and 5x4, shifting between them as subjects demand.

One photographer I imagined would have exerted a major influence on Goldblatt's work was Walker Evans, sharing as he does the same versatility of format use and intelligent delicacy of sensibility.

During the late fifties and early sixties there were very few photographic books in South Africa. I saw odd ones by Dorothea Lange and Paul Strand (the latter I did not really like at the time — I think differently now, of course). I saw a few pictures by Evans, but it was really in 1968 when I first encountered *Let Us now praise Famous Men* that I suddenly had a sense of being in tune with a very particular way of seeing. It was a tremendous moment — a confirmation.

Goldblatt occupies a singular place within the culture of South Africa. He is regarded by other photographers, quite rightly, as a constant, driving, seminal force. He is unstinting in his generous urge to encourage other photographers. He says of the 'younger generation' that came to prominence during the social revolt of 1985-86 that:

They were brave young people, often with limited photographic knowledge and experience, who often at great personal danger produced fine work literally in the front line. With the changes in society the problems that they have to face now photographers are responding to that change. I have no doubt that significant work will be produced:

These were photographers who worked within a sustained political ideology and who used photography directly to support the struggle. Two books that resulted - *The Cordoned Heart* and *Beyond*

the Barricades - are exemplary in their deployment of photographs as powerfully effective propaganda. As to his ideological position, Goldblatt has often said that he does not view his use of the camera as a weapon. His position throughout has been one of being committed to documenting South African society unaligned to a single political ideology. He says that he believes his photographs are not politically effective although he hopes that, by percolation, they might have 'made a difference'.

Omar Badsha, who edited *The Cordoned Heart* and who is a major photographer in his own right, disagrees:

I think David has always had a problem with the notion of photography as political protest. It seems to me that he shares the same problems that a writer like Nadine Gordimer experiences — the position of a white South African exploring the aesthetics of their work in relation to extreme political and social realities. The simple fact is that David's photographs, over the years, have been politically effective in revealing the context of what has happened in this country.

Badsha also points to a paradox in the nature of Goldblatt's unique position within South African photography in that, while he is widely recognised as being the most significant photographer in the country, strangely his influence, as made manifest in the work of the younger photographers in particular, has been minimal. Badsha accredits this to the fact that for long period Goldblatt was seen by the younger radical photographers as an embodiment of the establishment. They now seem however to be increasingly coming to terms with his influence at a significant period in their own development.

Searching in conversation for crucial elements in Goldblatt's work, we keep returning to the significance of Randfontein. It is obvious that his home town acts as a terminus through which he moves, probing continually, the sense of 'what it is to be white in South Africa'. He travels from



Title Page:
Saturday Afternoon in Sunward Park.
Boksburg, 1979-80

Above:
Workers of the Progressive Federal Party
checking voters rolls.
Boksburg, 1979-80

childhood experiences to adult perceptions. Like the work of Nadine Gordimer, who has collaborated with Goldblatt, his work is rooted in the local, dealing with a vibrant and penetrating sense of the different racial communities that exist within South Africa.

This sense of individual communities minutely explored can be seen in the book Goldblatt produced during the height of Verwoerdian apartheid about Boksburg, a community which for Goldblatt was obviously Randfontein revisited. In looking at the local details of white provincial middle-class life Goldblatt was exploring again the life of his formative years, and expanding the tensions he had experienced then. In Boksburg he photographed white people getting married, celebrating; husbands mowed the lawn on Sunday afternoon while their children played on the veld in the stark, penetrating South African light. Life seemed to be carrying on with a normality shared by any middle-class white community, anywhere in the world.

The more familiar one becomes with these photographs, however, the more they verge on the surreal: (because) one recognises that underlying this quotidian normality is a weight of politically enforced social madness which, as Goldblatt says, was certainly evil and which was supported, tacitly or otherwise, by the people in the photographs. These people in their domestic provincialism lived on the edge of what Nadine Gordimer several years earlier called 'the impassable desert' of prejudice and assumption, people 'kindly, decent, within the strict limits of their "own kind" (white, good Christians, good Jews, members of the country clubs...'). The indifferent do not want to extend that limit by so much as one human pulse reaching out beyond it. Where the pretty suburban garden ends, the desert begins'.

In reprinting the Group Areas Act for Boksburg in which the area assigned to black people was demarcated to the last metre, Goldblatt contextualises the obvious madness that surrounds the apparent normality as displayed in the photographs.

What is remarkable about Goldblatt's vision as

a whole has been the quality of his intelligent tenacity. South Africa has a peculiar quality for eroding perception, of tiring out those individuals who confront its moral dilemmas. At the height of apartheid it must have been a society in which it was very easy for one to retreat into 'making a living'.

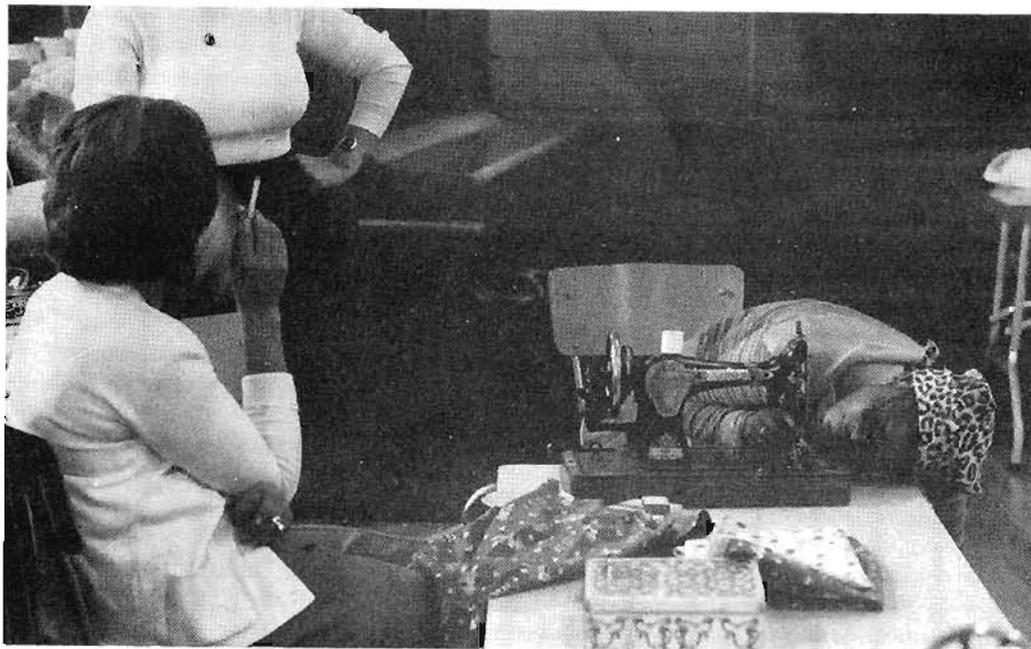
Goldblatt has patiently, with consistent commitment, revealed the conditions that he has confronted, creating an iconography of potent symbols for the way many white people guarded their lives with a skein of ordinary behaviour and prejudice.

In these images, precise, quietly structured, pregnant with revelation, Goldblatt, like no other South African photographer, charts a personal odyssey. In describing society he describes the pain, fear and inextricable dilemmas that have surrounded him and have formed part of his life and which his photographs go some way, if certainly not to resolve, then to describe and reveal.

We met for this interview a few weeks after the whites only referendum in which President de Klerk was given overwhelming support by the white electorate for his political agenda within CODESA. In a recent interview Goldblatt was reported as saying of the new conditions, 'While I do not feel I am out of a job, I recognise that something really important has actually changed. It does seem as though the ideological structure of aspirations and hopes that the Afrikaners built up has been turned inside out. A rational, ordinary liberal and human approach seems to be emerging'.

Goldblatt, however, is not naive about the new social conditions. He relates how where he lives in Johannesburg three miles away in Alexandra township seventeen people had recently been killed in clashes between local residents and Inkatha hostel dwellers. Last month four hundred people were killed throughout South Africa in similar incidents.

'I dream,' says Goldblatt 'about this madness every night. And I am certain this trouble can be stopped. If a group of white people were victims of the violence in Alex the police would prevent this trouble immediately.'



Top:
Sewing classes given by white women to black women at the Centre of Concern in the Methodist Church Hall. Boksburg, 1979-80



Right:
Saturday morning at the Hypermarket, Miss Lovely Legs Competition. Boksburg, 1979-80

We discussed the recent culmination of a project called 'Structures', which Goldblatt has been working on for over ten years. The work consists of photographs of buildings which express, through their architecture, a very South African sensibility. He says that South Africans express themselves:

'In their structures with a kind of clarity, almost nakedness. We have not yet built up those encrustations of art and convention which have become almost concealing or obfuscating devices in places like Europe'.

Using a 5x4 view camera for its absolute fidelity to appearances, Goldblatt has photographed a series of buildings that range from municipal offices and churches, to mud huts in remote areas of South Africa.

The work could be seen as a departure from his central aesthetic of documenting the social manifestations of his society, but this is, in fact, not the case. For instance, in one photograph of a township cemetery, amid the chaos of barren earth and simple sun-bleached wooden crosses, the foreground is dominated by the jagged fractured slab of a black marble head-stone. Dedicated 'to the freedom-loving people of Uitenhage'. The names on the headstone itself are fractured and disjointed as though having been effortlessly wiped from history. In the distance the shacks of the township straggle over barren ground to the brow of a hill. The caption gives the historical context for the photograph 'monument to those killed in the Uitenhage massacre of 21 March 1985 destroyed by vigilantes after the reimposition of the state of emergency 12 June 1985'.

Another photograph from the series taken in Ventersdorp shows hand prints and wheel tracks, set messily in concrete, which commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Afrikaners' Great Trek. In a society whose architecture points up such obvious social differences as a maid's quarters being smaller than an urban garage, Goldblatt's exploration of the country's landscape and architecture once again reveals images that show the complexities that underlie South African life.

In conclusion, I asked him how he saw his work developing in the changed social conditions of the 'new South Africa'.

Isometimes envy photographers in other places their freedom to be unabashedly lyrical. The celebration of life here has for me nearly always been attenuated by the all-pervasive presence of an innately evil system. I hope that in the more open society now so painfully being born, more expansive ways of being and seeing will be possible. But they cannot happen yet. Apartheid has worked only too well: we have still to digest its bitter harvest of chaos, violence and corruption. The reality is both extremely complex and confused. Somehow I have always found minutiae that contained in their particularity the essences of larger matters. I think I shall have to look very hard and deep to do that now.

As Goldblatt leaves I am reminded of the words of his friend and colleague, Joseph Lelyveld who, in his book *Move your Shadow* says in conclusion to his penetrating study that:

Beyond all the fatuous theorising and scenarios there is the reality of what actually happens day after day. Those I admired most, blacks and whites, were those who really looked. I do not mean those who snatched a glimpse in order to draw support for some tribal suspicion or inherited fear, but those who, in stepping across a forbidden frontier, managed to shed their armour and arguments and take in the larger truths of what these had achieved.

For over forty years David Goldblatt has been one of those people who have really looked. He has shown us his own rite of passage through the desert to understanding, moving from what he has called the 'fatal isolation' of being white in South Africa.

In a time when his world must have seemed to him inhabited predominantly by the Afrikaner cyclops that figures in one of his earlier photographs, he has helped us immeasurably to see and understand.



Above:
*Memorial to those killed
in the Langa Massacre, 21 March 1985,
destroyed by vigilantes.*
KwaNabohloe Cemetary
Uitenhage



Hergen Junge

Namibia

Two Poems

On Paper

An empty sheet once
But no longer now

The first words settled south,
building on coast and cape.

The next ones trekked further,
claimed space,
filled in gaps,
conquering some not-yet land,
as they said.

Not that that's easy:

Wood is detexturalised,
loses its natural meaning,
turns into lack of sense.

And also the words that come then:
Some run into Vegkops,
battle in Nauklufis,
don't live through a Cuito kind siege.
Some do survive.

But in the end
the lines on the page move on:

black on white.



Poetry

Karasburg

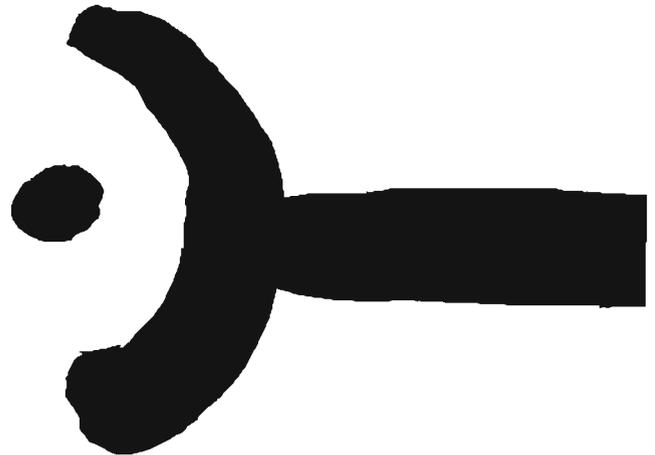
Past midnight.
A hotel well-lit.
Lamps cutting a brighter pale
into the night.
The door ajar.
People asleep.

Two neon tubes shine peppermint.
Under them:
bars
marching in military single file.

Eyes climb and stay.

Harsh rays,
the sound of flash and flare
against a rigid framework.

A black shadow advances,
a wing slaps steel,
breaks into flames,
another wing proves tinder,
spread-eagled moth,
glowing the seconds of its lethal glory
on lofty pyre,
then softly drops,
incinerated.



The turmoil hardly gone,
another insect follows fate,
and still another one.

The splatter of flames
and the sudden silences
will last a night long.

Ungluing my eyes from ugly fascination
I scold
'Suicicada, lemmings,
by neighbours' agonies quite unperturbed!'

I stop in shame
at visions flooding in:
planes cascading carpets of bombs,
cities torched into tempests of fire
bodies grounded, blasted and burnt.

Transactions

'This is just a simple notion:
Sex is subversive ...
Now we can fuck ...
but live in different suburbs'

- Michael Tillestad: *The Passing of Immorality*

the guard outside the door
advises two men where they can get a transaction.
at the bottom of the steakhouse escalator
midwinter howls down strand street:
there's negotiation.
there's a codesa.
there is a transaction.

there is not much subversive
about a drunk between our legs on friday,
so die council doesn't disconnect us on monday.
it is not so subversive
when sex hires the middle class tenured, housed:
but the working class is paid hourly or part thereof
before returning to her township.
it is not overthrowing the system
when layoffs leave us no option but getting laid.

here is a revolutionary notion:
sex is subversive - when we have the choice
not to be part of your discretionary spending.

Keith Gottschalk, South Africa



Marius Schoon

South Africa

Two Poems

Waste

MK comrades dug the holes,
Clothed by Luanda heat.
They sang Hamba Kahle 'Mkhonto
As the coffins were lowered down.

The midwinter
Of my life.

Ireland,
Climate cold,
People warm,
Brought the thaw.

New hope.
New ove.
New life.

And here I am in Joeies,
Doing what I can.
happy and productive.
Back where it all began.

There's work to do
My dear, for you.

If only you could apply.

Learn to Rhyme

Gina dog's a boxer,
Very bold and bad.
Cat is Siamese,
Just a little mad.

They snuggle up together
When its sleeping time.
A portent of our future
When we learn to rhyme.

Arrival

In silence
the fool stands on parade,
in anticipation of what he believes to be
the sun's loving rays?

He's been waiting a lifetime
his breath ragged and torn.
The nightmare hidden inside him
treasured and fed day by day.

Standing erect in his fear
arms thrust open wide
willing to trust
his greatest foe.
Wanting in the end of certain death.

His doom has arrived
with a grimace on his face
he rides into the night.

He came for the treasure,
the fool misunderstood
far too long.

With the moon as witness
he prepares to embrace
the sinister journey
leading back into birth

He wraps night's cape around him
taking the stranger's hand
riding off the trail
of an unknown fate

No longer sure
he contemplates escape
there is no turning back
the offer was too great

The doom is now part
of the wishful fool
not intending to let go
lest it's needs be fulfilled

Thoughts of thunder
the plan clearly lit.
As the fool rides off
a faint smile playing at his lips

Jackie Botha, South Africa

The Wind in a July Afternoon

It sweeps across the bare land
Dust particles hit at the dry faces
The sky turns to brownish
The tree branches rattle up
Trousers tatter like on poles
Skirts fly neck high
Hat blown beyond reach
Weary faces watch the events in despair
The sun dims down
Papers float sky high
The wind is sweeping across the land
Dry to leave a drop of water
The lips dry up
Everything is in dusk

Mandla Mathebula, South Africa

Eject It

Blow it out, my friend
I can see, it harms you
Vomit it to reshape yourself
I miss your splendid smile
Split the rubbish
It took your affectionate look away

Approach a mirror
You'll see your face is swollen
Cough!
Your chest is rotting
Eject what's in you
Tomorrow you may burst

Be angry
Anger is a daily disease
Forget not, though, to make way for tomorrow's anger

Speaking cures daily diseases
Say it before sunset
I really miss your golden voice
I long for your smile
Give me your affectionate look.

Mandla Mathebula, South Africa



Towards a Universal Declaration of Poets' Rights

Chris Mann

South Africa

WHEREAS all earthlings are possessed of emotions, language lobes, tenacious shades and a tendency from time to time to brood; and

WHEREAS in each generation individuals occur in which such elements are found in abundance, together with a productive inflammation of the heart and a stubborn ambition to be heard; and

WHEREAS the said individuals, often but not always justly deserving the title of Poets, are afflicted by the temporary enthusiasm, the indifference, perplexity and downright suspicion of their peers;

THEREFORE LET IT BE KNOWN BY ALL PEOPLE that we the said Stewards and Makers of Words, the Root-ends and Wing-tips, Transducers, Bards, Prisms and Plumbers of Language do hereby claim, without apology, permit, certificate of approval or further ado the following Rights:

To speak from the innermost and outermost cores of our being without regard to censorship or social censure;

To speak of all that the creative spirit moves us to speak of, be it humans, lasers or butterflies, ghettos, mines or galaxies, socks, diamonds or boils, fossils, quarks, dongas, eros or agape, music, pumpkins or God;

To fix words as stark as light-bulbs into lines as concrete and greyly unadorned as prison-cell walls, and place them like clusters of indigo grapes in trellis-work stanzas rustling with light-green assonant leaves, and wring them onto the page in sparse, elliptical phrase, and recite them in rhythmized cascades of sound;

To nurture new visions in prayer and solitary meditation when in every street people cry out for action, and cry with a prophet's fervour for action when others smug in creed or affluence creep like tortoises from civic responsibility or yet still others chant a vortical prose of violence with unselfcritical glee;

To grab and shake by the scruff of the neck all jargon, cant and doublespeak, the false abstraction and anology, the twisted conclusion, the half and quarter truth, the partisan, sectarian and doctrinaire, the lie private commercial and political;

Above all, to love and rejoice in Language, as soil and sky, soul and community, mind, marrow and mystery, tool-box, jest and hymn of Creation .

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The winning novel will present young people growing up in southern Africa today with a fresh, unsteretyped perspective on their own experience and the land they live in.

The novel must be an original, unpublished, untranslated work in English, in the region of 25 000 to 30 000 words.

The competition is open to all writers born, or currently resident, in southern Africa. Closing date for entries is 25 February 1994.



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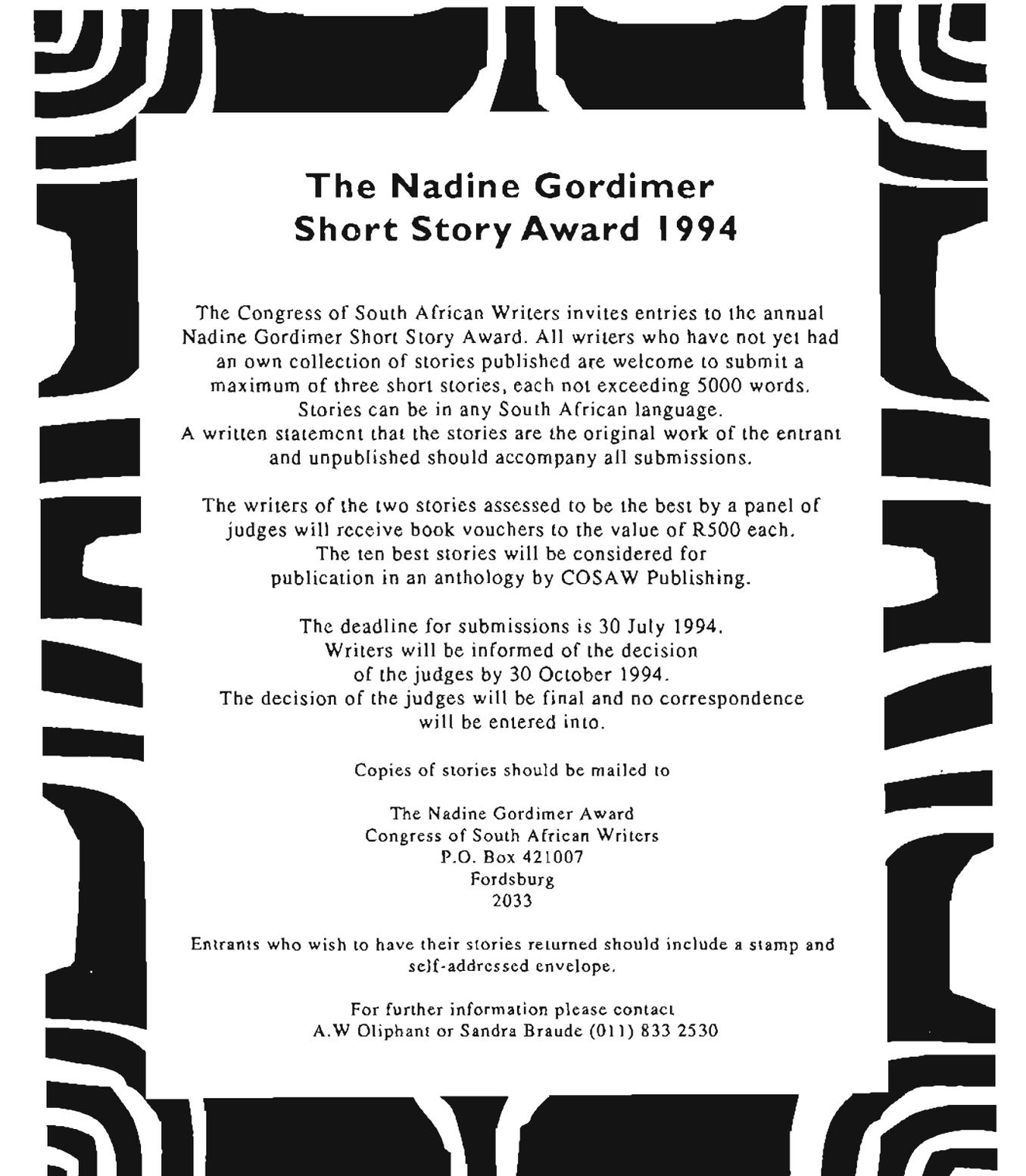
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The Nadine Gordimer Short Story Award 1994

The Congress of South African Writers invites entries to the annual Nadine Gordimer Short Story Award. All writers who have not yet had an own collection of stories published are welcome to submit a maximum of three short stories, each not exceeding 5000 words.

Stories can be in any South African language.

A written statement that the stories are the original work of the entrant and unpublished should accompany all submissions.

The writers of the two stories assessed to be the best by a panel of judges will receive book vouchers to the value of R500 each.

The ten best stories will be considered for publication in an anthology by COSAW Publishing.

The deadline for submissions is 30 July 1994.

Writers will be informed of the decision of the judges by 30 October 1994.

The decision of the judges will be final and no correspondence will be entered into.

Copies of stories should be mailed to

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

Entrants who wish to have their stories returned should include a stamp and self-addressed envelope.

For further information please contact
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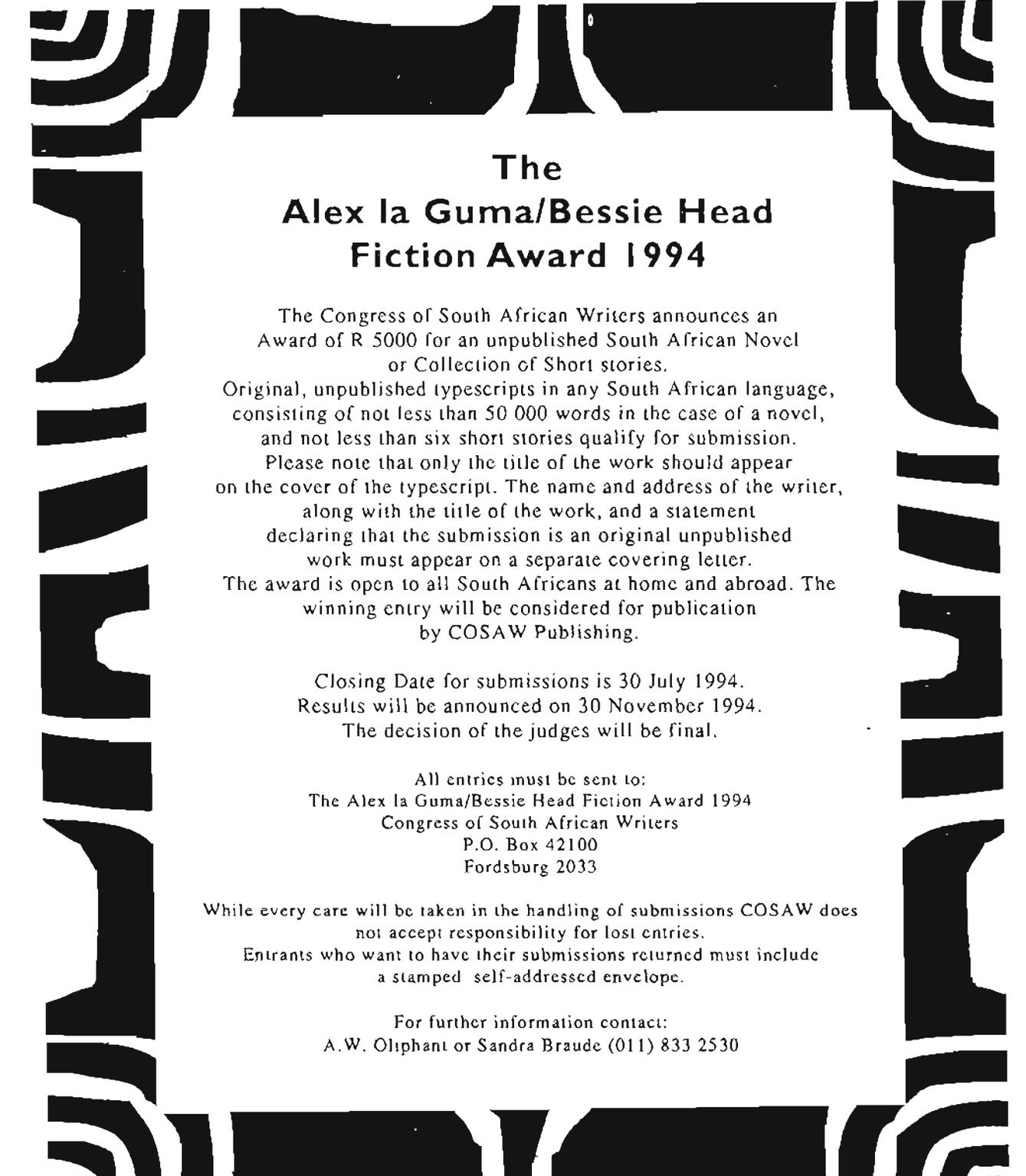
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**The
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The Congress of South African Writers announces an Award of R 5000 for an unpublished South African Novel or Collection of Short stories.

Original, unpublished typescripts in any South African language, consisting of not less than 50 000 words in the case of a novel, and not less than six short stories qualify for submission.

Please note that only the title of the work should appear on the cover of the typescript. The name and address of the writer, along with the title of the work, and a statement declaring that the submission is an original unpublished work must appear on a separate covering letter.

The award is open to all South Africans at home and abroad. The winning entry will be considered for publication by COSAW Publishing.

Closing Date for submissions is 30 July 1994.
Results will be announced on 30 November 1994.
The decision of the judges will be final.

All entries must be sent to:
The Alex la Guma/Bessie Head Fiction Award 1994
Congress of South African Writers
P.O. Box 42100
Fordsburg 2033

While every care will be taken in the handling of submissions COSAW does not accept responsibility for lost entries.

Entrants who want to have their submissions returned must include a stamped self-addressed envelope.

For further information contact:
A.W. Oliphant or Sandra Braude (011) 833 2530

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The English Academy of Southern Africa,
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Poems, stories and unpublished essays on all matters of Jewish and
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Mayibuye
P.O. Box 61884, Marshalltown, 2017
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New Coin Poetry
Institute for the study of English in Africa,
Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 6140.
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New Contrast (Incorporating Upstream)
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P.O. Box 3841, Cape Town, 8000.
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Southern African Review of Books
Centre for Southern African Studies, University of the Western Cape,
Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7530.
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Vrye Weekblad
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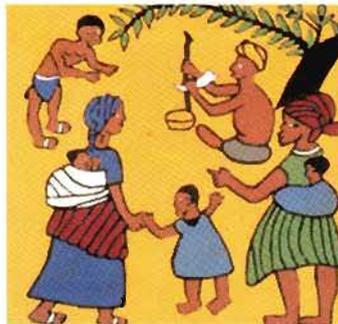
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