

# Stattdrider

Vol. 2 No. 1 March 1979



on my homeward way africa bound towards sunrise it was hard the road was steep it was heavy  
but i heard the beat and i heard them sing i heard it blown the golden horn i heard the echo  
stirring my soul i heard them cry tears wetting dry earth from eyes that have seen the bitterness of life



A CYA production written by Matsemela Manaka and directed by John Moalusi Ledwaba  
EGOLI is a three-man play featuring Susan Shabangu, Daniel Stopa Lekalakala and John Moalusi Ledwaba.  
Stage Lighting/Moses Mamabolo  
Posters/Kay Hassan  
Transport/Solomon Sephadi

PERFORMANCES AND VENUES

Box Theatre (Wits) – March 1, 2 and 3; Entokozweni, Soweto – Fund Raising for P.U.S.O. (People United to Save Orphans)  
March 24; Port Elizabeth – March 29, 30, and 31; Maseru – April 13 and 14; Swaziland – April 19, 20 and 21

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\*Enquiries regarding purchase of the originals should be addressed to the artist, c/o Staffrider, P.O. Box 31910, Braamfontein 2017

Ten hours fifteen minutes. Carefully and steadily Pula walks into a well-polished office at a Licensing and Traffic Department. He has come to make an appointment for a test on road signs and traffic regulations so as to acquire a provisional driver's licence.

With no option he enters through a double glass door inscribed 'NIE-BLANKES' in white letters. Beneath this racial instruction the English version 'NON-WHITES' looks as brutally clear as the original impression.

The office is so spacious that it could accommodate an articulated truck. Fifteen steps take him as far as a counter about waist-high, with a glass pane stretching from the surface of the counter to the ceiling.

This counter, which looks extremely wide, and this glass pane which seems exceedingly thick, create two worlds - Pula's side, the world of black people who have to wait for hours before being attended to, and the other side of the glass 'iron curtain', populated by a number of elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen - white of course.

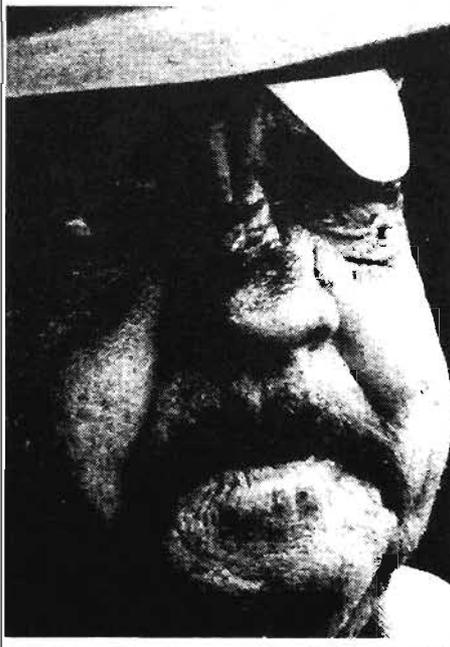
Today he is alone in his world and he knows that he has to wait until one of those creatures beyond the wall decides that he has waited long enough. As he stands there, his 'pass' in hand, his curious eyes probe through the iron curtain and find their mark - a middle-aged man, slender, grey hair, black pinstripe suit, snow-white shirt and black tie. He is the kind of man everyone would like to vote for, but unfortunately the franchise is strictly limited. His academic and immaculate looks compel Pula to call him Professor. The atmosphere around him, created by piles of files and documents on his desk, make the honorary title more appropriate. The point of his pen, like a claw, rhythmically sways over an open file like a tiger ready to pounce on a meatball hanging at the end of a swinging pendulum. Spasmodically the claw darts into the file and viciously cuts a swathe across the page. It reminds Pula of his former English teacher deleting 'redundant' sentences or 'gibberish' from his essay, the slash accompanied by a slap across the face.

His attention is disrupted by the clattering behind the professor. His eyes meet two ladies in I-don't-know-whether-it's-blue costumes. Any black man could mistake them for twins - ugly twins at that. Their fingers are tapping skilfully on the keys of typewriters. 'How I wish I could type like

that' - but Pula knows that wishes are not taxis and he lets the green-eyed monster die.

Immediately behind the typists a bevy of ladies are giggling. He caves-drops, hoping to hear what their jokes are all about. To his disappointment their conversation is a miscellaneous concoction of idle gossip.

Another soberly dressed gentleman struts in and walks to a desk near Professor's. He picks a sheet out of the IN basket, adjusts his thick-lensed spectacles and struggles to decipher the message in the typed letter.



'... like a hunter taking aim with a rifle'

He brings the sheet close to his nose, and makes no mistake about it, the frown on his face menacing. Fortunately the iron curtain guarantees Pula security against the crooked teeth. His left eyelid covers the eye like a hunter taking aim with a rifle. To Pula's relief he utters a sigh of capitulation and drops the letter in the OUT basket.

The door is pushed open and a black lady enters the forbidden world of offices. She is carrying a tray the size of Johannesburg, with many cups, saucers, sugar-basins, cakes, bread, knives etc., etc... After she has put the tray on a desk there is an avalanche. they help themselves to tea and cakes.

The myopic one casts a cursory glance at Pula (or should I say at the iron curtain?) and adjusts his spectacles to have a clear view of this black creature on the other side. He then looks at the tea-maid (as they call the lady) and asks in paraplegic English 'Do you like that man?' (I have purged my version of the question.) She looks at Pula, then replies that she is very fastidious about the type of man she

goes to bed with. They all laugh uproariously, simulating pleasure at what has just escaped her mouth. Though their laughter is hollow and dry, the manipulated tea-maid is flattered.

She then explains that she never goes to bed with dirty and stupid black men. This one is used by her masters - during and after working hours. Poor black girl, selling her pride and her body for nothing.

The Professor looks at her interrogatively, then roars at her, 'Where is the milk jar?' She looks around the table, but it is not there. 'I am sorry. I left it in the kitchen, baas,' she answers in panic. 'Go and fetch it, you stupid...' Deflated, she rushes out of the office. No protest from the others.

The immaculate one walks to the counter and through a round opening in the iron curtain he asks Pula what has brought him to this office. After stating his case he waits. The Professor walks away and disappears in a corner. After a few minutes the Professor comes back to explain that the forms for an appointment are not available - they are in the 'big baas's' office, which is in Germiston. Pula pretends not to understand the Professor's mother tongue. The latter switches to staccato English in a heavy Afrikaans accent.

Pula knows very well that the Professor is lying and he is tempted to tell him so bluntly. He stands there as if he does not understand what was said. On second thoughts the Professor decides to phone the 'big baas' for the forms. Pula thanks him politely and waits, impatient and exasperated.

The Professor picks up the receiver from the cradle on the counter, dials some numbers and after a crackle a female voice replies. He notices an expression of recognition on the Professor's face, then the ball begins to roll - in Afrikaans of course.

She wants to know why he did not honour the appointment the night before. He explains with a shower of apologies that his wife smelt a rat. The voice of the fairer sex sounds adamant and unforgiving, and it costs the Professor a volley of honey-coated epithets to calm her. He is smiling victoriously, but unfortunately the beaming smile is seen by a person for whom it is not meant.

The topic changes - now they discuss a friend of a friend. The friend of a friend paid a visit to his brother's family. One night the brother went to bed earlier than usual, leaving the visitor and his wife in the living-room. The woman started making seductive suggestions to her brother-in-law and

He wore a haggard-looking face and his eyes were fixed on the ground. His clothes were ragged, soiled with dirt. Passers-by stared at him suspiciously.

Tizzah -- as he was affectionately known -- was a middle-aged man sitting despondently on the pavement. His thoughts wandered back to his old, happy days. Life in jail had completely destroyed his future. He was penniless and hungry. A dustbin nearby was littered with refuse. Slowly, he moved to the dustbin, his curious eyes directed at every person. With the speed of a cat, he picked a stale brown bread and gulped it into his mouth. His lean fingers carefully groped into the garbage.

A tall, bearded, athletic young man stopped in his tracks, his eyes fixed on him. Tizzah continued with his meal, unconcerned about people's curiosity. A sense of pity compelled the new arrival to show sympathy towards the hungry man and, beckoning, he tossed a coin on his tattered cap.

'Thank you,' said Tizzah with a hoarse voice, clutching his tattered hat with its few coins. He moved to a Chinese restaurant.

Entering, he was subjected to bumps and jabs from late shoppers while he bought a packet of chips and slices of bread, and perched himself on a chair at a corner table. While he was

eating, he thought of a trick. To turn himself into a permanent cripple would certainly bring in more money. After his meal, Tizzah moved out of the shop seeking shelter.

As he neared the toilets, a policeman was pushing two men into a police van over an illegal gambling game. Their plea to the policeman to set them free fell on deaf ears. A chill ran down his spine. He was relieved when the police van pulled away. He sauntered into a toilet, clutching dirty newspapers, a sack and a roll of plastic tucked under his armpit. A young man holding a broom with his right hand gave him a mean look. That mean look from a labourer was too much for Tizzah, but he tried to maintain his cool.



'Move out, now,' yelled the man at him, pointing a finger at the door which was slightly ajar. Tizzah proceeded to move, not paying any attention to this man. His bloodshot eyes were glued on the ground.

'Move out, you dirty pig,' repeated the man.

Tizzah stood staring at him. The man held his ground when he tried to move forward. Then like lightning the labourer grabbed him by the collar of his shirt and tossed him out of the toilet. A single push sent him flying like an acrobat performing breathtaking movements. A pile of papers, a sack and a roll of plastic were scattered on the floor. He picked up his 'luggage' and quickly disappeared into a dark alley. He stumbled over some bricks and fell. His heart was pounding heavily against his ribs. He wrapped his legs with an old sack, stuffed it with newspapers, and bound the plastic sheet

over the rest with string. An hour later he emerged as a typical cripple. He murmured an inaudible blessing to every good Samaritan who showed kindness to him. On his way, he picked up a stick.

Finally, he sat next to a jewellery shop. The steady flow of clients was interrupted when a short, broad-shouldered man emerged from the crowd and stood before him. He could not believe his eyes: the 'maimed' man was Tizzah.

'Tizzah!' bellowed the man with a rich, powerful voice. Tizzah remained silent as death. Two plain-clothes policemen eyed the scene suspiciously.

'Will you kindly tell me how you met with an accident,' said the man, his eyes glued on him. 'I met your brother, Peter, last week and he said nothing about your accident.'

'Mind your own business. Even if I was dead, you would be happy instead of mourning.'

Tizzah, his face contorted with fury, made a deep sound through his throat and swung his stick at this inquisitive man. One of the plain-clothes policemen confronted the man, closely followed by his companion. Eagerness was written on their faces.

'Do you know him?' quizzed one of the policemen. 'Yes, he was my pal and I am certain that he is not a cripple.'

The policemen looked at Tizzah, their faces tightening. One of them struck a match and burned the string while his friend unwrapped the contents covering the legs. People came running from all directions to see the bogus cripple.

'I am unable to stand up and walk,' he pleaded, pointing a finger at his legs.

The policeman raised his hand and lashed out at him but he remained glued to the ground without uttering a word. He was pulled by the policemen towards the police van, walking properly now without displaying any sign of injury. The police van door jerked open and he was thrust in. His eyes stared on the ground, unable to withstand countless faces fixed on him. Some of his victims made threatening gestures while others were laughing at him. The police van pulled away moving down Commissioner street to John Vorster Square.

*Illustration by*  
Vusi Zwane

#### *Conversation Piece continued*

he yielded. From that night the two made love in the living-room while the husband slept. On the sixth night they were caught in action. The ailing man emptied his Smith & Wesson .38 into his brother's skull. The professor goes on and on with his narrative until, after kissing the receiver loudly and uttering soporific goodbyes, he drops it

The Professor, with an air of dignity and sympathy, tells Pula that he was talking to the 'big baas' but has been told that the appointment forms will only be available after three months.

For three pregnant seconds black and white stand tête-a-tête. In silence they curse each other for mutual double-crossing. The transparent iron curtain between them becomes thicker in their eyes. Thanks to the architect of this building, the impressions crystallizing in this moment will live on for these two men. Pula decides to break the thick ice. 'Thank you very much for what you have done for me -- I will call again after three months.' This comes out in fluent and perfect Afrikaans. Take a bow.

**SOUL'S DISPARITY**

We came from faraway,  
 from a land of darkness and continuous wars;  
 Where light seemed very strange to watch,  
 the roads there were dangerous with dongas  
 gaping at the sun.

When shall we see the sun again  
 in this droning night resistant to sleep?  
 And caress the warm breeze  
 from seas of fraternity and love?

We felt western belief  
 embracing change in our sleep  
 We drank this to our fill  
 and now we have our eyes glued on the moon!

O, how we sheltered our heads  
 under roofs of civilisation . . .  
 And froze our hopes in regrets  
 for having allowed poor souls to practise an  
 alien life!

But every day; when civilisation enlightens our souls,  
 we drag our feet in despair . . .

Motlase Mogotsi/Rustenburg

**THE PRIDE OF TSHOSA A MOTSISI**

We survived his pride  
 from a mere nation to a populous  
 recognition  
 alongside his guidance  
 a paddling boat of bright men  
 Some leaders failed in direction  
 withered and succumbed in unpatriotic  
 defeats of unfaithfulness  
 thus, in deep monstrous seas are buried  
 meeting graves so much disliked!  
 We had a voice with which to ride any breeze  
 which received strays destituted by wars  
 and rekindled the hope of free thinking  
 near the ruins of Matlotleng  
 the pride of Tshosa, son of Motsisi!

Motlase Mogotsi/Rustenburg

**I'M AFRAID TO GO HOME**

Miles away and behind closed doors.  
 My wife Lorato, fully dressed, and busy with supper.  
 Although singing joyfully awaiting me, she'll sleep  
 cold today.

Through the forest, behind mountains –  
 Muffled voices are there, waiting . . . thus, I'm afraid  
 to go home.

Under eyes of frightened stars, here I am, alone and  
 afraid to go home.

Loneliness, watching me through the powers of the night  
 here I am, alone and afraid to go home.

Ah, life in wild forest, frightened heart, oh, yes, my  
 wife Lorato will sleep alone tonight.

Miles away and behind closed doors.  
 My wife Lorato, fully dressed, and busy with supper.

Motlase Mogotsi/Rustenburg

**THIS OUR LAND**

You did not want to take my hand  
 in this our very own land –

Like you I came from this very earth  
 Like yours it is the land of my birth –

I too love the table mountain  
 I also love the very same city fountain –

I love the birds as they sing in the trees  
 I love the wide open spaces and the breeze –

Like your heart mine cries out too  
 when I see the beauty of our skies so blue –

Yet, in this our very land  
 I may not take you by the hand –

For yours is white and mine is black  
 And here life may not be like that  
 Even though our hearts sing the same tune  
 Even though our eyes shine for the same desert dune.

Noorie Cassim/Kimberley

**WE KNOW LOVE**

Oh people you shall not drown in your tears  
 But tears shall bathe your wounds.

Oh people, you shall not die from hunger  
 But hunger shall feed your souls.

Oh people, you are not weak in your suffering  
 But strong and brave with knowing.

Oh people, if you have known struggle  
 Only then are you capable of loving.

Oh people, be aware of the love you have

Let not your tears submerge it  
 Let not your hunger eat it  
 Let not your suffering destroy it –

Oh people, bitterness does not replace a grain of love:  
 Let us be awake in our love.

Noorie Cassim/Kimberley



The name **MADI** is derived from the acronym made from the first letters in music, arts and drama, and the i is taken from literature. This is, in short, what this Katlehong-based literary group is all about.

In its infancy the group has already brought together a number of up and coming Katlehong artists, poets, writers and dramatists.

Top of the group's regular activities is the **Madi Arts Fair**. The first of these monthly Fairs was in January where **CYA's** musical group, **Babupi**, were the central attraction, and an extract from Matsemela Manaka's play, **Egoli**, was performed.

A weekly Arts Academy for the serious study of the arts, conducted by invited experts, is run by the group at the Katlehong Art Centre in Phooko Section.

Madi is destined to be a milestone in the appreciation of the arts in Katlehong. Madi writers who have appeared in previous issues of Staffrider are **Letshaba Thubela** and **Moloto wa Moloto**.

**THE MOON AND THE SUN**

Created in Time  
Both belong above.  
Each seems to hate the other,  
For the one's existence depends  
on the other's disappearance.

How striking a similarity  
Is posed by man.  
Just like the moon and the sun  
Men assume  
One man's poison  
Is another man's meat.

At our peril they thrive,  
Our tears bring them joy  
Though their time has run out,  
And the sun must shine, the moon must go  
Albeit for a while:  
so they were created in Time.

**Tebello Radebe**

**LOVE**

Mother, what is love?  
Is love to love anyone of the opposite sex?  
Is it to love my fellow man?

Love is said to be free,  
not so?  
But for me love is not free.  
If love is free  
Why can't I love  
everybody on earth?

Love is said to be a winner?  
Now I know who is the best loser.  
When I was a child  
I loved everybody  
through the help of Modimo

But now my love isn't as free  
as before  
for my love is oppressed  
by molao

And my love turns  
to hate.  
How I, who used to hate hate before  
love hate now!

**Maupa Kadiake**

**TSHISA-NYAMA**

The very fact that it is isolated  
From other shops proves the reality:  
This a Bantu Special Restaurant  
Owned by all Italian team-mates.

The pap, you braai till it turns chocolate brown  
The meat and the wors, you leave in the red oven  
Till it resembles our customers' colour.  
The binnegoetes, you leave half-raw, half-cooked.

The shop, you don't label the name.  
The tables must be of hard steel, the chairs as well.  
The plates must be of aluminium,  
The spoons, big, round and rusty.

The advertisement must be fuming smoke  
That is burning meat and pap.  
Let a Bantu man call it Tshisa-nyama,  
We don't mind the queries and all such.

The soup must be made from a cheap recipe,  
The ingredients as costless as ever.  
The sweets must be sticky, and also Dube-Dubes.  
Cigarettes? mainly B.B., Lexington and Mboza.

When he orders he must be as audible as a motor horn.  
Should he warble like a swallowing Bull,  
Give him any item in front of you –  
He'll not lodge even a single complaint.

Business manners – not applicable to him.  
Just shout at him: 'Funani Bhizzah?'  
He'll never wrinkle – 'Funa Pap en Steik!'  
And then draw shekels from a dirty horseshoe-pouch.

Same, must be wrapped in an inky Newspaper  
He must eat outside on the dusty stoep  
Who does he think will clean for him  
After finishing with all those remnants?

The suitable drinks served are usually:  
AI Mageu, Hubby-bubbly and Pint –  
If he wants something decent, try next door!  
We sell only Bantu appetising stuff here.

He must eat like a pig stuck in the mud,  
His teeth, must emphasize the echo of the  
Battle with the whitish-pink coarse tongue.  
He's mos never taught any table decency!

It is a restaurant designed solely for Bantus.  
No other race has any business to interfere,  
The food sold here is absolutely fire-smelling:  
Sies! I'll never eat that kind of junk! Ga!

**Tshisa Thixo safa Yindelelo!**

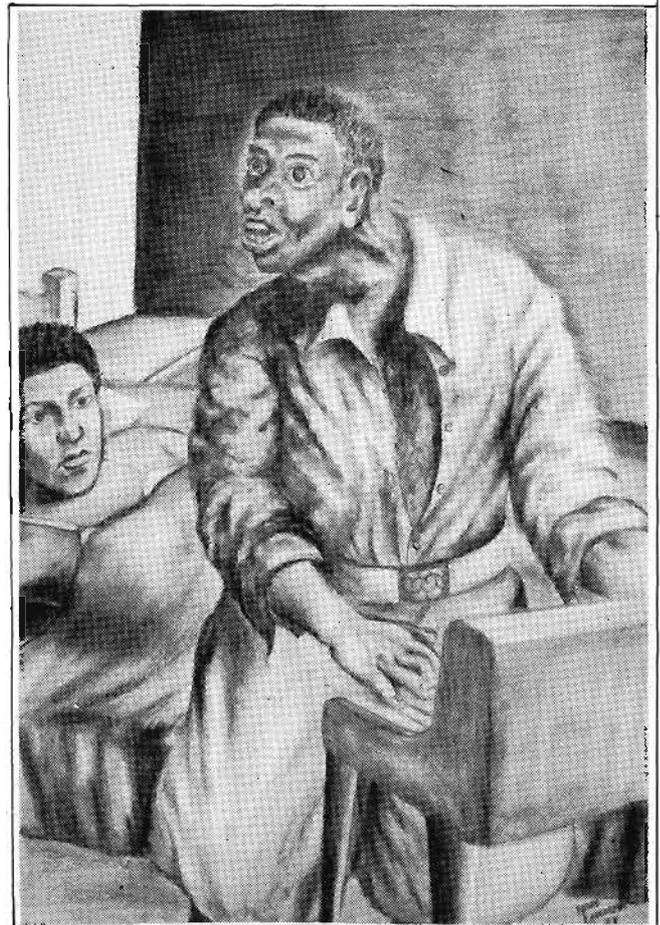
**Daizer Mqhaba**



Napo Mokoena/ *Untitled*



Moses Setlo/ *Dancing Mmatbitelo*



Napo Mokoena/ *Infatuation*

**THE WRECK**

Man in himself is born to die.  
He comes forth in bloom and freshness,  
like a flower to droop and wither away  
under the very influences which at first  
he successfully resists.

Man in himself and in his history is like a ship at sea,  
at first riding triumphantly over the waters  
in which he at last, be the voyage long or short  
sinks and disappears.

Death is passed upon all men,  
for that all have sinned.  
It is appointed unto men once to die,  
and however brightly or usefully a man  
may pursue his course here, warding off  
the power under which eventually he will succumb,  
yet the time comes when he must bow  
to the power of death.

Man in his brightest day  
is but a ship in trim,  
with all her sails set,  
but sooner or later she must become a wreck,  
and the greater or grander the ship,  
the greater the wreck.  
And so shall the end of man be,  
for he is a sinner  
and the wages of death is sin.

Death is appointed unto men because of sin.  
But after this is the judgement.  
This is the second death.

So, every man must one day come to the end  
Of his particular road,  
When his journey through life  
is concluded: and the man who  
is good at anything ought not to  
calculate his chances of living or dying.

**Bonang Mohale**

**MY NAME**

*Nomgqibelo Ncamisile Mnqhibisa*

Look what they have done to my name . . .  
the wonderful name of my great-great-grandmothers  
*Nomgqibelo Ncamisile Mnqhibisa*

The burly bureaucrat was surprised.  
What he heard was music to his ears  
'Wat is daai, sè nou weer?'  
'I am from Chief Daluxolo Velayigodle of emaMpodweni  
And my name is *Nomgqibelo Ncamisile Mnqhibisa.*'

Messia, help me!  
My name is so simple  
and yet so meaningful,  
but to this man it is trash . . .

He gives me a name  
Convenient enough to answer his whim:  
I end up being  
Maria . . .  
I . . .  
*Nomgqibelo Ncamisile Mnqhibisa.*

**Magoleng wa Selepe**



Moses Setlo/ *The Tough Bite*



Moses Sedo/ *Midnight Story*

## AWAKENING/ a story by/AMELIA HOUSE

Into the fleapit. A collection of drunks, junkies, prostitutes, robbers — a gathering of human débris. Although trying to hide himself, the fat, little man in the corner was perhaps most noticeable of all. He clutched a satchel under one arm, while he tried to wipe the dirt off his neat, dark-blue, pin-striped suit. His round face and bald head shone although this belied the dullness he felt inside. Two women chatted loudly as they leaned against a side wall. Their hair had been freshly hot-combed for the evening's work; lips were made rounder and fuller with pillar-box red lipstick. Both smoked defiantly. Their 'Evening-in-Paris' perfume would normally be offensively overpowering but here it was a welcomed smell. It penetrated the mixture of lingering *dagga*, sour wine and beer, sweat and urine. Two drunks lay, out cold, on the floor. A number of other regulars filled the pit. They were the night's take and would appear before the magistrate in the morning.

'Here's a teacher. Perhaps you can teach him something. They're the high and mighty, hey!' cackled the policeman.

'How's about a show then?' shouted one of the customers.

'Yea. Down, Mr. Library. Teach them to say "Please, my Basie!" Do it nicely down on your knees.'

Eric had no will to argue.

'That's nice. Hands together. Hey, you, join the show. You can piss all over this nice teacher.'

A tough looking young man stepped forward. Even in his complete abjection, Eric sensed that this scene had been staged before. The other actors were regulars in their roles. Eric realised he could only endure this by removing his mind from this terrible scene.

At the desk, the clerk for the night was going through Eric's belongings. He was a middle-aged man who had not progressed beyond sergeant. A kindly man who believed in giving the offenders a chance to mend their ways. When he joined the service, he believed he would be able to affect some change. He found Eric's name and address in his wallet. He recognised it as that of the postman on their beat.

'I thought he looked familiar. Those young policemen seem to belong to another breed. They would hate to see any offender go straight. They delight in crime. Seek out crime or even create it. I wish I had the courage to speak out. I'm sure Eric Peterson is innocent. If I speak out now I will probably be dis-

missed and lose my pension.'

Sergeant de Vos had witnessed these scenes nightly but he had grown tired of crusading — tilting at windmills.

'If I call Mr. Peterson now, he will be able to fetch his son before midnight. Eric will then not have to appear in court. Strange though, I thought his son didn't smoke or drink. That family doesn't deserve the disgrace.'

Sergeant de Vos almost welcomed the commotion he heard from the cells. He could not risk the other policemen knowing of the phone call.

For Eric it had been another late evening. He had to attend lectures at the University after a day's teaching. He taught English and Science at the High School and was studying at night to complete his Bachelor's Degree in English and Economics. Every Wednesday evening he worked in the library until it closed at half-past nine. He had to sprint to the stop to get the last bus down to the railway station. After a long day, he did not want to face a three mile walk.

Tonight the streets were deserted. He felt as if everybody had gone to shelter from a threatening storm.

**You students spend time on Ancient History and don't know what's happening right now.**

'I seem to be the only one around tonight. I didn't see Dr. Jay in the library,' he chatted to the bus driver.

Normally a White driver might resent the over-friendliness from a Coloured, but this driver had driven the Varsity bus so long that he knew most of the students.

'Dr. Jay probably knew how to save his skin. Got away early. Agitator. They can give him a fancy title — Professor of African Studies — he's nothing but a damn Communist. I wouldn't be driving the bus if I didn't have to. It's the bread and butter for my family. Today was terrible.'

'What happened?'

'Where've you been? Everybody was warned to stay home because of the riots.'

'What riots?'

'Didn't you hear the radio? I suppose you were busy in the archives. You students spend time on Ancient History and don't know what's happening right now. That's education for you. I hope my children learn more useful things.'

'Who started the riots?'

'I was driving up the road when I saw the huge crowd of natives. They were like swarming locusts.'

'I suppose there were not more than fifty. Even ten Blacks would be a crowd to you.'

'I mean hundreds. They were singing and shouting.'

'Singing is no crime.'

The driver ignored Eric's interruption.

'A young boy led them. I won't be surprised if he isn't a Varsity student. Give those people a little education and they all become agitators. What does the native want with education?'

Eric did not want to hear a long tirade about the ungratefulness of the native, but he was anxious to find out the events of the day. He felt as if he had emerged from hibernation. He let the driver drone on.

'That young boy led the group from Langa all the way to Cape Town. That's easy twenty miles, I guess. They went to the Court House, Caledon Square, with some petition.'

'Lord knows they have enough to complain about,' muttered Eric.

'Their leader made a big speech. He said they had no weapons. It was a peaceful demonstration. Any fool knows those *knobkieries* they walk with are powerful weapons.'

'Hardly a match for guns.'

'They demanded this, that and the other. The Commandant was clever though. He said he would speak to the leader if the crowd went away.'

'So the people once more fell for that old trick.'

'You know, those stupid people had to be shot at first before they would go away. I suppose the Commandant is still speaking to their leader.'

'You mean he was arrested,' Eric involuntarily commented.

'No. He was allowed to go in with his petition.' The driver pretended not to know the true nature of the interview. 'Those peaceful *Kaffirs* swarmed into a riot. Their swinging *kieries* caused as much damage as locusts do to a crop. I'll be glad to be home. My wife must be worried. Emergency radio messages were broadcast. Warnings to clear the streets.'

'How many shots were fired by the police?'

The driver still ignored Eric's comments.

'The shopkeepers quickly bolted their stores. The *kieries* smashed windows and displays were looted. The damage was terrible.'

'How many were shot in the back?'

'Their leader's interview will be a long one.'

'They were betrayed if he was arrested. What else can we expect?'

'Why do you Coloureds at Varsity always side with the Natives?'

'We all belong to the Oppressed.'

'You all become Communists at that place. What can you expect — when even a Native is a Professor. Your parents want you to be decent. My children will not go up that mountain to that ivy-covered building — Communist breeding place. They'll go to Stellenbosch.'

Eric did not care to comment.

'At Stellenbosch they will know they are *Afrikaners*.

The driver had started on one of his favourite topics.

'There are too many Jews at this place. The Ikies try to be nice to everybody. That doesn't work. We can't all be bosses. As we *Afrikaners* say, if I'm boss and you're boss, who will grease the wagon wheels?'

Eric retreated to his reading.

He could not concentrate. He thought of Dr. Jay. They usually rode the bus together. Had he heard of the riots? Dr. Jay lived in Langa.

As the bus reached the railway station, Eric recalled the driver's account. The police were out in force. With truncheons and guns at the ready, they were prepared for an invasion.

Just as Eric got to the station, he saw Dr. Jay get out of a car.

Dr. Jay was immediately pounced on.

'Where's your pass, *Kaffir*?' the policeman demanded.

Dr. Jay fumbled untidily in the pockets of his neat dark-blue pinstriped suit. His satchel was pulled out of his hand, the contents strewn on the ground.

'Quick. Your pass!'

'That's Professor Jay. How can you treat him like that?' Eric blurred.

'Shut up. Do you want to be arrested for obstructing justice?'

Dr. Jay attempted to retrieve his books and papers. He joined them as he was knocked down.

'You Communists teach decent *Kaffirs* to riot. You're the cause of the trouble we had today.'

Eric's train arrived. How could he erase the picture of Dr. Jay on the pavement amid his books? He could not concentrate on his reading. Usually he buried himself in a book for the half-hour ride. Tonight he stared blankly out the window at the dark mountain. Table Mountain seemed to cast a shadow over the whole world tonight.

'Good evening, Teach. Gotta cigarette for me?'

Eric continued to stare.

'I'm asking nicely, Teach. All I want is a cigarette,' he nudged Eric.

'Oh, yes. I don't smoke, but here you can buy some.'

The next moment Eric had knuckle-dusters under his nose. The *skolly* stood over him.

'I'm the gentle fellow. I do like your watch. I'm not violent. I annex property peaceably.'

Eric wanted to protest. That was the first watch he ever owned — bought with his first pay cheque. He handed over his watch. He knew better than to argue. Two other *skollies* were watching.

'Tell us the time on your own Big Ben.'

'He doesn't know how to tell time,' teased one of the two onlookers.

The one had put on the watch but he still stood over Eric as if deciding what next to annex.



'Hey, pal, leave the teacher alone,' one whined. 'I know his Dad. Used to teach me Sunday School.'

Even Eric almost joined in the laughter that was evoked by the idea that any of them had attended Sunday School.

Eric offered no comment. He knew the rules. If he tried to defend himself, he might be beaten up, even stripped. He did not want to relive that experience. That had happened to him in College.

Although the *skollies* terrified Eric, he could not help feeling a sadness at the waste of their lives. They could be making a positive contribution to their community. A few of the *skollies* came from good homes, but they allowed themselves to be ruled by the 'rough leaders.' Some of them even had some schooling. They bolstered their manhood with *dagga* and knife-fights. None of them had regular jobs, so they preyed mainly on the 'decent people' in their own community. They wore pants cut off below the knees, caps with peaks to the side or back. They walked with a special skip-step — both hands in pants' pockets stuck out to the sides. They usually had gang affiliations and often congregated on street corners. There they rolled dice, sang and smoked *dagga*. Although the community feared

them, their ready wit and sense of humour were admired and copied.

'Kenilworth. Kenilw-o-r-th . . . Wynberg . . . next stop!' the conductor shouted.

Home was near. He could almost smell the good food. What a long day.

He was out and headed for the bridge before the train had completely stopped. Home. Then he remembered that the bridge was now 'Whites Only.' He doubled back to the other end of the platform. He had to use the subway. On this station the policemen were also well represented. Their absence would have surprised him. Only two other passengers had got off. Here too the people seemed in hiding. He felt the need to get home quickly.

He ran down the steps and jumped the last two. Instead of landing on his feet, he found himself carried a few paces by two policemen.

'Where do you think you're going? You're not supposed to be on the streets.'

'Ja. Everybody was warned to be off the streets.'

'I've been to the library.'

'An educated Coloured, *geleerde Hotnot*. You've been to the bar. Look how drunk you are.'

'I'm not drunk. I don't drink.'

'Shut up. *Hou jou bék, Hotnot!*

A kick landed. He was bounced from one policeman to the other. Satchel ripped out of his hands. Contents on the ground. Was he watching a replay of the Dr. Jay incident? Was it really happening to him?

'Communist books, hey?'

The books and papers were trampled on. Eric watched his term's work disappear.

One policeman produced bottles of wine. He put one into Eric's satchel.

'You don't drink? What's this wine doing in your bag?'

Eric opened his mouth to protest. The other policeman had opened a bottle. He poured the wine into Eric's mouth and over his clothing.

'Don't be so greedy. You can't drink quick enough. Why do you spill so much? Look at your clothes.'

'Constable, do you think this man is drunk?'

'Stinking drunk!'

Eric looked like a confused little boy between the burly policemen. He was often mistaken for one of the senior students. His students called him 'the absent-minded professor' because he was always lost in his own world. He was more comfortable with books than people. At home he was adored by his two sisters who never failed to wait up for him every night. His parents still

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protected him as if he were in junior school.

'Come from the library? Where's your books? Only a bottle of wine. *Dronklap*, drunkard.'

'Sies! You're stinking. All Coloureds drink cheap wine.'

Handcuffs slapped on.

Eric tried to say something. The policemen were enjoying their jokes and did not want to be interrupted. One slapped him across the face. Knocked his glasses off.

'Come, *jong, kom*. We're not going to carry you. You have to walk. Are you

too drunk to walk? We'll drag you.'

Eric decided to comply. The humiliating parade up Main Road and Church Street to the police station must be endured.

Into the flea pit.

'You, punk, do you enjoy pissing over somebody? Being piss-drunk you have enough for your show. *Sies*. You're too weak to say no to that pig! Mr. Tough, like hell.'

Eric heard one of the women trying to put an end to the show.

'You enjoyed the show before.'

'Yes. You and another Mr. Tough.'

You both looked so stupid.'

'I'll do it to you if you don't shut up. Then your Evening-in-pissland-Paris will smell real good.'

A flashing knife signalled a free-for-all. Some of the regulars took their chance to land a few blows on the policemen in the scramble. The policemen had to take the blows during their efforts to restore order.

Eric wished he had the courage to land a few on those policemen as he crawled to the side of the cell to avoid the feet and fists as best he could.

## KLIPSPRUIT



Ingoapele Madingoane's epic poem, *black trial*, became part of a new popular culture before it was ever printed. Many thousands of people have heard him read, often backed by the musicians and poets of the MIHLOTI GROUP. *black trial* is often recited by other performers, and is fast becoming a part of the lives of its audience. It will be published by Ravan Press in March, as part of Madingoane's first book, *africa my beginning*. The cover drawing is by Fikile.

In this issue we publish an extract from *black trial*.

little hector died and africa went  
on mourning  
for the other three onkgopotse mapetla abantu biko  
the others as they said

ancestors of africa  
fulanis of nigeria jies of uganda  
eastafrican mbutis abantu tirikis  
you've taken away from us  
spirits of your power  
as ancestors of africa

nigeria uganda congo & liberia  
leaders have emerged without power  
sufficient  
to help africa shake off this burden  
ancestors of africa

the strumming of tabane  
the emphasis of bebyi  
traditional cowhide sounds  
from thobejane's african drums  
medupe's meditations might have been  
enough music and message  
in the service of all men  
ancestors of africa

ancestors of africa oh hear our cries  
the rivers and valleys have turned red  
fields and bushes have gone bare  
while you went to ask  
for permit  
tarzan is trekking our bases  
ancestors of africa your black gold has  
gone

colourful ancestors of africa  
ancestors of africa oh hear our cries

in the heart of africa africans shall meet as one  
and africa uta swemakiswahili to seal the african bond before  
i die

how i long to be there  
in that part of you africa  
and drink from the calabash  
umuthi we inkululeko  
before i die  
how i long to be there africa  
where all of africa shall dance marabi  
from the beat malombo  
while elders drink pombe  
from likhamba eligaywe o-makoti  
be-sizwe before i die  
how i long africa  
to see strong warriors singing  
and  
chanting songs of expectation on the  
african soil

i would be so glad if i too was one  
before i die  
how i long to be loved africa by that  
african woman in africa  
as lonely as the river Nile in the blazing  
desert sahara waiting  
for the man of her heart to slip on  
that canemade ring on the finger that  
points out

the path to our future  
before i die  
how i long africa o swema kiswahili  
to appear african as africa  
have with me a family to love  
i would be glad that i was black  
before i die

**WHY, TUMELO MY SON?** *a short story by* **Mandla Sibeko**

Many people saw him coming with the paper bag. As he approached the Anglican Church, he joined the chorus sung before entering. The young people within the church were jubilant to see him. This was their leader, the chairman of the Crusade.

Quite a lot was done on that day by the youth, by way of drowning frustration before it drowned them. Late in the afternoon they left the church in groups, filled with jubilation. Tumelo, the chairman, was the last to leave the vicinity. He had locked the church and closed the windows as usual.

Rev. Ntokozo and his wife, Ma-Moriti as she was commonly known, were proud of this young man Tumelo. They loved him for his character, his ability to organize and motivate the youth. He wasn't a member of their denomination, but of their society. To him barriers of difference had melted. He could speak close to six of the languages spoken by their various neighbours, though by nationality he was a Tswana.

On that very same night a tragic incident occurred. The Anglican Church was blown to smithereens by a bomb. This occurred at about 10 p.m. The rumours of this incident spread to the whole township in less than an hour. At 3 a.m. the next day, Tumelo was picked up by the Security Police.

'Church Blown Up! Young man arrested!' This was the style of the headlines that morning. Members of the church, milling like bees early in the morning at the scene, were murmuring and whispering to each other. The news got around that Tumelo had been arrested. One church elder exploded: 'That young bastard, leaving his cursed denomination to do this here! Why were Rev. Ntokozo and Ma-Moriti so blind!' Someone backing up the old man from the crowd said: 'He wanted to establish a god-cursed inter-denominational youth movement. Now look at the results!'

This was the hardest blow to Rev. Ntokozo and his wife, Ma-Moriti. Of all people, how could Tumelo be re-

sponsible for such a thing? It was alleged that he had brought a paper bag along the day before. Their trust in this young man whom they had loved eroded, leaving the dongsas of despair and hate. The church authorities were surely going to denounce them for ever accepting an outsider who was so destructive.

At Tumelo's home they were not shocked when the cops came to pick him up, for this was not the first time. But when news reports in the press were read the next morning, despair descended upon them, too. Both parents could not believe what they read. Tokoloho, the younger sister of Tumelo, even dared to denounce the reported news as an outright lie. She was determined to dig out the truth about the whole matter.

The following day came the most shattering news: 'YOUNG MAN COMMITS SUICIDE! DENIED ALLEGATIONS OF BOMBING THE CHURCH!' The young man who had been arrested in connection with the bombing of the church had hanged himself in his cell.

Tumelo wasn't the suicidal type. It was unbelievable. The youth crusade vowed to find the people responsible for the destruction of the church and revenge Tumelo's death. To Tumelo's parents this was a blow beyond recovery. They were thrown into a deep melancholia and their mental state wandered forever in the thin borderline that separates the sane from the insane. Tumelo's funeral drew thousands of people, some coming from afar. It was one funeral that will never be forgotten by the people there. Rev. Ntokozo was pardoned by the church elders for what occurred but he could not pardon himself for cursing and condemning Tumelo. Somehow it was evident that Tumelo was innocent.

Tokoloho, Tumelo's sister whose heart was hardened by this occurrence, and her inner yearnings for justice and freedom deepened, almost went crazy. She felt it her duty to clear the name of her brother. When she picked up a piece of paper advertising Zambian vinegar at

the ruins of the church, it dawned on her that a petrol bomb had been used in blowing up the church. The pieces of bottle which might once have contained the petrol were nowhere to be found. It had been alleged that a Russian bomb had been used by Tumelo.

Tokoloho met individual members of the Crusade and re-organized them. Their new meeting place became her home. She showed them what she had discovered in the ruins of the church. Tshidi, one member of the Crusade, was the first to recognize that piece of paper. Yes she had seen it on the bottle which was carried by Tshokolo, one of her suitors. It dawned on her that Tshokolo was an informer, and an arch-rival of the late Tumelo. Tshokolo's sister, who was offered a scholarship to Zambia, had brought some Zambian vinegar home. She said it was particularly tasty.

The members of the youth crusade went to Tshokolo's home and demanded that he show them a bottle of Zambian vinegar. Tshokolo, shocked by the discovery, confessed to bombing the church and telling the cops that Tumelo had, on the grounds that he had seen him carrying a paper bag. Tshokolo's confession gave a new complexion to the whole matter. The three cops who had interrogated Tumelo confessed to having beaten him during the interrogation, which resulted in his losing consciousness and never again regaining it. Tshokolo was sentenced to eight years in prison for sabotage. The three cops each got five years in prison for the murder.

The church has been re-constructed and next to it is the large youth centre which was constructed by the community. Tokoloho is now the ever-jovial leader of the youth crusade which holds its meetings there. Many constructive ideas for the benefit of society are put into practice here. The Rev. and Ma-moriti love Tokoloho very much — this may be in part the payment of a debt. Tokoloho's parents are both in a mental asylum and may never leave it.

**WHAT IS DEATH?**

Mother, what is death?  
Death is a stray bullet,  
That hit your sister at school.  
Father, what is death?  
Death is when your brother  
Dies in detention.  
Teacher, what is death?

Death is deep sleep.  
Doctor, what is death?  
Death is when brains and heart  
Cease to function.  
Hangman, what is death?  
Death is a day's job.  
Priest, what is death?  
Death is a chariot which  
Takes us to our Heavenly Father,

To live everlasting life.  
Grave-digger, what is death?  
Death is hardwork for me.  
Undertaker, what is death?  
Death is profit.  
When they cry all the way to the cemetery  
I laugh all the way to the bank.

**Abia Ramalebo Diutloileng**

## SHARPEVILLE

### THREE POEMS BY MATIME PAPANE AND THAMSANQA ZONDO

#### BURNING HUT

It burns  
And rains ashes  
Down to the ochre  
Smearred and hardened  
By those hard and black fingers  
Of an Ndebele maid.

And now it smells,  
Making fuel  
For a downfall  
To its own destruction.

Quiet down, fire  
Slow up your roar:  
Do not molest  
These souls,  
Souls in flames,  
Dead souls.

Ndebele clan  
Take hold of your power  
Thatch is burning

Hurry up, woman  
Incite the river  
To a mere metre's distance  
And bring thence the liquid  
For your burning hut,  
Quench your soul's thirst  
And rescue your art:  
African hut,  
Mighty art.

Matime Papane/Sharpeville

#### STAFFRIDER

I ride  
And hang  
On a moving locomotive,  
My soul  
It hangs in air.  
I am a staffrider:  
My life  
It is staffriding.

I go to school  
To Unisa  
To 'Turf' and all:  
My life is staffridden,  
My future  
It is bleak.  
I  
And my life  
We live  
A life unworthy:  
I am a staffrider.

I turn  
By that Eloff,  
By that Commissioner:  
'Dompas!'  
They seek me out  
For a book unworthy:  
I am a staffrider.  
I am black  
I am a staffrider.

I sleep  
In my box  
Away from pass-men  
But a knock  
Comes at my window  
Seeking my soul  
For a permit  
For a pass:  
I am a staffrider.

My life  
Is a number,  
My life  
It is not worth a history,  
An absurd story.  
I live  
Like a staffrider  
On the pavement  
By the wheels  
Of the S.A.R. loco's.

I weep  
By day  
And by night, out  
I cry  
Like an orphan  
Like a widow  
For her widower:  
I am hungry  
And staffriding,  
My life  
An uncertain life.

High up on a crane  
I toil,  
Build,  
And smarten this city.  
Low down  
On a pavement  
I beg  
Like a leper:  
I am hungry,  
Unemployed or not,  
My life the  
Life of a staffrider.

Guns and bullets  
They barrel  
And brim  
On my side  
Of the cities  
I've built:  
They want my soul,  
My trespass.  
Right here  
I've laboured,  
Right here  
I'll be shot:  
I am black,  
I am a staffrider

Matime Papane/Sharpeville

#### DEATH WITHOUT COMPROMISE

He who has no heart knows no compromise,  
He who knows change knows he cannot  
compromise change,  
For the truth of change is the truth of  
growth,  
And today Azania stands on the threshold of  
justice and liberty.

Hearty men in harmony with justice  
Experience the joyous pains of change,  
But the heartless experience the sting of that  
pain.

Sweet are the fruits of pain,  
And sour the fruits of pain:  
For now Azania moves and the apples of life  
Are at hand: Eat Brother! Eat Sister!  
Be happy in suffering, for opium is sent  
packing,  
And change is on the doormat of my father's  
house.

But for a heartless man life is vanity,  
And vanity knows no compromise:  
An enemy of mankind.  
In vanity they move and monopolise,  
And you and me are their objects.  
But for reality we stand,  
'For life is earnest' –  
And for that we die, and must die.

How cruel death seems to be,  
And how painless it is,  
In it change is not compromised,  
And great is the man who knows this fact,  
And experiences this fact.

But woe to men of vanity  
In the alleys of arrogance and ignorance they  
move,  
In luxury the dance! dance! dance!  
They don't know this fact: *a great man has  
died.*

Like the sun, Azania rose on that day, for a  
Flower of progress died, and scattered  
Its celestial seeds:  
On fertile soil did they fall,  
And the sun of Azania became hot  
As it rose,  
And it rained as the sun set.

Thamsanqa Zondo/Sharpeville

## RIVA/a story by/Richard Rive

A cold, misty July afternoon about twenty years ago. I first met Riva Lipschitz under the most unusual circumstances. At that time I was a first year student majoring in English at University, one of the rare Coloured students then enrolled at Cape Town. When I first saw her Riva's age seemed indefinable. Late thirties? Forty perhaps? Certainly more than twenty years older than I was. The place we met in was as unusual as her appearance. The Rangers' hut at the top of Table Mountain near the Hely Hutchinson Reservoir, three thousand feet above Cape Town.

George, Leonard and I had been climbing all day. George was talkative, an extrovert, given to clowning. Leonard was his exact opposite, shy and introspective. We had gone through High School together but after matriculating they had gone to work while I had won a scholarship which enabled me to proceed to University. We had been climbing without rest all afternoon, scrambling over rugged rocks damp with bracken and heavy with mist. Twice we were lost on the path from India Ravine through Echo Valley. Now soaking wet and tired we were finally in the vicinity of the Rangers' hut where we knew we would find shelter and warmth. Some ranger or other would be off duty and keep the fire warm and going. Someone with a sense of humour had called the hut *At Last*. It couldn't be the rangers for they never spoke English. On the way we passed the hut belonging to the white Mountain Club, and slightly below that was another hut reserved for members of the Coloured Club. I made some remark about the White club house and the fact that prejudice had permeated even to the top of Table Mountain.

'For that matter we would not even be allowed into the Coloured Mountain Club hut,' George remarked, serious for once.

'And why not?'

'Because, dear brother Paul, to get in you can't only be Coloured, but you must also be not too Coloured. You must have the right complexion, the right sort of hair, the right address and speak the right sort of Walmer Estate English.'

'You mean I might not make it?'

'I mean exactly that.'

I made rapid mental calculations. I was rather dark, had short, curly hair, came from Caledon Street in District Six, but spoke English reasonably well. After all I was majoring in it at a White

University. What more could one want?

'I'm sure that at a pinch I could make it,' I teased George. 'I speak English beautifully and am educated well beyond my intelligence.'

'My deal Paul, it won't help. You are far too Coloured, University of Cape Town and all. You are far, far too brown. And in addition you have a lousy address.'

I collapsed in mock horror. 'You can't hold all that against me.'

Leonard grinned. He was not one for saying much.

We trudged on, instinctively skirting both club huts as widely as possible, until we reached *At last*, which was ten minutes slogging away, just over the next ridge. A large main room with a very welcome fire going in the cast-iron stove. How the hell did they get that stove up there when our haversacks felt like lead? Running off the main room were two tiny bedrooms belonging to each of the rangers. We removed damp haversacks and sleeping bags then took off damp boots and stockings. Both rangers were off duty and made room for us at the fire. They were small, wiry Plattelanders; a hard breed of men with wide-eyed, yellow faces, short hair and high cheekbones. They spoke a pleasant, soft, guttural Afrikaans with a distinct Malmesbury brogue, and broke into easy laughter especially when they tried to speak English. The smell of warming bodies filled the room and steam rose from our wet shirts and shorts. It became uncomfortably hot and I felt sleepy, so decided to retire to one of the bedrooms, crawl into my bag and read myself to sleep. I lit a lantern and quietly left the group. George was teasing the rangers and insisting that they speak English. I was reading a novel about the massacre in the ravines of Babi Yar, gripping and revolting; a bit out of place in the unnatural calm at the top of a cold, wet mountain. I was beginning to doze off comfortably when the main door of the hut burst open and a blast of cold air swept through the entire place, almost extinguishing the lantern. Before I could shout anything there were loud protests from the main room. The door slammed shut again and then followed what sounded like a muffled apology. A long pause, then I made out George saying something. There was a short snort which was followed by peals of loud, uncontrolled laughter. I felt it was uncanny. The snort, then the rumbling laughter growing in intensity, then stopping abruptly.

By now I was wide awake and curi-

ous to know to whom the laugh belonged, though far too self-conscious to join the group immediately. I strained to hear scraps of conversation. Now and then I could make out George's voice and the low, soft Afrikaans of the rangers. There was also another voice which sounded feminine, but nevertheless harsh and screechy. My curiosity was getting the better of me. I climbed out of the sleeping bag and as unobtrusively as possible joined the group around the fire. The newcomer was a gaunt, angular White woman, extremely unattractive, looking incongruous in heavy, ill-fitting mountaineering clothes. She was the centre of the discussion and enjoying it. She was in the middle of making a point when she spotted me. Her finger remained poised in midair.

'And who may I ask is that?' She stared at me. I looked back into her hard, expressionless grey eyes.

'Will someone answer me?'

'Who?' George asked grinning at my obvious discomfit

'Him. That's who.'

'Oh him?' George laughed. 'He's Paul. He's the greatest literary genius the Coloured people have produced this decade. He's written a poem.'

'How exciting,' she dismissed me. The others laughed. They were obviously under her spell. 'Let me introduce you. This is Professor Paul. First year B.A., University of Cape Town.'

'Cut it out,' I said very annoyed at him. George ignored my remark.

'And you are? I have already forgotten.'

She made a mock, ludicrous bow. 'Riva Lipschitz. Madame Riva Lipschitz. The greatest Jewish watch-repairer and mountaineer in Cape Town. Display shop, 352 Long Street.'

'Alright, you've made your point. Professor Paul — Madame Riva Lipschitz.'

I mumbled a greeting, keeping well in the background. I was determined not to participate in any conversation. I found George's flattering her loathsome. The bantering continued to the amusement of the two rangers. Leonard smiled sympathetically at me. I remained poker-faced waiting for an opportunity when I could slip away. George made some amusing remark (I was not listening) and Riva snorted and started to laugh. So that was where it came from. She saw the look of surprise on my face and stopped abruptly.

'What's wrong, Professor? Don't you like the way I laugh?'

'I'm sorry, I wasn't even thinking of

it.'

'It makes no difference whether you were or not. Nevertheless I hate being ignored. If the others can treat me with the respect due to me, why can't you? I'm like a queen, am I not George?' I wasn't sure whether she was serious or not.

'You certainly are like a queen.'

'Everyone loves me except the Professor. Maybe he thinks too much.'

'Maybe he thinks too much of himself,' George added.

She snorted and started to laugh at his witticism. George glowed with pride. I took in her ridiculous figure and dress. She was wearing a little knitted skull-cap, far too small for her, from which wisps of mousey hair were sticking. A thin face, hard around the mouth and grey eyes, with a large nose I had seen in caricatures of Jews. She seemed flat-chested under her thick jersey which ran down to incredible stick-thin legs stuck into heavy woollen stockings and heavily studded climbing boots.

'Come on, Paul, be nice to Riva,' George encouraged.

'Madame Riva Lipschitz, thank you. Don't you think I look like a queen, Professor?'

I maintained my frigid silence.

'Your Professor obviously does not seem over-friendly. Don't you like Whites, Professor? I like everyone. I came over specially to be friendly with you people.'

'Whom are you referring to as *you people*?' I was getting angry. She seemed temporarily thrown off her guard at my reaction, but immediately controlled herself and broke into a snort.

'The professor is extremely sensitive. You should have warned me. He doesn't like me but we shall remain friends all the same; won't we, Professor?'

She shot out her hand for me to kiss. I ignored it. She turned back to George and for the rest of her stay pretended I was not present. When everyone was busy talking I slipped out quietly and returned to the bedroom.

Although falling asleep, I could pick up scraps of conversation. George seemed to be explaining away my reaction, playing the clown to her queen. Then they forgot all about me. I must have dozed off for I awoke suddenly to find someone shaking my shoulder. It was Leonard.

'Would you like to come with us?'

'Where to?'

'Riva's Mountain Club hut. She's invited us over for coffee, and to meet Simon, whoever he is.'

'No, I don't think I'll go.'

'You mustn't take her too seriously.'

'I don't. Only I don't like her type and the way George is playing up to her. Who the hell does she think she is, after all? What does she want with us?'

'I really don't know. You heard she said she was a watch-repairer somewhere in Long Street. Be reasonable, Paul. She's just trying to be friendly.'

'While playing the bloody queen? Whom does she think she is because she's White.'

'Don't be like that. Come along with us. She's just another person.'

George appeared grinning widely. He attempted an imitation of Riva's snort.

'You coming or not?' he asked laughing. For that moment I disliked him intensely.

'I'm certainly not.' I rolled over in my bag to sleep.

'Allright, if that's how you feel.'

I heard Riva calling for him, then after a time she shouted 'Goodbye, Professor, see you again some time.' Then she snorted and they went laughing out at the door. The rangers were speaking softly and I joined them around the fire then fell asleep there. I dreamt of Riva striding with heavy, impatient boots and thin-stick legs over mountains of dead bodies in the ravines of Babi Yar. She was snorting and laughing while pushing bodies aside, climbing ever upwards over dead arms and legs.

It must have been much later when I awoke to the door's opening and a stream of cold air rushing into the room. The fire had died down and the rangers were sleeping in their rooms. George and Leonard were stomping and beating the cold out of their bodies.

'You awake, Paul?' George shouted. Leonard shook me gently.

'What scared you?' George asked, 'Why didn't you come and have coffee with the queen of Table Mountain?'

'I can't stand her type. I wonder how you can.'

'Come off it, Paul. She's great fun.' George attempted a snort and then collapsed with laughter.

'Shut up, you fool. You'll wake up the rangers. What the hell did she want here?'

George sat up, tears running down his cheeks. He spluttered and it produced more laughter. 'She was just being friendly, dear brother Paul, just being friendly. Fraternal greetings from her Mountain club.'

'Her White Mountain club?'

'Well yes, if you put it that way, her White Mountain club. She could hardly join the Coloured one, now, could she? Wrong hair, wrong address, wrong laugh.'

'I don't care where she goes as long you keep her away from me. I have no

need to play up to Jews and Whites.'

'Now really, Paul,' George seemed hurt. 'Are you anti-Semitic as well as being anti-White?' My remark must have hit home.

'No, I'm only anti-Riva Lipschitz.'

'Well anyhow, I like the way she laughs.' He attempted another imitation, but when he started to snort he choked and collapsed to the floor coughing and spluttering. I rolled over in my bag to sleep.

Three months later I was in the vicinity of Upper Long Street. George worked as a clerk at a furniture store in Bree Street. I had been busy with an assignment in the Hiddingh Hall library and had finished earlier than expected. I had not seen him since we had last gone mountaineering, so strolled across to the place where he worked. I wanted to ask about himself, what he had been doing since last we met, about Riva. A senior clerk told me that he had not come in that day. I wandered around aimlessly, at a loss what to do next. I peered into second-hand shops without any real interest. It was late afternoon on a dull, overcast day and it was rapidly getting darker with the promise of rain in the air. Upper Long Street and its surrounding lanes seemed more depressing, more beaten up than the rest of the city. Even more so than District Six. Victorian double-storied buildings containing mean shops on the ground floors spilled over into mean side-streets and lanes. To catch a bus home meant walking all the way down to the bottom of Adderley Street. I might as well walk all the way back. Caledon Street, the noise, dirt and squalor. My mood was as depressing as my immediate surroundings. I did not wish to stay where I was and at the same time did not wish to go home immediately. What was the number she had said? 352 or 325? I peered through the windows of second-hand bookshops without any wish to go inside and browse. 352, yes that was it. Or 325? In any case I had no money to buy books even if I had the inclination to do so. Had George been at work he might have been able to shake me out of this mood, raise my spirits.

I was now past the swimming baths. A dirty fly-spotted delicatessen store. There was no number on the door, but the name was boldly displayed. *Madeira Fruiterers*. Must be owned by some homesick Portuguese. Next to it what seemed like a dark and dingy watch-maker's. *Lipschitz - Master Jewellers*. This must be it. I decided to enter. A shabby, squat, balding man adjusted an eye-piece he was wearing and looked up from a work-bench cluttered with assor-

ted, broken watches.

'Excuse me, are you Mr. Lipschitz?' I wondered whether I should add 'Master-Jeweller'.

'What exactly do you want?' He had not answered my question. 'What can I do for you?' His accent was guttural and foreign. I thought of Babi Yar. I was about to apologise and say that I had made some mistake when from the far side of the shop came an unmistakable snort.

'My goodness, if it isn't the Professor!' and then the familiar laugh. Riva came from behind a counter. My eyes had become accustomed to the gloomy interior. The squat man was working from the light filtering in through a dirty window. Rickety showcases and counters cluttered with watches and cheap trinkets. A cat-bin, still wet and smelling pungently stood against the far counter.

'What brings the Professor here? Coming to visit me?' She nodded to the squat man indicating that all was in order. He had already shoved back his eye piece and was immersed in his work.

'Come to visit the queen?'

This was absurd. I could not imagine anything less regal, more incongruous. Riva, a queen. As gaunt as she had looked in the Rangers's hut. Now wearing an unattractive blouse and old-fashioned skirt. Her face as narrow, strained and unattractive as ever. I had to say something, explain my presence.

'I was just passing.'

'That's what they all say. George said so last time.'

What the hell did that mean? I started to feel uncomfortable. She looked at me almost coyly. Then she turned to the squat man.

'Simon, I think I'll pack up now. I have a visitor.' He showed no sign that he had heard her. She took a shabby coat from a hook.

'Will you be late tonight?' she asked him. Simon grumbled some unintelligible reply. Was this Simon whom George and Leonard had met? Simon the mountaineer? He looked most unlike a mountaineer. Who the hell was he then? Her boss? Husband? Lover? Lipschitz — the Master Jeweller? Or was she Lipschitz, the Master Jeweller? That seemed most unlikely. Riva nodded to me to follow. I did so as there was no alternative. Outside it was dark already.

'I live two blocks down. Come along and have some tea.' She did not wait for a reply but began walking briskly, taking long strides. I followed as best I could half a pace behind.

'Walk next to me,' she almost commanded. I did so. Why was I going with her? The last thing I wanted was tea.

'Nasty weather,' she said, 'Bad for climbing.' Table Mountain was wrapped in a dark mist. It was obviously ridiculous for anyone to climb at five o'clock on a weekday afternoon in heavy weather like this. Nobody would be crazy enough. Except George perhaps.

'George,' she said as if reading my thoughts. 'George. What was the other one's name?'

'Leonard.'

'Oh yes, Leonard, I haven't seen him since the mountain. How is he getting on?' I was panting to keep up with her. 'I don't see much of them except when we go climbing together. Leonard works in Epping and George is in Bree Street.'

'I know about George.' How the hell did she?

'I've come from his work. I wanted to see him but he hasn't come in today.'

'Yes, I knew he wouldn't be in. So you came to see me instead? I somehow knew that one day you would put in an appearance.'



How the hell did she know? Was she in contact with George? I remained quiet, out of breath with the effort of keeping up with her. What on earth made me go into the shop of Lipschitz — Master Jeweller? Who the hell was Lipschitz — Master Jeweller?

The conversation had stopped. She continued the brisk pace, taking her fast, incongruous strides. Like stepping from rock to rock up Blinkwater Ravine, or Babi Yar.

'Here we are.' She stopped abruptly in front of an old triple-storied Victorian building with brown paint peeling off its walls. On the upper floors were wide balconies ringed with wrought-iron gates. The main entrance was cluttered with spilling refuse bins.

'I'm on the first floor.'

We mounted a rickety staircase, then a landing and a long, dark passage lit at intervals by a solitary electric bulb. All the doors, where these could be made out, looked alike. Riva stopped before one and rummaged in her bag for a key. Next to the door was a cat litter smell-

ing sharply. The same cat?

'Here we are.' She unlocked the door, entered and switched on a light. I was hesitant about following her inside.

'It's quite safe. I won't rape you,' she snorted. This was a coarse remark. I waited for her to laugh but she did not. I entered, blinking my eyes. Large, high-ceilinged, cavernous bed-sitter with a kitchen and toilet running off it. The room was gloomy and dusty. A double-bed, round table, two uncomfortable-looking chairs and a dressing table covered with bric-a-brac. There was a heavy smell of mildew permeating everything. The whole building smelt of mildew. Why a double-bed? For her alone or Simon and herself?

'You live here?' It was a silly question and I knew it. I wanted to ask 'You live here alone or does Simon live here also?' Why should I bother about Simon?

'Yes, I live here. Have a seat. The bed's more comfortable to sit on.' I chose one of the chairs. It creaked as I settled into it. All the furniture must have been bought from second-hand junk shops. Or maybe it came with the room. Nothing was modern. Jewish, Victorian, or what I imagined Jewish Victorian to be. Dickensian in a sort of decaying nineteenth century way. Riva took off her coat. She was all bustle.

'Let's have some tea. I'll put on the water.' Before I could refuse she disappeared into the kitchen. I must leave now. The surroundings were far too depressing. Riva was far too depressing. I remained as if glued to my seat. She reappeared. Now to make my apologies. I spoke as delicately as I could, but it came out all wrongly.

'I'm very sorry, but I won't be able to stay for tea. You see, I really can't stay. I must get home. I have lots of work to do. An exam tomorrow. Social Anthropology.'

'The trouble with you, Professor, is that you are far too clever, but not clever enough.' She sounded annoyed. 'Maybe you work too hard, far too hard. Have some tea before you go.' There was a twinkle in her eye again. 'Or are you afraid of me?'

I held my breath, expecting her to laugh but she did not. A long pause.

'No', I said at last, 'No, I'm not afraid of you. I really do have an exam tomorrow. You must believe me. I was on my way home. I was hoping to see George.'

'Yes, I know, and he wasn't at work. You've said so before.'

'I really must leave now.'

'Without first having tea? That would be anti-social. An intellectual like you should know that.'

## CAPE TOWN

'But I don't want any tea, thanks.'  
The conversation was going around in meaningless circles. Why the hell could I not go if I wished to?

'You really are afraid of me. I can see that.'

'I must go.'

'And not have tea with the queen? Is it because I'm White? Or Jewish? Or because I live in a room like this?'

I wanted to say 'It's because you're you. Why can't you leave me alone?' I got up determined to leave.

'Why did you come with me in the first place?'

This was an unfair question. I had not asked to come along. There was a hiss from the kitchen where the water was boiling over onto the plate.

'I don't know why I came. Maybe it was because you asked me.'

'You could have refused.'

'I tried to.'

'But not hard enough.'

'Look, I'm going now. I have overstayed my time.'

'Just a second.' She disappeared into the kitchen. I could hear her switching off the stove then the clinking of cups. I stood at the door waiting for her to appear before leaving.

She entered with a tray containing the tea things and a plate with some assorted biscuits.

'No thank you,' I said determined that nothing would keep me, 'I said I was leaving and I am.'

She put the tray on the table. 'All-

right then, Professor. If you must then you must. Don't let me keep you any longer.' She looked almost pathetic that moment, staring dejectedly at the tray. This was not the Riva I knew. She was straining to control herself. I felt dirty, sordid, sorry for her.

'Goodbye,' I said hastily and hurried out into the passage. I bumped into someone. Simon looked up surprised, then mumbled some excuse. He looked at me puzzled and then entered the room.

As I swiftly ran down the stairs I heard her snorting. Short pause and then peals of uncontrolled laughter. I stumbled out into Long Street.

## CAPE POETS

F.H. Adkins, Roy Joseph Cotton, Peter Horn, Mike Dues, Allan Kolski Horwitz, Keith Adams, Avril Swart

### SETTING THE MAP

In the hard times  
even the firefly loses its glow  
and the world is possessed  
by a damp melancholy.

I left my wife in her village:

she with her running limbs,  
the coals of night swept from their place  
there in her eyes.

And she worked the vegetable patch  
of her mother.

I took my strength to the library:

hours of solemn ticking  
as I sifted the archives  
for facts of my people.

Sometimes I was lost in the quiet of turning pages.  
They seemed like ears of corn in a breeze.

The narrative of conquest and loss  
like a blanket in clashing wools.

We will claim our land

on the basis of blood  
and the droppings of cattle  
and the newly established right of the dispossessed

to their lives.

Allan Kolski Horwitz

### ENCOUNTER IN THE NIGHT

Going home in a mellowed mood,  
the brandy still retaining some of its well-being  
thoughts of good things flowing  
and then  
seeing the dreaded van and its occupants  
feeling the fear pouring out of its victims  
my colour making me helpless  
and offering easy excuses  
compromising with silent curses:  
sleep would not come that night  
and only when death is no longer a stranger  
will I be truly free  
and act accordingly.

Keith Adams

### STRANDFONTEIN CLIFFLIGHT

Orange bar  
Mourning-dove grey  
Greenfinger  
Stonypeak sunset

Avril Swart

### LONG ODDS

Religio  
Uno Domino,  
Smik-smak  
Sidewalk gamester –  
Tables tremble  
Gongs ring,  
It's lunchtime  
In long street

Avril Swart

**SUB CONTINENT**

Out,  
Far out  
Beyond the outer reaches of consciousness  
Hangs a cloud  
of fear – and doubt

Paralysed around the perimeter  
Skulking in the stolid eye  
of the storm  
Surrounded  
By frenzied, fear-filled  
Knife-edged living  
                  loving  
                  warcloud swirling madness  
They sit –

Out,  
Far out  
Beyond the outer fringes  
of experience  
Hangs a cloud of paralysing indecision  
                  Fearful  
                  Filled with hate  
                  and anger  
                  Stultifying, ruling  
                  Stifling the mind:  
                  Fear and doubt  
                  feed on one another  
                  Living, loving  
                  Headlong bound  
                  In angry flight.

They scream with fear,  
Or is it laughter,  
Mad, hysterical –

It's getting fainter now  
It's going further away  
Far  
away  
Way beyond reach  
Way beyond the outstretched  
arms of reason  
Far beyond the hand  
of human friendship

F.H. Adkins

**TRANSKEI NIGHT**  
(from *Transkei Poems*)

Sleep, sleep. The hills  
must sleep. The passion  
of the fields arouses  
the deathly owl. Foul, foul  
is the world where the  
maggot reigns supreme. Sturdy  
is the flock whose breathing  
quickens the dust. All the  
world's creatures must  
bathe their dreams in musk.

Roy Joseph Cotton.

**SILENCE IN JAIL!**

*Nothing was sadder  
there was no more saddening want  
than the deadly lack  
of music*

**Dennis Brutus**

They don't like music in prison  
so they banned Dennis Brutus's poems  
and Wopko Jensma's poems  
and Breyten Breytenbach's poems  
and Wally Serote's poems  
and Sipho Sepamla's poems  
and James Matthew's poems  
and my own poems

They hate music and poems  
and pictures and statutes  
they have cleaned out the country:  
there is silence between its bare walls  
the silence of bones in the desert  
cleaned by the vultures

But unaccountably  
music crosses the border  
on waves of ether  
through every crack  
between the heavily armed border posts

Peter Horn

**HUNGER WROTE THE EPITAPH**

this city  
pregnant with hunger  
grinding underfoot  
tons of cemented sweat  
whose swimming pools  
are catchment areas of tears  
whose towered names  
refuse to listen  
where cities  
are different nightfalls  
and one neon lit  
the other lit  
for stilling the hunger of men coming home  
ask him  
who only plods mechanical feet  
the marvels of the day  
ask him  
who stares at you from sockets  
gouged by his day  
ask him  
who knows his place  
by the ages of the day  
and could not befriend the moon here:  
I know you remember  
'our father . . . . .'

Mike Dues

## FOUR POEMS/Fezile Plam

Work by Guguletu writers Nkos'omzi Ngcukana and Zoli Kota will appear in the April issue of Staffrider.

## FACE OF AFRICA

To my left it's misery  
and to my right despair,  
'front of me a hazy future  
and down it's wealth  
a wealth I will never share  
up there it's distortion:

Your face, Africa  
spells nothing else but  
SHAME  
DISGRACE  
CRIME and  
SIN.

## ANDINALO

Police vans, fearful men  
In grey uniform and khaki,  
Raids, endless raids  
for the pass and permit:  
and you haven't got it Mama.  
'Ewe andinalo mnta'nam.'

Look at that:  
scattered all over the place  
men and women running  
as if pursued by a lion,  
and if they haven't got it, they have to run,  
and you too Mama.  
'Ibe andinalo mnta'nam.'

Little kids are crying:  
'Come back mama,  
you've forgotten my bread!  
But she keeps her pace  
saying, 'I cannot help it, my child!  
Andinalo!'

But I say: run Mama,  
Don't let them catch you.  
When Papa comes back and finds nobody  
at home  
he will understand; he's used to it,  
used to the miseries  
that have become his daily bread.

When darkness falls  
and you have been repersonalized,  
we will go back and console him:  
you will be able to restore that warmth  
and share your love.  
But now you have to run:  
you haven't got them,  
Pass or Permit.  
'Ibe andinalo mnta'nam.'

## LET THERE BE LOVE

If I'm to live  
And be happy  
don't harass me  
Let be,  
Let go,  
— Freedom!

Free to travel  
Share  
Free to think  
Create  
Free to work  
Wherever, at will,  
Make my contributions  
'Use my talents'.

Restrictions kill  
Reservation incites  
I should sing  
Let there be love.

## ODE OF A WOMAN

Then they splash  
in the water,  
then they dance  
clapping their little  
hands,  
then they sing  
young voices full of life:  
they're happy.

But what do I say  
when they come back  
and know they can  
only  
say *Mama*  
Eleven months of the year?

How does a young child  
love a stranger  
who comes into the family  
only ten days a year?  
Oh Nkosi Sincede!

BAYAJULA/KWA-THEMA



NEW WORK BY THE BAYAJULA ARTISTS/Madi Phala/Nhlanhla Xaba/  
Fikile Zulu/ *Next issue: Sam Nblangethwa.*

BAYAJULA POET/ Bonisile Motaung/ *Next issue: Zakbel' Amandla Mtsweni/  
Tim Dladla.*

*Poems by Bonisile Motaung have appeared in Staffrider No. 2 and Staffrider No. 3.*



Madi Phala/ *The Strength is sinking . . . go latihela madi metsing*

**BLACK WOMAN, BLACK WOMAN**

Black woman, black woman  
 Beautiful like sunset across the horizon,  
 With plaited hair and a face  
 Shining with vaseline, making her  
 More black in the night:  
 Her face wears the look of nature.

Black woman, black woman  
 She is a boat with sails  
 A captain and a soul  
 A boat sailing on stormy seas  
 Meeting rocks  
 Sometimes washed by rain  
 At times stormed by waves  
 Fighting against winds  
 That constantly change her course  
 Sea robbers fishing her cargo  
 Leave her anchored with hope

Black woman, black woman  
 She moves with the  
 Dignity of a funeral,  
 It is not tears  
 Shining in her eyes  
 But petals of blood  
 Mourning the history  
 Of her suffering:  
 Obituaries of her children  
 Deeply line her face  
 Leaving freckles to mark  
 Their graves.

Black woman, black woman  
 Laughs and  
 Screams  
 When the day is  
 Black  
 In the matchbox she  
 Proudly calls  
 'My house' though she never  
 Owns it,  
 When the curtains are closed  
 And the room is dark  
 And the air around  
 Is black,  
 Everything not herself is  
 Buried.

Black woman, black woman  
 My heart  
 Jumps  
 The  
 Toes squeeze  
 Blood boils through  
 The  
 Marrow,  
 Your thighs are  
 My sighs.  
 I shout  
 I  
 Weep  
 I  
 Scream  
 I  
 Laugh  
 Black woman, black woman  
 I  
 Love  
 You . . .

**Bonisile Joshua Motaung**



*Fikile Zulu/ Untitled*



*Nhlanhla Xaba/ Mementoes . . . carvings by the late artists on the outer portion of the cave*

**HOMAGE TO A MOTHER**

What a precious name,  
The name that stands by one's side  
at all times!  
It comforts and sympathizes  
with one  
In times of sorrow,  
It rejoices with one  
In times of happiness  
None can take your place  
'Cause of the unique warmth,  
Which makes the heart throb with joy.

**Anthony Makou**

**PLAY ME A SONG**

Oh! play me a song,  
A song that will heal my soul.  
My soul is hurt,  
Hurt by somebody . . .

Let it be tunes  
Once played by our Ancestors  
Those are the ones which  
Will heal the wound  
In my soul

If those tunes fail  
To heal my injured soul,  
Better go to a secluded place  
To search for tranquillity,  
And be like a hermit.

**Anthony Makou**

**A CHILD IS BORN**

Strewn leaves on the soil as usual,  
Naked branches jerking up and down,  
While a freshness in the dull breeze responds  
Like people outpacing each other, to awaken the world from  
its sleep.

The Child will be born, a name he will be given,  
A name that no-one ever thought will gather blood before  
gold

To liberate the sins of men.  
While in the day the sun is hot  
During the night the sky is clear and lit  
For the blind and lame to see and believe.  
Like Thomases we shall see, like Peters we shall believe.

**David Mphuso**

**HIDDEN SOUNDS**

From behind the misty hills  
Hidden behind the cloudy horizon  
There is a melody  
That's hard to hear.  
There wails a trombone  
With unwavering blasts  
Of certainty and confidence.  
It's like honey to the tongue,  
Like a seed to a bird,  
This melodious sound  
Which I can't enjoy.

I am like a caged dove.

There are pillars on both  
My wings,  
My feathers drop like citrus leaves:  
They fall in dirty water.  
They fall on muddy plains.  
Their beauty is no more  
Than a penny's worth.

**Anthony More**

**UPON THE FALL OF NIGHT**

When darkness descends  
Upon the dusty, turbulent earth,  
Clasping it in its claws,  
Crushing the small beautiful twig,  
Sucking  
The milky liquid of power while  
Castrating  
The delicate cells of manhood,  
Depriving the light of worthiness,

And when this night  
Comes down  
The light falters and dies.  
And when this dies  
The gods of darkness rejoice  
Upon this death of light.  
But light grins  
Upon its destruction  
by darkness,  
While the demons of darkness  
Smile  
Upon the failure of the happy  
Life.

And this powerful darkness  
Swallows the irregular form  
of this light,  
Driving it to total obscurity  
In its geometrical form,  
Reducing its efficiency to moronic  
Inefficiency,  
To efficient insanity,  
To progressive lunacy,  
When this darkness of night  
Descends.

**Anthony More.**

**SEFOFU**

(Blind man)

Staring in the dark,  
groping for luck,  
one day perhaps  
a miracle on the door raps,  
brightens the room  
and curses the doom  
of this darkness  
and sadness.

The darkness lingers on  
yet life goes on,  
shedding the lachrymal  
and being dismal  
won't drive the dark away  
and give sight today

He twists the cane  
the blind man  
some pennies to gain  
the blind man

He stands on cement  
the blind man  
sings for a cent  
the blind man

Glory to the kind men  
the pleading can is full  
gay is the blind man  
the pouch's gonna be full

The white stick gropes for home,  
the shoes shuffle, full of form,  
blind man, blind man  
sings a song:  
perhaps, one day  
I'll see the way

Rratau Mashigo

**WHOM TO BLAME?**

I am suffering. But why? I have just lost my job. Then look for another. But where to start looking? The police are all over, searching for 'jobless persons'. You explain to them, but they don't care. You ask your employer to give you a chance. He ignores you, so you go to the labour inspectors. They say: *Jy wil nie werk nie. Gaan terug na jou werk.* How can you *terug gaan*? You've been fired. Their answer is: *Ons sluit jou nou nou toe.*

Now where to go, I ask myself. I find a twenty cent coin in my pocket. With this I can only go to the beerhall to console myself. I do just that. Tomorrow I will go to the Labour Office for an endorsement stamp in my reference book. It's for my own safety. But which road shall I take to get there? The police are all over the place, especially on the roads leading to the Labour Office. No, I will remain indoors today. Perhaps it will be better tomorrow.

I wake early the next day and stand at the front gate watching the passers-by. I see one of my best friends.

*'Go slege, bathibile, mo gotlhe, useke wa leka le goruwa ka gati,'* he warns me. It's bad, they've closed everything off. Don't go out of the gate.

What to do? I want to work. The police are not to blame though. They have their instructions. So I stay at home. Then one night there is a banging on the doors and windows.

*'Poisa! Poisa! Vula! Vula!'*

I wake up and open for the *poisas*. I am aware that I am the culprit. There is no greeting from them.

*'Kewena mang monna? Kenna John pasa ya gago ekae? Areye areye Monna, apara ka pele in the land rover,'* the *poisa* says.

*'Is dit hy?'* the white constable asks the *poisa*.

*'Ja, Morena,'* the *poisa* answers.

*'Hoekom wil jy nie werk nie?'* he asks me. I do not answer; I am afraid. *'Nou gaan jy hard werk, vir niet,'* he says.

I am charged under Section 29. Who, I ask myself, is to blame?

Paul Khoza



Mzwakhe

Mzwakhe Nhlabatsi/Untitled drawing



**BOTSE BJA GAGWE**

Tlang le bogeng  
 Le bone — ke senonnodi sa mahlolephega  
 Le rego le a se hloka seboka  
 Ke itse go setsa  
 Ya bowa mafisa — nna ya nkgaoletša  
 Ya ntira makukwane  
 Ya ntšhupetša kotsi — go loba.

Bulang mahlo le bogeng  
 Ke naledi  
 Mahlo ke dipone, a bonogela ba masuana  
 A pokapokeletsa 'pelo tseo di lego tša gare ga maru  
 Ge re hlamula ka tša lerato.  
 Ke mathunyaane, ke botse bua naga ga se le lemologa  
 Nko ke magolo a sethaga  
 Molomo ke dikgabiši tša botsoro  
 Thonthodi sefahlogong go adile.

Tsinkelang  
 Gašang mahlo mmeleng  
 Le bone ge mabothakga a dirilwe  
 O hlophogile — o hlamegile · o beatsantšwa — bageso!  
 Letswele ke la mmatšhungwana  
 Ge a šišitše ra ngwaela motshubo pele — re akola ka letšatši  
 Noka ke sefagafaga  
 Ke dilo tša ga Mampa — a Mapagane.

A mathakga, beetse!  
 A botsoro, batho!  
 A bopilwe ke mang manongonongo?  
 Petlwane ke ya mang —  
 Ke ra lena le rego Bopedi bo le ela borwa,  
 Ge e se mpedi'a Seimela, kgagarana ya thaka ya marumo.  
 Kgaotsanga, go re tswari!

**Kanakana Lukbaimane**

*(For Thembeke)*

Love's labour  
 wrought you  
 to this hour:  
 you are new —  
 with inner strife  
 for fresh life.

You've pinched the last moon —  
 ray; *be* now karate-chops the swollen cocoon.

Next month innards of your brown  
 horizon descend: a bounty none should frown  
 upon; tarantism of the hearth  
 awaits the debris of birth!

**Nape 'a Motana**

**THE SUBLIME WITHIN**

How like a sweet song is my spirit  
 wherein thought, feeling, deed are  
 ballets in single harmony.  
 Like a silent lake is my mind  
 reflecting motion on its surface,  
 itself unmoved,  
 motionless  
 still.

It mirrors from moment to moment  
 the whole field of inner life  
 in entirety of truth:  
 be they dark desires or motives veiled,  
 corruption embalmed,  
 or, whether they be inner or outer masks  
 worn in subtle-sweet deceit  
 to blindfold my eye  
 to what I am —  
 the all-seeing mirror shines,  
 strips all,  
 and I stand naked as in noon-day.

The waves of desire rise  
 but to fall in this omniscient ocean of my mind.  
 Passion surges, rises, storms,  
 the ocean roars —  
 my mind reels — is tossed — almost lost;  
 self-awareness rescues me:  
 I am not lost in the storm,  
 the storm is lost in me.

Such transcendent stillness fills me —  
 freed from the space-and-time prison!  
 Neither past nor future:  
 actions having no reaction,  
 neither born in past,  
 nor bearing future.  
 But action incarnated as creation —  
 spontaneous, fresh, new, free . . .  
 . . . And the heart and soul of my desire is  
 that this spirit sublime lives ever, never to die . . .

Ashok Joshi

**CANDLE**

Dark-  
 ness plagues  
 my vague eyes  
 so a match  
 stick plants  
 a noisy kiss —  
 unctuous with  
 lemon life. This  
 candle, placental  
 to me has itself  
 a placenta that  
 n-i-b-b-l-e-s  
 the white body  
 to a wat'ry coffin.

**Nape 'a Motana**

A SON OF THE FIRST GENERATION / a story by Mtutuzeli Matshoba

*Of the two: To love or to hate — Which is the easier?*

The Tune-in

'What is it sonny?'

'A baby,' answered the one wearing a grey straw hat with a black band, and a tweed jacket with narrow lapels which was a size too big for him. He replied as from an empty and dejected soul.

'Hey, ndoda. What's wrong with you? Girl or boy?'

'Boy.'

The train staggered, heaved and swayed with its human load, and the hold-on straps hanging over our heads slipped in our grips as the weight of the passengers leaned heavily on us.

You might have thought that our destination was Pandemonium, capital of Blazes and that we were fast nearing it. The way we were sweating! Trickle of sweat tickled down the side of my ribs and cascaded over my brow.

Maybe it was the heat which vaporised the cheerfulness out of the young man's soul.

His friend wrestled a handkerchief out of his clothes and wiped his face: 'Shoo! Eight in the morning and the sun is already so damn hot! How the hell do *they* expect us to work in the frying heat?'

I couldn't guess who *they* were, but I thought how intransigent man can at times be. Never satisfied. Cold, rain and heat, conditions beyond his control, are all reasons for complaint.

'I reckon you're awed by your newly acquired fatherhood status, mfana. It is sometimes frightening to think that there's a new human being on troubled earth just because of you. To think that the new life is as delicate, as vulnerable and as mortal as yours; nothing permanent. I think death starts at conception, mfana. Growth is a slow death process. That's why people die naturally when they get too old.'

Great simple life concept, commuter train philosopher! His dome did not shine for nothing. Father of three, stable matrimony, social drinker, zestful worker, Sophiatown upbringing and four-room at Rockville. You can always tell the latter from the Afrikaans-sprinkled dialect.

His friend and co-worker, the younger man, was not listening. He looked as if a worm was gnawing at his heart.

Don't anyone say I was listening in on anybody. In the first place I never go

around with earplugs. And then, you see, they were talking through my head, my ears and consciousness forming a sort of crossed-line telephone system.

I guessed that he wanted to get something off his chest. He wanted to get rid of the worm perhaps.

'No one would be excited by finding himself a step-father first try, Bro Zakes.'

Bro Zakes raised his eyebrows dumb-foundedly. He blinked as if he had got something in his eye. 'You want to tell me the child is not yours?'

'Ya.'

'How can that be? Mos ub'umuskepa almost everyday uMartha . . .' His eyes blinked some more and seemed more mystified.

The voice of the younger man told of the pain in his soul. I knew from the mention of a girl's name that it was a pain of unrewarded love; of betrayed emotions. 'I took her home with me every day, Bro Zakes, I admit; but nature can never lie.'

'Why? How can you tell a baby a few hours old from the lump of meat that it is? Those who identified it concluded too early that it's not yours. They should wait until that meat takes human shape if they have doubts.'

The train snaked around a bend and they all fell on us again, distracting us for a moment while we sought to maintain balance.

'They did go to identify the child and they returned with the gifts they had taken with them. That means . . .'

'You didn't go and find out for yourself; why?'

Bro Zakes had to draw the information out of the young man, as it apparently sat heavy and deep in his soul. He must have truly loved the girl; gambled with his emotions. Like Dr. Faustus, sold his soul to Lucifer.

Before the lovelorn young man could reply, Bro Zakes continued: 'Hho-o . . . Kana, a child is not seen by men before it's ten days old and the umbilical cord has dried, fallen off and been buried.'

'I went, Bro Zakes. Couldn't wait for ten days and couldn't wait to hear from anybody else whatever it was that made them return with the gifts. Especially not from Auntie Abondabas.'

'Mbh . . . What was it?' Bro Zakes could not suppress the ring of intense, sympathetic curiosity in his voice.

I felt like aiding him to coax the answer out of his friend.

The Previous Day

His sister had welcomed him with the good news when they were passing the shops three hundred metres down the street from home. He had felt shy in front of so many people.

'It's a bonny boy, my brother. I knew Martha could never beat you to the winning post. When I 'phoned maternity and heard it was a boy I was so excited, dear brother!'

'Ek sé . . . come on Thembi, don't talk so loud. People are looking and listening. You're broadcasting to the whole world now.'

Those who had overheard had put on welcoming smiles of congratulation. He had experienced the feeling that he always enveloped his being when he heard he had passed a standard at school.

During his courtship of Martha it had occurred to him from time to time that he could never be sure how much he meant to her until she bore him a child. During her pregnancy he had lived for nothing else but pampering his 'ill madam'. She had been all his for all the period she had 'pushed the wheelbarrow,' no other creature in trousers giving her a second glance. He had grudgingly parted with every cent for dire necessities while he was saving for lobola. They would marry when the baby was weaned.

'Aunt Nellie, Aunt Thandi and Aunt Nomvula have already gone to see the child. The presents that we bought for his reception! He's going to be the best dressed newcomer on earth, my mother's child, I'm telling you.'

'To think that it will be ten days before I see them,' he remarked dreamily.

The sister had gone into a friend's house and he had continued alone. Alone with his exultation! Nature had seemed so mysterious to him and he had thought it was wonderful not to know the why and the how come of everything. Only the other day they had discussed life and death during their lunch break. The topic had been inspired by the death of an old man who had worked with them. Bro Zakes had said that life was both a passing phase and per-

perpetual state, limited by death but perpetuated in birth. They had all agreed that Madala, as they had nicknamed the late old man, was not dead but still living in his descendants who would also die but remain alive in their own offspring until the end of the world. He began to see Bro Zake's concept in a brighter light now that he had passed his life on to another human being.

Aunt Nomvula was the last to enter the house and the bundle of baby kits and the shawls which had been meant for Martha's mother were unmistakably still on her head as she sank low to avoid catching the top of the door-frame.

That was the moment he started feeling tremors deep down at the base of his immediate joy. They were supposed to return empty-handed, happily discussing a brand-new clansman! He had seen it happen around him for as long as he could remember. The birth of a normal human being was always reason for infinite jubilation, not the sombreness that he could make out four houses away. Was there something grossly wrong somewhere in the whole set-up?

The first thought to invade his throbbing mind was the safety of the mother and the child. His brain simply failed to register a possibility of such hideous proportions. He blotted it out, and the next thought seared through like a burning spear: had there been someone else, someone who had remained obscure until that final hour? At this reflection he felt the instinct to kill right in his marrow. If that were the case, he did not give a nip for life, existence or any of Bro Zake's hogwash about these two states of being... he did not care for anybody or anything in existence, let alone his own life and the life of whoever might have wronged him! Then came a slightly more acceptable likelihood: perhaps they had not been discharged from hospital, and that had been the cause of disappointment to his highly expectant folks. It had been a long time since a son had been added to the clan.

He had progressed by no more than a few faltering strides while seeking an explanation. Then his inner self challenged his will to a turbulent tug-of-war for his body, and he found himself standing in the middle of the dusty track like one trying to locate a vital factor in the shadows of his memory. Until he heard the hoarse warning in Sotho: 'Out of the way, mister. You wanna be trampled?' followed by a whistle and: 'FIRE-E-E-WOOD!' like a lost dog howling in the middle of the night. He moved out of the way to the side of the street and for a short period of awareness watched the wagon drawn

by a scrawny, dejected horse which seemed to have accepted ages ago that life was drawing a squeaky ten-foot wagon that sagged to one side on flat car wheels, under the weight of firewood and a ragged driver, through sandy streets all hot day long. The animal hung its head almost to the ground and did not bother to look where it was headed as long as the driver held the reins.

Ten minutes later he felt like killing the dog that attempted to prevent his entrance to the yard, and at the same time announced his advent against his wishes. He picked up a stone, and before he could throw the canine had vanished around the corner of the house.

There had been a shady movement behind the front-room window lace before Martha's elder sister opened the door and let him in with a smile which immediately betrayed her strong desire for the floor to gape and consume her.

'Where's Martha? Tell me Busi. She alright?'

Busi's eyes had flitted towards one of the doors. She had also stammered something which he had not even tried to grasp. His mind had been in that other room long before the rest of him had portered it there.

Busi had grown roots where she had been when she let him in.

#### Cupid's Targets

'Hey, sis... sorry, tu... ' The strange young man quickened his pace to catch up with Martha. She did not slow down to wait for him. Only one male voice meant anything to her and she could recognise it at a soccer cup final at Orlando Stadium. The man who was calling 'Please, sisi. Wait for me. We're going the same way...' was just blowing his breath to prove he was still alive as far as she was concerned.

He caught up and she felt his arm across her trim shoulders. She brushed it off as she would a fly: 'Don't touch me. You've no right to hug me,' she said without looking at him.

'Alright, if you think I've got leprosy,' the man said with mock pain in his voice.

'Oh,' — she looked up then, with big eyes that were as clear as a baby's — 'that hurt you? I didn't mean to.' She smiled to show it. That soothed the hurt look in the young man's face.

They turned up Eloff Street in the direction of Park Station. At half past four the evening bustle was beginning.

At twenty Martha was a fullblooded black lass. Warm but not excessive. Sensitive and woman enough to welcome

appreciation from more men than her Monde. She regarded the satisfaction she derived from her popularity with men as essential to her feminine ego, seeing no point in being a woman if one could not raise the pulses of men and attract love propositions wherever one went. However, she declined the latter advances courteously: 'I'm sorry, buti.'

'For what? Sorry that a man is attracted to you?'

'That I hear you talking but your words happen to be falling on barren soil.'

'What? You mean you're not interested? Then you're not woman enough.'

'Yes, I am. What brought you next to me if you think I'm not a woman?'

'I didn't know that you were an iceberg. A girl who does not enjoy being admired is not woman enough.'

'That's the trouble with you men. Can't give appreciation without expecting something in return. And I'm woman enough for a man in spite of your opinion to the contrary.' She thought of Monde and suddenly felt bored by the young man's company.

'What man? You mean I'm not one?' The young man felt really sore this time.

'For a man that's waiting for me at Park Station. And, you're also a man but, unfortunately for you, I happen to be engaged.'

'Hey, don't play that trick on me. Where's the ring to prove it?'

'I'm engaged at heart, brother. It does not take a gold and diamond ring for us to prove our love for each other. Those things are for whites and people with lots of money.'

The argument had carried on along those lines, until they descended onto the crowded platform where Monde waited for her at the same spot every evening. She suddenly stopped and reached out to slip her hand under his arm. 'Here's the guy I've been telling you about my friend,' she said.

Monde grinned and greeted: 'How's it mfo?'

The other one grunted, 'Sweet,' and sheepishly returned the grin. 'I thought she was lying about you. Anyway, so long and good luck to you lovebirds.'

'Who is he?'

'Ag, lovey. Just another one of the Park Station playboys trying his luck.'

'How did he fare?'

'Oh, Monde. Why ask me that? How do you expect me to reply?'

There was a short pause.

'Sorry, sweetheart. I'm both proud and jealous that other men confirm my fortune by trying their luck with you.'

He threw his arm around her and gave her an affectionate squeeze.

'I should be the one to apologize for allowing him to accompany me right up to you, darling,' she muttered softly, snuggling closer as if she expected them to fuse into one love being. 'It's as if I were showing off to you that there are always men trying to worm into my favours.'

They studied each other's faces like twins who had been separated for many years.

'When we first met you had lovers but you took me on. No harm in another guy seeing what I saw in you. It all depends on you to accept or reject them,' Monde said, trying to make her feel at ease.

'I never loved anybody before I found you — or was it you who found me?'

'It doesn't matter. We are one another's foundlings.' He gave her another squeeze.

'S'true, Monde! I never loved anybody else before you. That's why drink had been a prerequisite in all my associations with men. I had to have something with which to lessen the pain of my shame at being intimate with men I did not love. Had to be "anaesthetised before I was operated upon".'

'You talk as if you're the only person with a history. Always mentioning the past as if you lost something by dragging yourself out of a vicious way of life. What is it that you miss so much in the past, which makes you look back, heh sweetheart?' Monde asked, slightly disturbed at being reminded of the bygone days and the embarrassing lengths to which he had gone to convince Martha that one man was enough to make a woman happy and that HE was the man. His friends had made him an object of mockery for chasing one girl when the hunting grounds abounded with easy game.

Jabu, his best friend, had been the wettest blanket: 'Yissis, sonny! what has gone wrong with you?' he would ask, preparing to deride him.

Monde would not reply, knowing what was coming.

'You go on as if this girl has "dressed you in a heavy greatcoat," my friend. Look at Pinkie for instance. She is just plain crazy about you but you turn a blind eye and keep running after this kid that anybody can make for a bottle of beer. I bet she feeds you all the love potions in the market,' Jabu would continue to rail.

'You believe in potions?'

'Of course! Why not, if there are cases like you for proof? Who would believe that you're the same guy who only

yesterday, before you came across this girl, was preaching to me about the morals of drinking women?'

'That's exactly what I'm trying to discourage the poor girl from, Jabu. There's a lot of good in her but no one to appreciate it. In a way I'm trying to save a beautiful creature from the pit-falls of vice,' Monde would argue defensively.

'Oho. You're wasting your time, mfowethu, I don't want to lie.'

'We'll see.'

Jabu had seen for himself and even learned to appreciate Martha.

'No, love. You don't understand,' Martha explained. 'I don't miss the past. I'm always thinking how good my ancestors have been to me. What d'you think I'd be today because of men who appreciated me only because I wore skirts and kept a promise of ecstasy underneath them? I'd be counted among the Soweto human scraps I'm telling you, lovey.' She paused to look into his eyes and smile faintly, almost sadly. 'You came out of the blue and gave me all that a woman needs in order to feel fulfilled; you taught me to love.'

'I never taught you anything. I loved you in spite of everything.'

It was her turn to squeeze his hand. 'Thanks ever so much for that, papa. I wish all men were like you . . .'

The homeward-bound workers were swarming around them. The trains rumbled hollowly in and out of Johannesburg station. Stone-faced whites on platforms three and four. A youth in 'Lee' denim overalls, checkered shirt and perched white 'sporty' sun hat was teasing the whites: 'Hey, baasie!'

Some of the stone faces showed signs of response.

'Wat sê julle, kaffers? Ha, ha, ha!'

Some of the people on platform two chuckled at that. The stone faces snapped away, looking tormented.

'Hey, kaffers!'

Nobody looked this time.

'What's eating you? Why don't you make conversation, or at least smile to yourselves? Look at your faces . . . You all look like you drank poison . . . Or have you all been scolded . . . Or fired from work? . . . Tell us, we might be able to help . . .'

The nearby people on platform one and two had a refreshing laugh after a hard day's work. Those on platform three and four switched off their receivers and wished their train would arrive.

Our two lovers were swallowed in the buzzing life around them, although to them nothing else seemed to matter but themselves.

Their train clattered into platform two.

'Wait, lovergirl. Let me prepare to grab a seat . . .'

The middle coach they always boarded crawled past them and Monde dived inside through an open window and broke his fall on the dusty floor. Legs kicked in the air as men dived in and, before the train screeched to a halt, there were human clusters like rugby scrums at the doors.

Martha moved down to the coach Monde had entered and was caught in the whirlpool of jostling for some moments before she burst inside and rushed to Monde, who sat on the longitudinal seat with his legs wide apart, his hat next to him and a no-nonsense expression on his face to show that the seat had been 'booked' and any intruder was likely to incur his displeasure.

### The Way to Perdition

When eight of them — three 'teagirls' and five others from the manufacturing department — were called to the general manager's office a few minutes before they were due to knock off, they were all of one mind.

Martha found Maria and Mme Thandi already waiting solemnly opposite the closed office door. The rest of them who had been called were still changing out of their work clothes. She walked up the carpeted passage with arms folded across her chest and the general appearance of a child summoned for a tanning.

'What is it now Mme Thandi?' she inquired when she came to the two women.

Mme Thandi was equally confounded: 'Who knows, my child? I was only ordered here without any explanation as to why.'

'Don't be frightened, maan. Maybe we're going to receive wage rises.'

'Yo, Maria. I wouldn't cling to that hope if I were you. What if "bayadiliza"?'

The prospect of staff reduction was too much for Mme Thandi: 'Come on now girl. You're too pessimistic. The firm is doing well and they can't afford to chase people away — they'd lose business.'

'What can prevent them doing so? They might think that we have been working here too long and have developed ways to beat their security,' Martha replied, adamantly refusing to nurse any hopes.

Her fear was catching. Maria mused anxiously: 'Oh-h . . . You can say it again sisi. They can get rid of us at the bat of an eyelid and have us replaced by the first work-hour tomorrow. Just ima-

gine how many women throng Polly street, desperate for a job, these days.'

'Desperate for subsistence, my child. The fear of hunger is the driving force in our lives. Everything belongs to *them* and they hand out little doles for which we are forced to prostrate ourselves and lick their shoes or "bite each others' heels" to receive.'

'And 'struc, Mme Thandi. We might have been "pimped". You know, I don't trust that Sarah. The other day . . .'

'Sh-h-h, here they come,' Mme Thandi cautioned when the others came into view at the end of the passage.

The three of them fell silent and tried to study the attitude of the five approaching women from a distance. All but Sarah wore stricken faces.

Sarah was reassuring them: 'You'll see. He's only going to remind us about the party. You should be smiling because that means overtime pay.' She was the 'head-girl', if that is a suitable feminine gender for 'Induna' or 'baasboy'.

On the last day of October, the end of the financial year of the firm where Martha was employed to make tea for the fifty-two white male and female secretaries or clerks, who had seemed to be two sets — one male, one female — of 'multiplers' when she first arrived, a generous party was thrown for the white staff and they received their annual bonuses. The occasion naturally called for the extra services of the three 'girls' who made tea, plus a few other girls from the predominantly black manufacturing department. From the size of the ceremony one could deduce that the garments and draperies the firm dealt in earned considerable profits: the firm could afford to give its employees a free treat several times a year, but chose to make one big celebration of it. No, two celebrations, for the white and black workers separately.

The whites took the first turn and on this occasion drank like fish and ate like elephants. The blacks had their Christmas party when they received their 'presents' of towels and matching washrags, bed-spreads, table cloths, glass and teacup sets; even teetotalers broke their resolutions and helped themselves to the 'free' booze.

These events at work were nothing special to Martha and her colleagues. You could even say they regarded them as part of their duties, which in her case, being only making tea and running errands for the white employees, needed no detailed attention. Every day's work was completed that same day and did not carry over to the next. Small wonder then that, as the end of October drew near, the evaluation of the firm's financial position, necessitating celebra-

tion, was totally out of their minds.

The office door swung open and a grunt from inside told them to go in. As the others hesitated, Sarah led the way. They followed and spread to the right and left of the door behind them.

'Mind the wall girls,' the general manager warned from behind an acre of gleaming mahogany with gilded ballpens jutting out of a cobalt blue stand, two scarlet and cream-white telephones and a brown leather table mat on top. The off-white walls of the spacious room would embarrass a fly, and the ankle deep ocean-green carpet appeared not to have been made to be trodden underfoot. 'Mister Merwe', with a double chin, a glossy over-nourished pink skin and well-groomed black hair starting to grow white at the temples, looked like a Prime Minister.

Dawie Steenkamp entered the office and went to rest his athletic figure on the low window sill so that he seemed to be an appendage of the skyscrapers behind him. The girls stood still and waited.

'You all look nervous. I'm sorry to have called you in this manner. There's nothing to it except that next week . . . 'Merwe' spoke like a real Prime Minister. He proceeded to lay down what would be needed of the 'girls' the following Wednesday.

On their way home that evening Martha had told Monde about the arrangements.

'Nxa!'

'What's it, love?' Monde had asked with a ring of concern in his voice.

'Nothing. We've just been reminded that the end of the month is drawing near and there's going to be this party at work.'

'What's with it? Mos it's just part of your employment. Take it that way.'

She looked at him with disbelief written on her face: 'But that means I'll have to sleep at home to prepare myself. I can't go there dressed the way I like. I have to dress for a party, white style, it needs time to do that. I can't do it at your place. And you act as if you don't mind that we won't be together that night — why?'

'What difference does one night make, sweets? We'll be together the following night. Don't try to make me fret over it.'

'Actually, it's just that I didn't want to show up at home just yet. Wanted to show my mother that I'm a woman and can take care of myself. Last time I was there she told me about fornication and all that sort of old fashioned morality. I'll marry when I like; not when some-

one else feels it's time.'

Dawid Steenkamp

May had been his nannie.

May had been so dear to him and he to her that he had evolved an attachment akin to an Oedipus complex towards May and not to his natural, mother.

May's broad back had been so comfortable, soft and secure.

They had gone shopping with Bull, the Danish hound. They had gone walking to the verdant, willowy and tranquil parks all three of them together, although for some reason mysterious to his sprouting mind, May and Bull had confined themselves to the walks and would not go for a tumble on nature's carpet.

Their home, where they slept on an iron bed elevated with bricks, relaxed and listening to the radio in her own language which he was beginning to pick up in scraps, had been the servant's quarters of the large Steenkamp house.

The family could not take May to 'their' church on Sundays. So she and Dawie stayed behind and prepared dinner.

They could not go on holiday to the Natal coast without Dawie. So they had taken May along with them. She had remained knitting in the car when they had gone to cool off in the surf.

'Why won't you come May? Please do.' His innocent eyes had twinkled with ignorance.

'No, Dawie. I can't swim and I have no swimsuit.'

'Oh, May,' his eyes had made May feel a tinge of guilt.

'Honestly, I can't, Dawie. Now go on to mommy.'

'No. I want to stay with you and watch you knit . . . my May . . . You're my May; aren't you, May?'

'Yes, Dawie.'

'Father says "maid". I tell him it's May, not "maid".'

The jersey had been ready on his birthday, towards winter.

Five years later he was going to the Hoërskool in Vrystaat and May and he had stayed closer than ever. She had cried most and this had made him cry too. At eleven years of age he had slept in his own room, though it had been difficult to move him from May's room. In spite of this the bond between them had never loosened. She had accompanied him to the bus-stop in the mornings and waited for him in the afternoons out of an almost maternal love.

Her own children had been faraway in 'Zululand' and all the maternal care she might have bestowed on them had been showered on Dawie.

The whole family had tried all they could to treat her as one of them. But because of prejudices peculiar to this land there had been times when she had been reminded of her position in life — as in the church instance. However these had never rubbed off on Dawie, whose childish innocence of human evils had made him pure.

When the two older children had gone to the Hoërskool they had promised to write. They had neither kept the promises nor as much as sent regards in the letters to their parents. Only Bull the family dog had received greetings. Each time they had been home on vacation she had sensed that they had grown colder towards her. This had bled her heart but she had dismissed it as being part of life. Dawie would never change.

In spite of her trust in the little lad, he was leaving for the same Hoërskool and there was good reason to fear that the Hoërskool would do to him what it had done to the others. She had cried because of this and Dawie had cried because he had not been able to accept that he would not be with May for a long time.

At that time he had been a staunch believer in the cruelty of his parents. Separating him from his May! There were many schools everywhere in Johannesburg. Why did they have to send him to the Free State, many miles away from May?

They had taken him there by car and May had accompanied him to the gates of the Hoërskool. The gate-watch, an old white with a mole on a big nose had stopped her from going any further than the portals. Torrents of tears had marked the parting. Once the gates had clanged behind him and his parents who had taken him to the tight-lipped boarding master, they had been worlds apart.

The other children had given him hell for crying over a 'Bantu maid'. Everybody at the Hoërskool had seemed bent on subtly scarring his love for May.

The change had been remarkable. When he came home on holiday he had adopted a reserved attitude towards May, as if his schoolmates and teachers had kept a close but invisible watch on him.

With each succeeding term of school he had drifted further away from 'his' May. The latter had excused him by convincing herself that it was all because he had grown accustomed to living without her. When he had been un-

couth, as when he purposely referred to May's husband, when he had come to take her out on her day-off, as 'Your boyfriend is looking for you, May,' she had only reacted in an admonitory tone: 'But, child . . . that is my husband,' and chose to take it in her stride. 'Boys will always be boys. When they reach a certain stage of their lives they become incontinent of speech,' she had reflected afterwards.

Without contact with other people except his own kind at the Hoërskool, Dawie had become completely detached from May. He was now wholly 'on the other side' and inaccessible. What May had feared on his first departure had eventually been realised. The innocent little boy was gone and his place had been taken over by an almost callous youth who demanded to be addressed only in tongue-knotting Afrikaans and who seemed blindly to believe that all people of different descent from his were enemies bent on effacing his species from the world. He had become completely distrustful of humanity and himself untrustworthy — in that if this attitude were encouraged it could develop into an unshakeable prejudice which would affect his relationship with his human brothers, among whom he held the delicate position of self-appointed fashioner of destiny.

These meditative considerations about Dawie had deeply pained May's heart. She could not quite accept the fact that all the love she had showered on the boy when he was younger, and which had been rewarded with a pure child's love, could be so completely erased by later teachings of hatred and contempt. For this reason she had clung desperately to the hope that maturity and more experience would later give her 'white son, Dawie' a more rational outlook on life, and the memory of a black woman who had tried to sow an all-embracing love in his soul would linger in his mind.

However, May's stay with the Steenkamps was at its end. She never saw whether her hopes for Dawie were ever fulfilled. Having brought up the three children and seen the first daughter married, she found that only a daytime cook and house-cleaner was now required. Having no stable abode in Johannesburg, she had decided to retire and be forgotten in the parched valleys of KwaZulu, the land of her birth, among those of her contemporaries who had never lost themselves in the cities, but had returned to the old land, making way for their off-spring whose turn it was to venture out to try and eke out a living in the promisingly glittering cities.

### Party Day

The cheap alarm clock rang or rather rattled, at exactly half past four that morning, disturbing everybody's sleep in the hollow matchbox. Martha, being the one who had set it the previous night, jerked painfully out of her dreams in the twin bed she shared with her sister when she was at home.

Still dazed, she blindly patted the floor near the bed to locate the irritation and stop it. Then she searched for the candlestick with the matches on it.

The light brought her closer to full consciousness. Yawning audibly and stretching her arms until she heard the shoulders crackling, she sat there looking blankly at the gloomy candlelight, fighting the urge to succumb once more to the welcoming embrace of slumber.

She won by swinging her legs to the floor, whereupon the chill characteristic of matchbox architecture sent a reviving shiver through her body. The next moment all her senses were a hundred per cent awake.

After making the fire and putting the kettle on the stove she again had to resist the temptation of going back to wait in bed. The reason for her being up that early passed through her mind and she summarised her opinion of end-of-the-financial-year parties in her favourite three-letter exclamation: 'Noca!' and went to sit on the bench opposite the stove like a sad soul, her hand supporting her chin on her knee. She thought: why do they always have to be waited upon by us? Sis! Those women are just ornaments! She tried to remember when she had last woken up at her chosen time, except on Sundays. That brought Monde's encouraging image into her mind. When they were together it was not such a tough business to wake up and face a day of labour. If only he would pass at her place on his way to the station, so that they could go together as always. She knew he would come. It was one of the things she counted among her few blessings: to be in love with a man like Monde. There were few left like him. Everybody went to the shebeens.

By the time the kettle was humming she was feeling much more like a hard day's work. First rinsing the baby pail outside, she emptied the hot water into it, cooled it with two jugs from the 'emmer' under the kitchen table and went back to her room.

Her sister was awake: 'Thanks to your sleeping home last night, Mati. I would have overslept.'

'Didn't want to disturb you, sisi. Thought you still had time,' answered Martha, placing the pail on the floor and

removing her washing utensils from her bag.

Busi sat up in bed yawned and sighed; then said: 'You know Mati, I woke up as I was dreaming about you. I dreamt you and Monde were getting married.'

'Oh, sisi. How can you dream bad omens about me?'

'You're so superstitious, my mother's child. One would think you were born on the farm.'

After washing Martha dressed half-heartedly though with her usual care and without forgetting that the general manager had put it in no uncertain terms that they all had to appear in their 'Sunday best'.

She had chosen her favourite but rarely touched cool, sleeveless light blue silk maxi. The dress had been bought for big occasions and there were few such occurrences in her life.

After she had slipped it on her well-formed body she was not satisfied, but went ahead with matching accessories: a set of large navy blue beads, white ear-stones, a white girdle and blue-and-white soft leather shoes with heels which had led Monde to ask her if it were safe to walk on them. She added the finishing touches by painting her long nails a matching blue and adorning her delicately plaited hair with a pale artificial rose.

All through these preparations her sister helped her. 'Now you look like the queen of Sheba, beautiful sister. Abelungu bakho are going to wish they were black.'

When she looked into the wardrobe mirror she saw that Busi was not flattering her. She wished she were a model and not a tea-girl. Making tea was burying a talent, she thought.

Outside, Monde felt a tightening in his midriff. He experienced the same sensation after every short period apart from her. He knocked. The door opened and her pretty face peered from the shade of the house. Monde stepped into her freshly applied floral aura: 'Hey, you outshine the sunrise, girl!' His eyes absorbed every minute detail of her beauty.

'Awu, Monde. Don't exaggerate, 'she cooed, pretending not to believe the sincerity of the compliment.

Busi came out of the bedroom beaming all over: 'Oooh, hello squeeze! Where did you think you'd end up? You've promised a thousand times to pay me a visit, and you never did unless Martha was here. I've been waiting for a chance to tell you that you mustn't think I don't know that to you the only important person in this house is Mati.'

Monde waited smiling until Busi had

finished chiding before answering: 'There now, sis Busi. This is exactly what I fear even when I've decided to give you a surprise visit. I haven't got the guts to come because I know you'll swoop on me before I draw breath to present my excuse. You're too strict maan, sisi!'

'What's the use? What's the use of an excuse when I prepare everything and sit here waiting for Noah's dove? Even now I'm not prepared to listen to anything except: how's life treating you?'

'Just fine "squeezer". Only that last night was the longest in my life. I've discovered I can't live without her.'

'Oh, that's beautiful! Mati, you hear that? Don't play with this poor child. If I had the choice I'd take you to the Commissioners right now, before either of you gets other ideas.' Busi winked at Monde before retreating to the bedroom and leaving them alone.

'How d'you feel about going to work this morning?'

'I woke up angry and missing you. But now that you thought of coming it's like any other day.'

'Good, lovey. Are you ready? We must leave immediately to make the station on time.'

'Yes papa, I'm ready, but first you have to say hello to my mother.'

'Ag, Martha. You know I'm so afraid of her. Moreover she's still asleep. Why disturb her rest?' complained Monde.

'Never. She cannot be sleeping at this time. She's the first to regain consciousness in the morning. Come on in. It's been a long time since you saw her.'

Monde was about to utter a stronger protest against it when the o'lady spoke from her bedroom. 'Don't let him escape Mati. Bring him in here. Where have you seen a shy man?'

Not that Monde was shy. He remembered the days when he and the o'lady were arch-enemies, and he was always promised a charge of abduction for taking Martha out. But the o'lady had since given up, and learnt to like Monde when she realized that the two were so inseparable that the tradition she meant to uphold was of no account to them.

He braced himself and went to meet her.

At work — despite all the slit dresses, transparent blouses and bare backs on view — they buzzed around Martha like bees around a flower on a spring morning when she arrived. The incidence of accelerated pulses transcended the race spectrum. 'Men will be men, in spite of the Act,' she thought when she caught them eyeing her hungrily. If people could be charged for 'illegal' thoughts

all her white male colleagues would be guilty, beyond any doubt. For the first two hours the ladies did nothing but make their rounds of the offices to admire, envy, show-off, privately criticize and secretly hate one another. Were it not that she was only a black 'tea-girl', which disqualified her from competing as far as the white women were concerned, Martha would have been the mark of the most poisonous glances and asides.

Like most social gatherings the party started in low key with people chatting in subdued groups all around the large room (the 'Council Room' was its pretentious title on other occasions) while Martha and her black co-workers made endless trips to and from their kitchen which served as a bar. Martha regretted the high heels, and even her dress was largely covered by a white pinafore which fitted her snugly into her role in the party.

As more liquor was served it began to have its effect on the merrymakers and their initial reserve started crumbling. Male-female pairs separated themselves from the milling crowd and took to shady corners where, first cautiously, then boldly, they began to chip away at the bounds of conventional modesty.

Martha began slightly to enjoy the day when the men paused mid-sentence in conversation to scan her contours with laser-beam stares, earning the disapproval of their female partners. She was not pleased because the men were white but because they were men, and it amused her to note that no matter what kind of restriction was placed on them or what mode of behaviour was expected of them, they still could not be prevented from exercising their right to respond to femininity, in spite of a woman's colour. *Legally* she was not a woman to them, but *naturally* there was no way of excluding her from consciousness.

In the kitchen Mme Thandi and the others had appointed themselves 'tasters' and thus managed to keep up with the party spirit in the council room. Only Martha felt a bit bored, which Sarah quickly noticed. 'Come on, Martha. A little champagne wouldn't harm a baby. Just so's you don't feel out of place — come on, maan.'

'I wouldn't touch it in a million years Sarah, my darling, honestly. When I called it quits in this field I meant it.'

'Hawu? Don't say, my baby. People have said that and broken their resolutions as easily as the devil sinning' said Mme Thandi, jovially, drawing beer out of a can with a straw.

'Strue Mme Thandi, I wouldn't like to let the man in my life slip out of my

hands because of drink. He made me stop, and as long as he loves me I'll remain as dry as a desert.'

They laughed appreciatively at that: 'Yoo! Martha and that boy! But would he be so strict on you as not to overlook this one instance?'

'Oh Nkulukulu wami,' thought Martha. No one to support my floundering will power. Instead they are all begging me to take just one sip for the sake of the party. I would understand if that were the case.'

'They have their party in the other room and we have ours here in the kitchen. It's not that we are gatecrashing. We can't just sit and watch other people having a good time. We must partake somehow.'

She wished Monde had been with her to prevent her from doing what she was finding it hard to resist. 'If I had never started drinking in the first place! This poison must have a permanent effect on one's will to resist it. How long is it since I last took a strong drink, and here I find myself with my will power going brittle. Aga maan, as if I couldn't measure how much it would take to make me drunk. What? Kenna Mati, who is thinking this way? Noca! Why is the time dragging so slowly today? I wish they would finish. The world is easy to face without drink, but a sober world, not a drunk one. Lord! They're all so drunk and happy, getting happier by the moment and there's still so much left ...'

They heard a man's footsteps approaching the kitchen and with amazing reflexes everyone found something to do — rinsing glasses, packing empties, emptying crumbs — but their general manager, though also plastered, had noticed, for when he went into the kitchen he said: 'Mh-h, such diligence, girls. Nice loud party talk, and then sudden industry at the faintest approaching footfall.'

No one said anything nor turned to face him, including sober Martha. No one ever said anything for herself when the 'Prime Minister Merwe' accused; nor did anyone ever look into his over-nourished face and icy eyes.

He did not know what was meant by good humour: 'Take off those aprons and come with me.'

They responded like a pack of trained dogs. Martha was the last to hang her apron behind the door, while the others were already in the passage following 'Merwe'.

The glass that stood half-full on the sink was irresistible. Without a second thought she snatched and gulped it as in the old days, at one tilt. It was too late to stop it going down her gullet when she realized that whisky, for one thing,

was included in the mixture.

'What could it be now? Even during a party!' She searched her mind for an answer as she went hurriedly after the others. 'With his endless accusations the bastard should have been born a prosecutor.'

She caught up with them.

'Merwe' led them to the party hall where he clapped his hands once to freeze his subjects to pole-like attention: 'Er... ladies and gentlemen. I thought there was something we were forgetting ...'

'Yeah, yeah!' everybody agreed boisterously, although they did not know what the 'Prime Minister' was going to say.

'Our hon'orable waitresses here. The party they are waiting on is going so well that they deserve an on the spot invitation ...'

Martha felt a courageous warmth in the pit of her stomach. It was her opportunity to show off what kind of black stuff she was really made of. They'd stop seeing her as a 'tea-girl' that day and look upon her as a woman, as Miss Stevens and Maggie, both white, did.

While many of the intoxicated minds present reeled, trying to decide whether they had any choice in the 'Prime Minister's' decision to relax South African white convention, Maggie was making her way to Martha. The two were genuine friends. For some reason known perhaps only to her Maggie couldn't understand and was disgusted by her people's racial prejudice. However, it was not to demonstrate this that she became friends with Martha. They just became friends: two beautiful girls admiring each other, seeing the beautiful side of each other.

The two friends started talking and giggling as soon as they came into contact. Martha decided that another drink, something light this time, would do. Together they went to the kitchen bar. She took a half-glass of champagne and smacked her lips: 'I didn't know his prejudice was soluble in alcohol. Whatever made the Prime Minister decide to invite us Maggie? Surely it was not solely his decision.'

'Miss Stevens hinted, and you know that she's the only one in this firm whose suggestions are worth his consideration.'

The sweetness of the champagne lingered distastefully in Martha's mouth and for something to neutralize it she opened a can of beer and took a sip. Long abstention made the effect greater. Her head felt pleasantly light.

Engrossed in a lively conversation and wishing to keep it that way, Martha

took a drink each time Maggie did.

When they returned to the hall dauntless Sarah was sharing the middle of the floor with a white lass, each dancing to the rhythm of a pop song in a fashion peculiar to her background. Everybody, especially every man, was cheering heartily.

Maggie said: 'Let's go, Martha. The one you showed me the other day.'

The latter did not hesitate. Amidst her frenzied gyration with Maggie she heard Mme Thandi cheering: 'Aww, my children!' and adding to the entertainment with a motherly version of the dance.

The song over, Martha felt like another drink. 'Damn,' she thought hazily. 'I'll take as many as I can hold and Monde will understand.'

Miss Stevens, a beautiful middle-aged spinster and the 'Prime Minister's' secretary, was serving a round of drinks. When she came to them Martha took one.

Maggie looked at her quizzically: 'Why, Martha? You're taking too much.'

'Oh never mind, Maggie,' she answered, 'I know my dose.'

'What'll your boyfriend say?'

'He'll be cross, but he can fo...'

They laughed.

Towards the end of the party, in the afternoon when many people had left but those who remained were still feasting, Martha had needed to visit the ladies. The passages were full of couples desperately clinging to each other. Habit led her to the black workers' toilet one floor below the one where the party was held.

The right angled, tunnel-like staircase was gloomy. Only the light reflected from the passage made her descent visible. She switched on the passage light when she came to the lower floor.

'I followed you. Felt lonely in that crowd without you.' He was speaking from the top half of the flight around the corner.

'Yoo!' Martha exclaimed with surprise. 'You frightened me.'

Dawie filled the whole tunnel end, towering above her like the colossus of Rhodes. She felt like a mouse trapped in a dead-end hole, with a starved feline waiting with characteristic patience at the opening. She started trembling like the poor mouse, too.

'So that's why,' she thought, realising for the first time that she had taken much more than she could contain, 'so that's why Mister David Steenkamp unnerved me so much when I was serving him drinks.'

Dawie had always been a loner at work. He was everywhere. He personally attributed it to the early days

of his life when he had been torn away from the one person he had ever loved, and been taught to hate. It was only as a grown-up that he had got to know that they had never been able to destroy the love he had held towards May. That was when he began to notice his 'weakness' for dark-skinned women. That love which should have been eradicated systematically from his being had only hibernated deep down inside for a cold season, while the waves of hate, contempt and selfishness swept over it. And because this revived emotion had no object towards which it could be directed, May having vanished into the sea of black skins that covered the land, he hunted blindly and tirelessly for fulfilment. The law did not allow him an outlet. But his reasoning was that it was an immoral and inhumane law that prevented him. So he felt no qualms about breaking it. His main hunting ground was Swaziland, beyond the borders of the country he so loved, yet so hated for its laws. At home it was the dark alleys of Hillbrow and the glittering streets of downtown Golden City.

The only part of it which left him unfulfilled was the financial ingredient. It was so impersonal that it made him yearn for the day when he would find one black woman with whom he could form a real relationship and give to her what he was not allowed to give openly. That was why he had continued to hunt.

It had not surprised Martha when she found him alone with his thoughts when she was serving drinks. They all knew that he kept to himself and this obvious loneliness inspired a feminine sympathy in all the women at the firm. What got them all where it hurt most was that although he was the right hand of van der Merwe he was such a gentleman and so impartially considerate towards everyone that Mme Thandi had once said of him: 'This one is lost. He has forgotten that he's white or he never knew it.'

When Martha was handing round her first tray of drinks, even before the whisky he insisted on had gone to his head, he had said: 'Thank you very much' in such a warm voice that Martha had almost tripped when she walked away from him.

On each of her subsequent rounds he had tried to look deep into her eyes. She had looked away each time afraid that if she allowed their eyes to meet and lock something might happen which would necessitate a cold brush-off for poor Dawie.

Poor Dawie! Yes, that was it. His eyes, so full of longing, looked at her, searched for her, like eyes from a different but equally human planet. They held a need so great that it spanned

light-years, arched across a whole inhuman universe of wasted lives. Her love for Monde, based on respect for him as a man, instructed her to have nothing to do with this message from outer space, this strange and compelling appeal to the roots of her human sympathy. Monde's effect on her was to make her feel responsible for *herself*: their love was a triumph over a world in which neither of their lives mattered until they mattered to *them*, at which point the power of the oppressor received its mortal blow. Yet here was this other voice crying across a wilderness wider even than the one she had wandered in before she met Monde. In the moment that she had turned her eyes away she had experienced a short struggle between the equal forces of disgust and the compassion that Dawie evoked in her. The disgust, in a strange way, reminded her of the person she had been before she met Monde. The compassion told her of the person she now was. And in that moment she had known that she, as the person she now was, felt responsible for this white stranger. Even though her compassion threatened the very basis of her new self, her love for Monde! Poor Dawie!

The drinks she had taken had braced her nerves and now a romantic element attached itself to Dawie's following her into a secluded spot. In her semi-drunken state what might have shocked her earlier excited her now. The appealing blue eyes looked straight into her soul. Her drugged mind tried to find out why she was so excited and defenceless. Was it habit? Had she grown so used to a man by living with Monde that one night without, plus a few drinks melted all her resistance? Neither was it a habit of the old booze parties and shebeens, though prior to the drink she had felt no urge . . .

The voice of those teachings which had coagulated their feelings towards beauty in those not of the same skin became fainter in their minds, until it went totally silent. Natural laws took over and offered no option but obedience. The cat stalked the mouse.

'No. Mr. David. No. We'll get into trouble!'

'I cannot resist you, black girl. You are so beautiful, Martha.'

She reacted in the natural manner of a black maiden to a compliment. 'Oh Mister David — a plain person like myself? I don't believe what you're saying.'

Her boldness had given her a pleasant surprise. She had not expected herself to be so much at ease.

'I prefer to be called Dawie by people I like.'

'I'd never get used to calling you that.'

'Ja. You will when we've struck something human and not the baas-servant acquaintanceship, the rubbish.'

She heard that from afar and it made her fight to maintain control of her faculties. 'Damn the drink!' she thought. 'What? What did you say . . .'

'I long to take you where the fact that we're South Africans of different colours and rights will be of no account.'

'Why Dawie? Why choose me? There are so many white girls. I can't. I don't want to get into the papers. Oh God . . .' Her anaesthetised mind tried to resist.

'The white girls bore me. It's as if they are all my sisters. I want a girl from another family. God made us one human race but different families. The adventure of life lies in the families discovering the beautiful human characteristics in one another. And sharing them.'

Her mind searched for something to say: 'But the laws made by you white people say it's wrong. You get arrested.'

'I see things differently from the rest of my family. That is my right.' Thanks to the whisky he was able to state his outlook on life without wracking his brain. The situation demanded that he be completely free of any fears he might have had about stating his case. He felt natural and the days of old washed back like the sea into his consciousness, those days with May abroad in the green parks, before the first black woman had ever said: 'How much are you prepared to pay me?'

#### Face to Face with the Truth

Life floats away with the wind  
of time

It is temporary  
Yet eternal  
Limited by mortality  
Yet eternalized by birth  
Its origin not felt  
Not known  
Until it is there

If he did not commit a double manslaughter, or a suicide, or both that early evening, it must have been because his will to live was harder than alloyed steel.

His heart had pumped so hard that the blood vessels all over his body had threatened to burst, and the sweat had been wrung out of his skin until the shirt he wore was like a second skin. The irises of his eyes had thumped in unison with his heart. Breathing had be-

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come a problem and his bowels had shrivelled inside him. First a haze as dark as the darkest night had blotted out everything before him. Then it had been slowly replaced by one as red as the insides of the eyelids when the face is turned towards the sun on a cloudless day. But all the time he was looking. The following haze was a silver one and the last, the natural light seeping through the window.

At this stage he had awoken from his hallucinations and seen her on the mattress on the floor, weakly holding the baby up to him with trembling hands. Her naturally big eyes were bigger and rounder, and glassy and frightened. The very recent throes of bringing forth a child had made her gaunt, and the pink night gown she wore looked like a rose petal.

'He cannot be yours, Monde... I have prayed every second of the nine months that he should be yours... but now I know that the only prayers I can say are for him... I am beyond redemption... For one moment I wanted to kill him... but forgave him... How could I expect mercy if I could not give him the basic right of life, like the million of other babies born into the world? Give him a chance too... I know I have betrayed your trust and I deserve no less than contempt from... But do not perform what you're thinking on either of us for he has not betrayed anybody...' Her voice sounded millions of light years away from him. It was some super-natural, omnipotent reason that spoke through her. The reason for life. The reason why he lived and why they lived, and a reason he could not fathom but simply accept for its infinitude.

'If nature has approved of the baby, who am I to dispute it Martha?' Tears

were welling up in Monde's eyes. 'It is myself I feel like killing now, because I should never have been born.'

'Simply because nature has taken her course, Monde?'

'No. Because you shall never be mine again. You betrayed my feelings. Even if it had been a black man I would still feel the same way about it.' The tears had not rolled out of his eyes. They just dried. He felt an unexpected surge of courage rising from the trough of his feelings. 'You did well to wait till the last moment, Martha. It shows that you wanted to save me from the shock for as long as possible.'

'Yes. Also because I was not sure. I met the white man only once, when I was drunk.' The sexual myth was that one intimate meeting between a man and a woman was harmless.

'Your guilt was not the birth of a child but your betrayal of my feelings. There are many like him in our midst, and nobody hates them because they were fathered by white men. Remove the thought of killing him from your mind, Martha. He will survive like any other child in the black community, whereas in the world of his father he would be a bad omen. He would not go to kindergarten without a question being asked. He would not attend school without a question being asked. He would not go to church without a question being asked. He would not be allowed even to enter the house of his father's people. He would not live in their neighbourhood without permission from the lawmakers. But among us he will live like any other human being. He will be given a name and I hope it will be Sipho, because he is a gift from God like all babies are.'

He stopped, and Martha's eyes met his in the light of the same understand-

ing.

'And it shows that despite the laws which divide people according to race, men are equal and related to each other in their natural context. Every animal species reproduces within itself, with those of its own kind. He, the first generation 'coloured' child, my child, links us in direct relationship with the people of the white skin. If they reject the relationship, we accept it. I accept my child with all that is in me of a mother's love.'

### EPILOGUE

*Dedicated to my 'Coloured' brother and sister.*

Yes, a child is born; a new human being comes into the world, and the worldly gods have the audacity to call his natural conception an immoral act, insinuating by that that the child's very existence is immoral!

But I do not see what can be immoral in the mere existence of a human being. Even the child born after an act of rape cannot be stripped of his right to exist, once born.

Martha's child was a first-generation 'Coloured' a direct fusion of the races, a natural bond between two people of a different skin pigmentation and in his descendants this human bond shall be represented until the end of time.

To me a so-called 'coloured' human being is a brother, conceived in the same black womb as I. Child of a sister robbed of the pride of motherhood by the man-made immorality laws.

White father, black mother, coloured child. Marriage of the races, above man-made laws. Black man and white man married in the blood that flows in Martha's child.

The stories of **MTUTUZELI MATSHOBA** have been a regular feature of *Staffrider* since issue No. 2. *My Friend, The Outcast* (Vol. 1, No. 2) explored corruption and cruelty behind the scenes of a Soweto eviction. *Call Me Not A Man* (Vol. 1, No. 3) dealt with organized thuggery by a group of police reservists. *A Glimpse of Slavery* (Vol. 1, No. 4) penetrated the dark world of the labour farm. In our next issue look out for *A Pilgrimage To the Isle of Makana*.

Matshoba's stories are inspiring others. CYA's drama section is working on stage adaptations, and artist **MZWAKHE NHLABATSI** is working on illustrations for *A Pilgrimage*.

Ravan Press is publishing **A GLIMPSE OF SLAVERY** — a collection of the stories — in May 1979, and a novel is also in preparation.



STAFFRIDER, MARCH 1979

IT IS DARK

we sat and watched  
 as our rivers  
 came flooded from the mountains  
 baboons running from the bushes  
 into our mealiefields  
 milk becoming sour  
 in the udders of our cows  
 thick like pus from a rotten wound  
 and our tears fell  
 like water from a dripping  
 tap  
 and we said:  
 this dress our days have on  
 is black  
 like that of weeping mothers  
 at the graveyard.

at dawn  
 we woke up  
 hope . . . hope . . . hope  
 instead  
 we read terror in the faces of mothers  
 those weary mothers  
 at the graveyard -- remember  
 voices weary  
 eyes weary  
 heads drooping  
 crying  
 weeping  
 the same people  
 heroes  
 a son here  
 a daughter there  
 we met again  
 at Avalon, Doornkop  
 to run blindly  
 like chicks from a refuse dump  
 when the hawk stoops

oh the stinging pain  
 the questions (unanswered)  
 these things  
 intoxicate our minds  
 and we say  
 it is dark  
 no more lights  
 and this dog has us in its grip  
 we kick  
 but it comes back  
 like a fly around chunks of meat

Nthambeleni Phalannawa

ON TOP OF THE MAGALIES

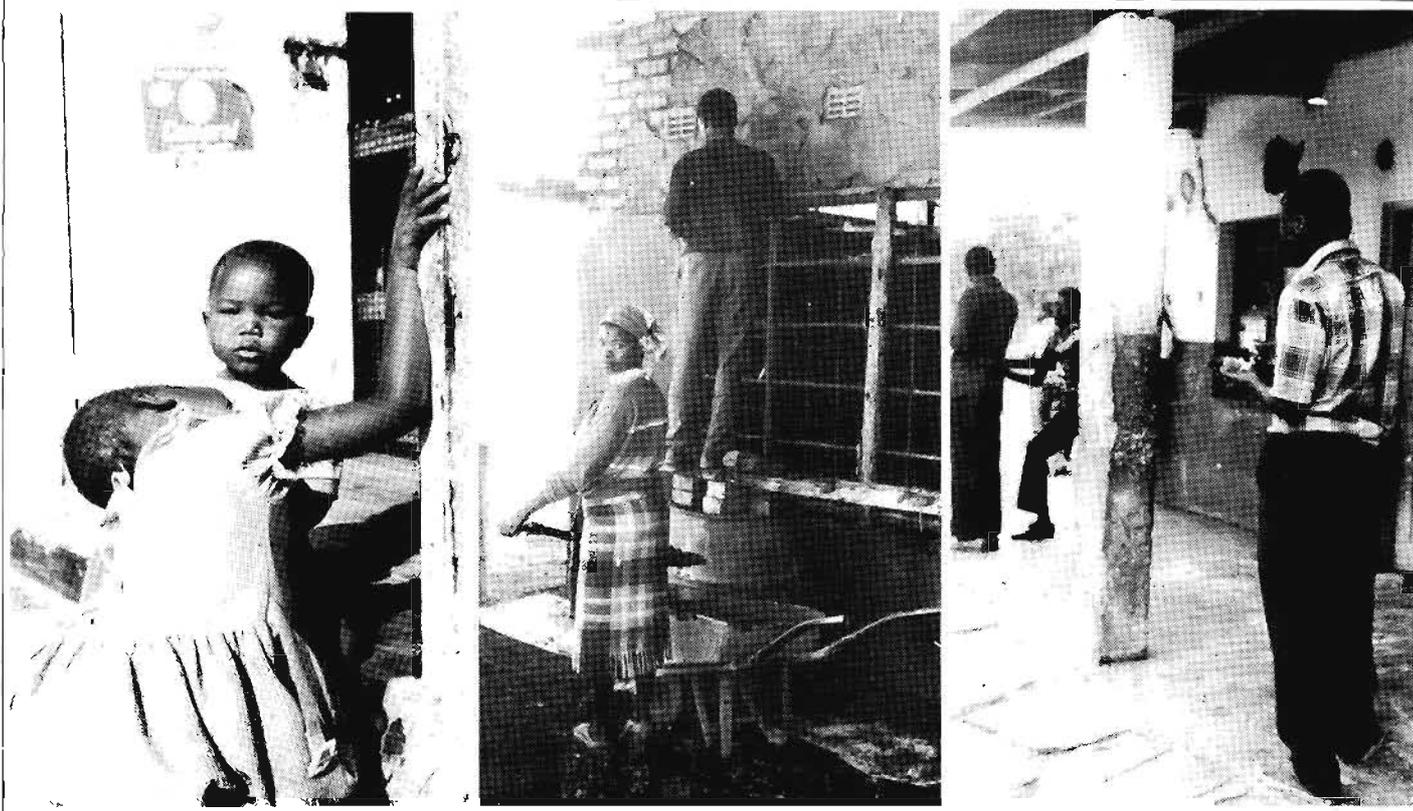
*For Nape á Motana*

I pray and sing  
 Drink and dance  
 On top of the Magalies  
 Look  
 Those are our mealie fields  
 And there are Afrikaner bulls grazing

Bleeding bantu lovers  
 Smoke senior service  
 At their ease in Braamfontein:  
 We in Brits hold a pipe  
 Leaning on the muur of a dam  
 Gazing at a thousand bantu arses  
 Greeting heaven

Amin may be the greatest marksman in Uganda  
 Let him pip south of the Limpopo  
 Where each family numbers more than thirty  
 We know our job and we are at it  
 We fed the bantu with the pill  
 To spend his days at the family planning clinic  
 And walk around with VD.

Maano Dzeani Tswana



**WHAT IS LOVE**

I love you my brother  
 So much that I can't  
 Share the endowments God bequeathed us with you.  
 I will privilege you with your rights  
 To suit my egocentric purposes,  
 Because I love you.

My brother, *I love you*  
 Is why we can't live under one roof.  
 You must dwell in the Subtopia  
 And I will reside in the suburb  
 You will not visit my palace without notice,  
 Because I love you.

*I love you, my brother*  
 Is why I'll give you a Homeland  
 And deny myself the privilege.  
 I will sing music for you  
 And you will dance to my tune,  
 Because I love you.

*I love you, my brother*  
 Is why we can't worship  
 Even God our Father together.  
 I preach *love* to you:  
 Do as I say not as I do,  
 Because I love you

*I love you, my brother*  
 Is why we can't rest together  
 At our country's luxurious hotels.  
 Even for the eternal rest at Avalon  
 I will do my best to keep us apart,  
 Because I love you.

*I love you, my brother*  
 Is why we can't learn together:  
 What is good for me can't be good for you.  
 I will design a special kind of Education  
 To suit my purpose and maintain my status,  
 Because I love you.

Yes, brother *Baas*  
 You have a lot of love for me:  
 But in which direction does your love flow?  
 Is it not flowing in the direction of your house?

**Tshilidzi Shonisani Ramoshe**

**THE ISLAND**

The Island is bad,  
 (except p'rhaps for the mad)  
 and Oh, how it makes me sad  
 and Oh, how it makes Them glad.

**Humbulani wa-ha Marema**

**WHETHER**

The sorrowful wind that blows  
 the heavenly teardrops against the window-pane,  
 and whistles thru' the chimney  
 makes me shiver with anger  
 that so many people won't know  
 where, or whether, they'll get the next meal.

**Humbulani wa-ha Marema**

**CITY-BOUND TRAIN**

Packed in each coach  
 As the engine pulls with force  
 Our relatives leave us  
 To seek money to feed us.  
 Like a snake it twines the mountains  
 With coaches bound like chains:  
 All the strong brothers, city-bound!

**Ntsieni N. Ndou**

**WATCH OUT**

if you continue  
 to write your poems in such vile style,  
 we'll send you to the seven-mile Isle  
 (no ordinary exile)  
 by using our judicial guile  
 (like 'the Garden of Eden reptile):  
 then we'll close your file.

**Humbulani wa-ha Marema**

## LEBANDLA

There are people there – every day except on Sundays. And they would like to be there on Sundays too, as long as their hands can hold a calabash, as long as their throats can swallow. My people are disappearing, they are sinking. Maybe they realise it too, yet they can't stop themselves from sinking. And now, it goes down, down their throats.

Who is to blame, who is wrong? They can't manage without it, a calabash, 'The True Beer' or 'Zebra' or 'Highveld', or anything you might call it. And what should they do but down it? It is their pleasure. It is their only way to ignore suffering, poverty and all kinds of oppression. Who made them suffer? Who made them forget that by chasing the calabash they are destroying their societies, themselves, their health?

Forgetting oneself is the most cruel thing in life. It invites ill-health, ill-discipline, and a rotten life, damage to oneself. But with a calabash you don't even realise that you're forgetting yourself, not a chance. I can see them going down there hurrying, as if they will be dead within seconds if they can't drain it down. Reaching the place they group themselves according to their friendship, the so-called 'lebandla'. One of them will go to the barman and buy three or four calabashes of beer: they call it 'pompi'. Then you'll see the calabash going from mouth to mouth, 'rotation of the calabash'. The murmur of the voices inside the beerhall is something you wouldn't stand for if you weren't used to it, but that is everything in life to them.

They may be there from morning to sunset, no breakfast, no lunch, maybe no supper too. What is a meal to them if they are not drunk?

Drinking brings problems – for themselves and for others. There is fighting between them: perhaps because they are not one 'family' of drinkers, but distinct groups. Some groups are enemies to others – and don't be surprised to find enmity growing even among the members of the same group.

But their families? There will be no discipline for the young ones at home. Where will they get discipline when their parents are away all day, returning home only when they are drunk? Drunk, when they should give love to their children, or tell them of God. They always talk of Him when they are drunk and when there is no mealie-mealie for the young ones. But where can they get a bag of mealie-mealie while they can't even afford a half-loaf, but can possibly afford a calabash? Having realised that there is no one to look

after them properly, the children start searching for some of the things they need themselves. They leave their homes. Some run away because when the father is drunk he curses them and also beats them a lot. You may hear him shouting at them, and see them backing against the wall, hiding their tiny, dirty faces with their even dirtier hands. What do you expect them to do, except run away from home, away from the curses, beating and hunger?

Worst of all is when children join their parents in this business. They too begin to find their pleasure in drinking. You see a girl of sixteen giving herself to a man just for a drink or some money to buy her a drink. My people are sinking. First were the fathers, then the mothers too. The boys also followed suit – and worst, the girls too. Maybe another Staffrider can tell us why these things happen.

## HUNGRY EYES

'It gives me a headache every time I think of it, and nightmares every night. It haunts my soul daily, but I can't do anything about it, or maybe I can.'

I heard these words a long time ago. I can't forget them: They are true words. They talk about an experience, an experience which I have also had. And I didn't like it, either.

Tiny eyes, tiny hungry eyes, looking at everything which comes within sight, looking at everybody who might interest them, maybe might give them something, something they might ask for. The owners of those hungry eyes are bony figures, too young to make a living themselves, too young to try.

The little ones are not rare, not hard to find. They are everywhere. You can't fail to see them, and you don't have to hunt for them, because they are not in hiding. They are roaming around the streets looking out for their needs. They are always where food can be found. You can see them attaching themselves to other children with parents worth having. Parents who have enough to give their children, enough to throw in the rubbish bin. The rubbish bin is a kitchen for these hungry ones. What gave me a pain in my heart was to see how these wealthy people treat these hungry poor ones. A dog looks better cared for than these hungry ones to them. They are cursed, ill-treated by their counterparts, reminded time and again that they are poor and indeed that they are dogs, who can't stay at one home. How can you stay at home when there is nothing for you to eat at home?

Yes, the woman was telling the truth when she said she couldn't do anything about it. I can't do anything about it

either, and yet I suffer the experience. I have to see them everyday, as long as I'm not ready to hide from reality. Walk around the streets on the outskirts of the black townships, you'll see them. They're always there in tattered soiled clothes, their small bodies stinking of dirt, smelling of poverty.

If you don't have the heart of a lion, please do not go to the rural areas. Disease among the young ones there is rampant. They are bony, pot-bellied with round big hungry-looking eyes. Maybe it is marasmus, maybe kwashiorkor, what else? If the little ones knew what it meant when we say 'The year of the child' they would revolt against us, because the promises we make to them are splendid but they're never fulfilled.

They are born in great numbers, born to suffer. After they're born there is nothing in this world for them. Their future is bleak, it holds nothing for them. They've no parental guidance, no home education, no money to take them to school, no clothes. Where can all these be provided if their parents can't even afford to give them food daily, although the parents may be working? No, the parents can't manage it. They have to pay rent for their 'shacks'. There is a high daily transport fare for them to pay too, for they have to travel apartheid distances to work. And now they are taxed everyday, the so-called GST.

Hungry eyes rove, they catch something and memorize it; another something happens, they won't miss it, they catch it and memorize it too. They memorize everything, the good and the evil. When they are alone they practice what they saw – and is it not true that practice makes perfect? What is good for them lives with them, grows with them and sometimes dies with them. It is almost always evil that grows with them, for they're living, growing in a society subject to poverty, and poverty is evil.

'Come with me, go with me, but take me wherever you wish to take me, but please do not take me to another nowhere! I don't need another place where my eyes will grow round with hunger, where my eyes will grow big with hatred of the ones I love, the ones who don't care a damn about me. I hate to see my stomach growing big, while there is nothing inside it except water and food which lacks nutrition. Take me with you and please, don't take me back to where I've come from. I will miss my friends with whom I used to share anything we grabbed, with whom I used to learn the cruelty of human being to human being. I survived!

Those were the words of a survivor I know.

## AN AFRICAN WOMAN

Over the baby's cradle she stood,  
And warmly she held him,  
With every hope that he'd be a man,  
A man of dignity and stature.

Come rain come sunshine, she had to go  
Looking for what she could do for him:  
With age catching up,  
Her baby was all to her.

Overlooking the difficulties she confronted,  
Ignoring the insults she got,  
The welfare of her child all important,  
She cared little about herself.

God showered the woman with fortune,  
He gave her courage and strength,  
That she might care for this child  
To whom his gift was intelligence, and a love of the people.

Then what a spear the authorities ripped into her heart,  
After so many years of devotion:  
The pride of her life taken from her,  
The only and all, for whom she had cared.

Yes, it is three months now!  
No sight of my beloved son,  
No word from the child I brought up!  
No warmth in my heart,  
No more those happy evenings together.  
No cheer in my home:  
Yes, they have taken that son of mine, son of the soil!

Oh, what a pain in my heart!  
After so many years of difficulty  
And so few of happiness,  
After so many expenditures  
On my son's education,  
Only to lose him in a minute,  
In that one minute which parted us.

He was beaming with happiness  
And the hope of coming back,  
Back from the struggle for his people.  
He had hope within him that he'd come back.  
That the sun would shine for all, all the people.  
Never did that materialize!  
Nor did I see the beaming face,  
The beaming face of my beloved son.

My body was left cold after I was told;  
Told by the pressmen that my son was dead  
My heart was cold,  
I never shed a tear,  
I never believed a word they said,  
Never thought such a thing would happen,  
Happen to my child, my beloved son.  
Oh! the little thing I used to love,  
I used to laugh with,  
Yes, he was dead, dead in a cell.

His life was taken; more taken was I.  
I had courage and strength.  
I felt what had happened was God's will.  
Yes he was lying there, dead as he was,

With a bullet in his heart  
And blood on his shirt:  
It was a horrible scene to look at,  
But I had courage and strength:  
It was my son lying there,  
My beloved son, the one I loved most.

Friends, the community and relatives came.  
From far places they gathered to be with me,  
To come and console me,  
To come and bring me back to the living world:  
Yes, they came to pay last respects to my son  
It was a mourning day:  
Never again would I see my son's body.

Thunderous explosions began,  
I thought it was World War III,  
People went beserk, everybody was screaming --  
My son's coffin fell!  
Yes, it was a shooting  
A shooting at my son's funeral!  
It was just like the son of God at his crucifixion.  
Lord forgive them, the son said,  
But I'll rise, and I'll come back,  
Come back and reign.

Shimane Maoka

## YOU HAVE NO SHAME

You black girls,  
Who swallow 'the pill' as if it was any other pill,  
You, who assemble your garments as if you were marching to  
a party

When you are merely marching to school,  
You who adorn yourselves like a rainbow at weekends  
And march to decorate the corridors of shebeens and beer  
halls

Merely to charm those whose hunger is great for you,  
You have no shame.  
You black girls,  
Who move hungrily from one fancy car to another  
Like that pick-pocket I saw in the Mamelodi-bound train,  
You who find pleasure in taking off your black  
Tights within the mansions of Houghton,  
You have no shame.

You black girls,  
Who are not ashamed to sleep in the beds of your mothers  
Listen! It is my people you are degrading.

Thabo Mooko

*Black culture -- poetry, music, paintings, sculpture, songs and plays -- lived again at CYA's free art festival held at the Diepkloof Dutch Reformed Church in Zone 4 recently. Three aims of the festival were to support the International Year of the Child, to further CYA's three-year struggle to secure a venue, and of course to welcome, in collaboration with the Johannesburg PEN Centre, the International Secretary of PEN, Peter Elstob. The festival kicked off with music and poetry from CYA. The following groups performed: Mihloti (featuring Ingoapele Madingoane's africa my beginning), Dillo, Motsweding, Kwanza, Bayajula, Mbakasima, Alexandra, Madi, Tembisa. Extracts from Egoli, CYA's three-man play, were performed. Joe Rahube, who has recently joined CYA, did it again with his one-man stunt, and the festival closed with a musical jam session contributed by Blue Ocean, Babupi, Isizwe, Bahloki and Mahlamala's Trio, all from Diepkloof.*

**PEACE**

I came here for peace,  
But where is peace to be found?  
I wandered, looking for peace  
While violence whimpered around me.

The saying goes,  
*Don't steal,*  
My experience is,  
the disease called poverty.

The saying goes,  
*Don't scold*  
My experience is  
Aggravated humiliation.

Is that the case  
With every being?  
Under the blessed black sun  
I was born dark:

I want peace.

Patrick Makungo

**DOG EATS PEOPLE**

Whenever oppression suppresses the basic needs of anything that lives, one must expect nothing but chaos and destruction to ensue. It is dangerous for people to accept a little of anything and feign content. People must not give a little of anything to anyone who does not have. The hit back has messy repercussions.

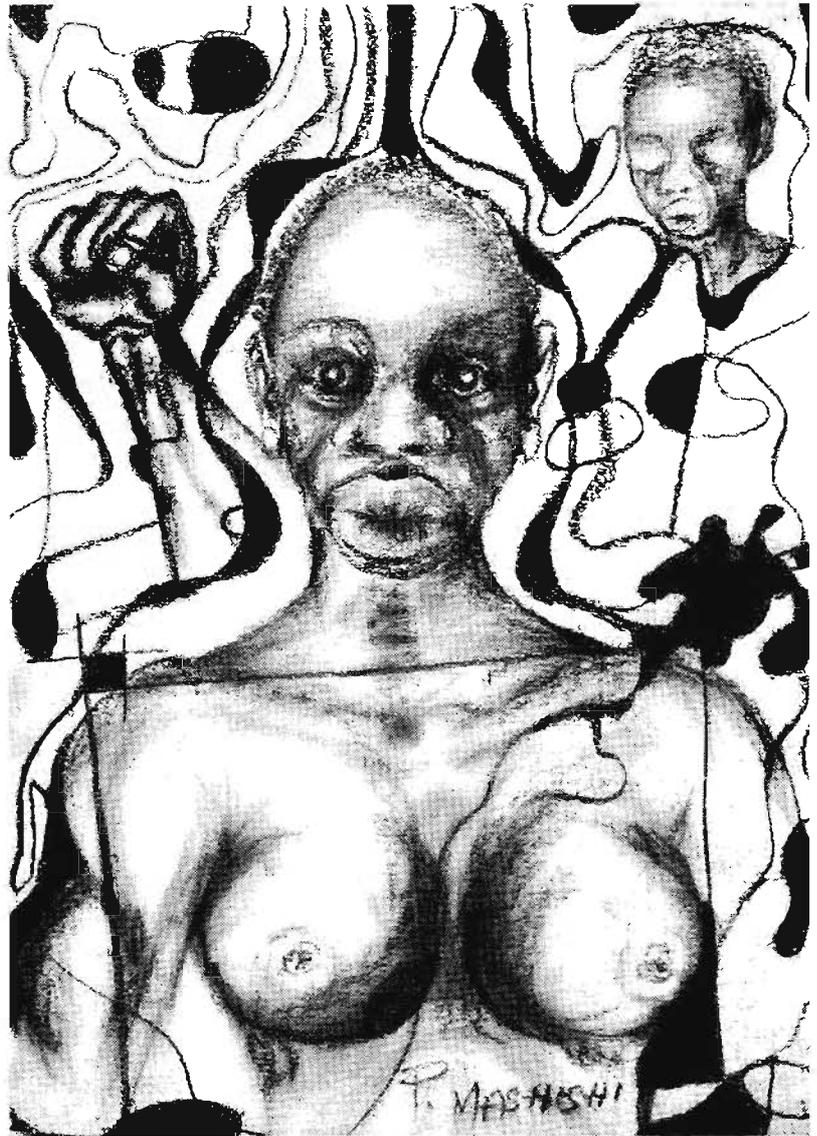
Anyone who knows Soweto knows how many hungry dogs are straying. This is not the case in Soweto alone, but also in other townships where black people are kept.

People were eaten by dogs some time ago in the sixties. The place was Pimville. Did these dogs do this of their own accord? Would you say that dogs are naturally dangerous -- if they are not chained?

Any normal human being knows about the declared 'non-citizens' who live in poverty and unending hunger. Somewhere (I know not when) people started to kill, and have been doing so since.

Were they just won't-work loafers? If they were, are they still?

Masilo Rabothatho



Peter Mashishi / Untitled



SILENT MOVIE/ *a story by Jill Bailie*

I saw a porcupine for the first time that night. It had a solid body and its quills swayed like seaweed in the moonlight. When it saw us it scuttled away across the potato land and into the darkness. My brother and I had been camping up in the hills and on our way down we passed by the calf-hut. It was empty, except for a water trough and this time we also found a big lady. She was sitting in a corner wrapped in a blanket, smoking. Her hair was grey but the curls on her forehead were tinted yellow from the smoke which she blew through her teeth. Her cheeks looked like yellow curtains hanging between grey walls. She also had a moustache and prickly brown bristles on her chin.

There was a buzzard in the sky. I was scared of her. I knew about witches from books I'd read but my brother didn't. He thought we should just go home. But I wanted to do something. Eventually we decided that we would start a fire all the way around the hut, but quite far away from it. She would then have a chance to escape if she wanted to. Otherwise she would be burnt. I knew that my father would be angry about his hut but when I told him why we'd done it he would understand that we had to burn the witch. We made a big fire. The flames were high and very hot and moved quickly over the veld towards the hut. Then we heard a deep sound like a drum, as if someone was calling. It seemed to surround us. It was louder and stronger than the crackle and roar of the wild fire. I was afraid. I told my brother that it was all her evil spirits escaping before she burnt. He was scared too. Then we saw a tall man floating over the next hill towards us, he was running but it looked as if he was floating. When he came he just said 'You mustn't burn my sister.' And after a little while of beating at the fire it went out. The hut was made of branches and mud but covered with a corrugated iron roof, so it was very hot inside by the time the big woman came out. She was sweating and smoking but she smiled. At first I didn't see that she was smiling because she was so ugly. She even asked us to have tea with her at her brother's house.

We went home to find my sister. We found her pushing her pram down the road towards the dam. She was taking her dolls for a picnic. She was wearing my swimming costume and my mother's high-heeled shoes and hat. She had gloves on and make-up. She was very excited about going out to tea, but it took us a long time to get there because

she could only walk very slowly.

My brother and I had been to visit the tall man and his wife before. They had lived in the forest for seventy years. Anna, Gideon's wife wore heavy brightly coloured clothes. She was thin and short, her face was creased and her eyes shone like fireflies in the night. I think she could see clearly in the dark. She lived under the ground in one room. The six steps were steep and lighted only from outside. Inside she lit six candles, three on either side of the room, all set into niches dug into the sand wall. There was another candle in the far wall, it was in a wider niche which was decorated with pieces of material. The floor was soft, straw had been spread over it then covered with a blanket. There were other little holes dug into the earth for clothes and cups and paper. And there was a blue blanket folded in the corner. She only had one pair of shoes. I think she thought she was dead and had buried herself. The tall old man was named Gideon. He had white skin and unlike Anna was very big. He lived on the ground in the entrance hall to the tree house. The frame of his room was made of wattle tree branches and between these white fertilizer bags were stretched. Each bag had been sewn to another very thoroughly. The roof was the same. In one corner of his room another blue blanket lay folded. He had a wide yellow brown table, his eyes were green and his hands tanned red. He spread them on the table and pushed himself out of his chair. He bent his head before he touched the roof, but he was not a giant. His hair was swept to one side and his head was always tilted like a bird. He was listening very carefully. This is how we found him when we arrived for tea with my sister.

Larry, Gideon's son, had met us at the stream and told us that his grandfather had just arrived from across the plains over the hill, and had been involved with a cricket on the way. They were all sitting at the wide yellow brown table. Gideon sat on his chair and Anna sat on a stool on her legs. Her skirt hung down to the ground over the stool. The ugly big woman sat cross-legged, smiling on a wide bench. I wished she could have a nicer smile because I knew my sister didn't like ugly people. The grandfather had eyes the size of the nail on my little finger. He was shrinking I think. He sucked his teeth and his cheeks into his mouth. I think he thought he could turn himself inside out. My sister sat next to Gideon

because she was the best dressed and Larry sat her two dolls next to Anna; Anna was just like a doll.

When we were drinking our tea the grandfather started moaning and groaning. I think he was warming up because soon afterwards he told us about the cricket. He had been walking around the side of the hill to fetch water in his bucket. He said that he heard a grating, piercing, scratching noise. I knew that he was deaf but maybe you can hear noises like that even if you are deaf. Then he fell into the grass. He lay on his stomach, still, and looked carefully until he saw a green bottle. It was a wine bottle and beside it was a glass standing upright. Next to the glass was a blue-black cricket and inside the glass at the bottom was a rim of sticky red wine and a dead cricket and two newly-born dead crickets. I could see that he was still crying because his chest was throbbing and he could hardly speak. He said that the cricket had jumped into the glass to have her children and she was too tired to jump out again, so she and her children had died of starvation and the other cricket was singing to them to jump out when they couldn't because they were dead.

I knew from before that the old man was very old. He didn't really know what was going on. Larry and me and my brother and the grandfather had all gone to a film in the village one day. It was a silent movie and very funny. The grandfather began to cry towards the end and we had to take him home. He told us that he couldn't enjoy the film because he was deaf. He could see us laughing and he wanted to laugh but he couldn't hear. I wished I could tell him that it was a silent movie.

Our tea party was spoilt because the grandfather wouldn't stop snivelling. Also we were all getting a bit cold. It was early in the morning. These people seemed only to be awake at night and a little during the day. My sister also liked the night, especially at full moon. She always took our dolls for a walk and a picnic then. My parents thought that it was better for us to do things at night because during the day the neighbour's children were awake and we always had terrible trouble with them. In the early morning just when it's becoming light, when you can't see the sun but you know that it's coming, the weather or the air gets quite cold. If my mother's awake she always tells us to put our jerseys on.

I decided that the grandfather needed a treat. I asked Larry and we decided

## JOHANNESBURG

that first we would take him on a tour of the tree house and then for a ride in our car. He had never been up into the tree house before, he had always been afraid of steep drops downwards, but we thought he wouldn't mind now because he was so nearly blind that he would only be able to see the branch he was holding onto anyway. Anna was frightened by our suggestion so she went to her room under the ground. The fat woman took Gideon's blue blanket and slept under the willow tree near the bathing area on the river. The birds had woken up because the sky was just grey.

Gideon picked grandfather up and put him on the third branch. The first storey of the tree house was on the fifth branch. Larry and my brother stayed behind him and I helped him from the front. The first landing was the kitchen. It had running water which came through a pipe from the river. You had to suck the pipe before the water would come. There was also a little gas stove. The second storey was Larry's room. It had a light which worked because of batteries which had to be attached to wires. There was a brown sack on the floor and a few books and a blue blanket in the corner. The third storey was Simon's room; he was Larry's brother. And the fifth storey was his other brother's room. He was the eldest so his room had a balcony which led round into the lounge which was at the top of the tree. All the rooms were very small, about the size of two car tyres together and one and a half upwards. The bedrooms had small windows cut into the fertilizer bag walls. The tree didn't seem to mind, it still had many leaves. It was an evergreen tree. Grandfather liked it very much in the lounge and wouldn't come down so we just tied a rope gently round his waist then round the trunk of the tree and left him up there.

When we got down again there was a messenger from my parents to say that the children next door had attacked the stables. We quickly fetched my sister from Anna's room and took her shoes off so that she could run home with us. It was definitely morning by then. The sun was warm. We ran across three lands of erogrostis and a mielie land and across the dam wall where we frightened the coot by mistake: we were in a hurry. My brother had an axe and Larry had a stick. They led the way just in case we were ambushed.

The children next door lived in a house with three rooms and a kitchen. There were twelve of them and a mother and father. They bathed in the sink in the kitchen: we spied one day from

behind their chicken house where they parked their car which didn't work. They were always giving us trouble even the eldest one who was twenty-five. He had very big eyes and was fat and short. He didn't like moving round much. He was responsible for planning their attacks.

We found the car waiting for us at home. It wasn't really a car but it worked just as well. It had two horses in the front attached by leather straps to the back seat of a car which still had the back wheels underneath. Our horses were strong and fast. We all sat on the seat and whistled and very soon we were at the stables. Another fire. Those children had tied the cows to their troughs then set the shed alight. That was easy because of all the hay. My father was there. One cow was dead, burnt, and the shed was badly damaged. He was angry and sad. We were too late to help so we went home for breakfast. When we got there those children had broken a few windows with stones. We hadn't been defeated for a few weeks so it was their turn to win. During breakfast we planned our revenge.

It started raining very hard and the lightning was bright and sharp. The dogs hid away. In twenty minutes the rain had stopped but there was a fresh stillness. Larry wanted to go home so he did. Then he came back. The grandfather had been struck by lightning. He was dead. My brother and I went to the tree house in our cart which was pulled by Boesman, a pony who wore bells and ribbons on his harness. Gideon had already carried him down and Anna was wrapping him up when we arrived. We put him in the cart, a small white parcel, and we all walked with the cart, the bells tinkling, across the hill and onto the plain where the grandfather lived. His friend, an old brownish lady was waiting for us beside a coffin. Gideon laid him inside and Anna placed some dry yellow flowers on his chest. Then we walked over the hill again. The brownish lady wanted to take the coffin away by herself. Anna and Gideon went to Anna's room and didn't come out for a few days. The fat woman took them food. We all wondered whether those children had anything to do with the storm and especially the lightning or whether it was time for grandfather to die and so the lightning had just flashed him away.

My father sent us to town to buy pig meal. We went in the truck with Larry's brother, Simon. Just before the village where there are a few houses we saw the brownish woman again. The sun was above us and getting hotter. She was walking crouched over, searching the

ground and she carried a packet. She had black hair and a black doek over her head and shoulders. Slowly we followed her. We walked quietly and carefully so that she wouldn't be disturbed. Sometimes she moved quickly and sometimes slowly. She threw her head and arms back and forwards and stamped her feet silently. She stooped to pick up stompies which she put in her packet. We walked quietly around houses, across streets, behind shops, under the railway line, into the station, over the bridge, for about an hour and everyone in the village was quiet and still as the brownish lady stooped and swung herself until her packet was full. She went into the veld, into some trees, and tore the stompies apart, collecting tobacco. She rolled it all up into a piece of paper. She had never smoked before, you could see because it was the wrong kind of paper and the cigarette was about six inches long. She put it into her mouth then lit it. The whole cigarette burnt quickly and caught her long hair and her doek. It was very interesting to watch her hair burn but Simon ran and put it out before her head could burn. She was crying just like the grandfather. When we asked her why she wanted to smoke she said that she'd heard that smoking comforted you when you were sad. Simon trimmed her hair in the truck with scissors and my brother and I bought her a new black doek. She said that her son had put the coffin in a tree and that they would put it into the ground when it fell down. We said that we would give her a lift back to town after we'd bought the pig meal. We took the brownish lady home in our car. We went to see the coffin in the tree but it wasn't there and neither was it on the ground. She started crying again so I stayed with her while my brother went to fetch Larry.

We had a very special way of finding things. Larry and my brother and I sat together and the brownish lady brought the old man's hair. It was in a bottle because it had to be cut off before he was wrapped up. Larry put a strand in the palm of his hand and then we all spat into his hand. After we had mixed it Larry slapped it with his middle and index fingers and we all watched to see which way most of the spit flew. About half a teaspoonful flew in the direction of the hill so we knew who had stolen the coffin because those children lived on the other side of the hill. The brownish lady was still crying but she quietened a bit when we told her that we had discovered where it was. Unfortunately we couldn't go in our car because the bells on Boesman's harness would have given us away. So we had to use the

other car with the two horses.

The last time I'd been to the shack we had interrupted their chicken killing. There was a heavy wagon in the ripening veld with a heavy wooden table and heavy rusted iron wheels and a forked iron handle. Some of those children had been killing chickens on it. They sold chickens and eggs but they killed the chickens by slicing off their heads with an axe. One child would hold the head and another would chop and all the others would laugh and dance and play while the headless, feathered, red-brown body ran around the veld sparkling in the sun. It made my tummy pull into my spine and I saw the black spots in my brother's eyes grow rounder. There was so much blood and so many wings pounding the air, wanting to escape, to fly away headless, but they couldn't and their heads lay in a heap on the wagon. I took one home to look at it carefully.

Ever since then we had called them Indians, because Indians did that sort of thing. But this time it was very quiet and the shack quite still. All we did was push the door open with a long pole, slip in cautiously, slide the coffin out of the kitchen from under the sink and put it onto the car. We buried him deep in the ground that night and slept in the forest on the side of the hill.

It was damp but the polecats still came to collect the left-overs when the fire had died down. We watched them raking the coals and embers and gnawing the bones or carrying them away. They all scuttled away quietly but suddenly we saw a bulging dark shape coming through the trees very slowly. It was Boesman. He had a friend, a tall black horse, much older than himself and not able to work or be ridden any more. During the storm he had been grazing out on the plain and the lightning had struck him down. My father had buried him near the old man's grave that day and Boesman must have got out of his camp to look for him. We followed him at a distance and watched as he smelt out Night's grave. When he found it he walked round it and stood by it and afterwards tripped towards the sheds where he was fed at night. We couldn't sleep very well that night, too many thoughts were trespassing and sleep just couldn't find us.

Larry had warned us that the Indians would attack again soon because we'd fetched the coffin back and buried it. My brother and I got up very early and gathered logs and branches to reinforce our fort. We had built the fort three or four months before but because it was so well camouflaged it had never been discovered. It was under the great crab-apple tree behind the chicken house.

There was an entrance at each end. We sat crouched waiting for the Indians. It was spring and we saw the sun catch the green fruit and pink blossoms of the tree above us. We had also prepared two saucers and left them in the sun just outside the back entrance. In one saucer there was water and in the other a piece of paper with 'Indians' written on it. The paper was covered with water and then we had sprinkled a layer of red fly poison over it. I knew that they would find us this time because they would have followed our tracks and also because they were desperate. If the sun evaporated the water then the Indians would die or all become very sick, but we weren't sure how close they were. Perhaps they would arrive before the sun had a chance to take the water away. Then we heard them. First the crackling of a few twigs then a loud wild cry to summon the other warriors. We moved slowly silently towards the back entrance. My brother spread the red fly-poison across the opening. He helped me to jump over it then we ran. Across the recently ploughed mielie land. It was difficult because the furrows were deep and I fell often. Through the paddock where the cows lay chewing their cud drowsily in the penetrating sun, round the stables, over the fence, through the garden, past the windmill to the loquat tree. We had built a tree house high in the loquat tree. It was covered with leaves and had a roof made of thinner branches, but no walls. They swarmed around the tree sweating. They would have killed us if they'd caught us. Their faces were smeared red with chicken blood and the feathers on their heads were white from our chickens that they had stolen. We were too high up for them to harm us. They began to dance and chant. Then I saw that the soles of their feet were stained red and remembered the fly poison. They had stood in it. After a few minutes some of them stopped dancing. Then others stopped. They couldn't move their ankles or their feet and I thought the spirited poison would move all the way up their bodies. They became quiet and spoke in whispers. My brother climbed down the tree and spoke to their leader - not the eldest child, he wasn't there. They said they would leave us alone if we took the poison away so that they could move again. I climbed down and helped my brother to wash their feet.

I was quite worried or frightened because we'd beaten them so thoroughly. Whatever it was I was feeling very still inside myself so I went for a walk to the frog dam. It is an oval, shallow dam at the bottom of a long red eroded piece of the mountain beyond the wattle

trees. We only went there to slide down the steep red slope. There were brambles there and we collected the berries for jam. No-one was there that day and it seemed as though the rocks were twisting in the heat as I walked across the narrow dam wall. I was bare-foot and I stood on a frog and I felt its life tubes on the sole of my foot. It didn't actually burst but I felt them pounding under its blistered skin. I turned and stared at it, open-mouthed as it poised itself to spring into my throat. That's what blocked my scream. I lay in the grass trying to close my eyes. My stomach heaved because I had closed my mouth and was feeling imprisoned behind my teeth. My arms clasped my knees and I rolled from side to side in the green green grass, hot hot sun, clear blue sky. I unfolded eventually but had to put my fingers into mouth and pull my lips and cheeks outwards before I could unclench my teeth. Everything was waiting, even the stones were still as I walked slowly between them through the grass up the hill towards the wattle trees.

Every year our family and the Indians and the people from the forest, walked together over that hill, into the valley and up the next hill because at the top a flower blossomed for two days every year and it was so radiant that we had to walk slowly to see it. Its leaves spread on the grass overlapping one another, then the stem rose straight out of the ground, two fingers thick with nodules on it. It opened into an ostrich egg of buds, which all became petals and the green cups holding them had white fluff on them. It was the only flower of its kind and much bigger than the others. It was in the ground surrounded by grass but it came out of the mist.

The wattle trees were on fire. I saw from a distance and pumped my stomach to make my legs run faster. As I arrived so did the tractors pulling water-tanks on wheels and trailers carrying drums of water. The red fire tore at the trees which screamed. It was a human shriek or scream and their branches and trunks became entwined with the blue, red flames and they bent to the ground as the flames stretched to the open sky. The farmers could only protect their lands and their houses by burning fire brakes. Even when the high yellow and red flames had ceased, the grass and fence-poles smouldered and hissed for three days. I went home on the tractor with my brother.

I had to go to work in the city the next day. I felt like a baby that was being pulled out of my mother's navel. There wasn't very much blood and soon the cord stretched and snapped. In the

## JOHANNESBURG

city I was like a child feeding from its breast; sucking the milk, then flesh, blood. As I sucked for more so it fought against me because it couldn't give me everything I wanted, yet it had to let me live. My work suckled from me and likewise I had to struggle with it to let it live.

One Sunday morning I found an old lady, similar to the brownish lady sitting on a bench at the bus terminus. She wore a grey skirt and green jersey with a white floral blouse under it. She held a brown paper bag and a black plastic bag to match her shoes. Her lips were red and her rouge soothed her purple-silver hair. Before her was a vast flock of pigeons, fighting, pecking, flapping, greedy for the crumbs that the woman threw. The sun was sprinkled over their grey

and blue feathers as I sat beside her watching. 'If only I could catch one and make pigeon pie,' she said quietly like an undercurrent in a gently rippling stream. So I decided to hitch home instead of taking the bus.

I wished my brother had been with me because I took a lift in a Bentley and was quite frightened by the two brown heads and over-coated shoulders which hummed from the front seat. We slid over the M2.

On the bridges over Braamfontein there was a man with blood bubbling from his face, down his body, mostly on the left. Round his loins was a white cloth, underpants, dish cloth, sheet, nappy, or towel and he was running, slowly swaying, staggering, he had brown hair and long arms. The Bentley

cased aside when it realised the tragedy and rolled tentatively backwards. He wasn't there, he must have jumped over the bridge, the road was so long.

I saw a mole cricket for the first time that night. It was positioned red-brown in the middle of my square room. Its jaws were moving but I couldn't hear anything. I wanted to but there wasn't a sound. Outside there were cars but not a sound and I couldn't hear what the big angular cricket was saying. I felt as if I was in the sea, tumbling in the waves but without my glasses, so I didn't know which way to go to the sand. I don't think he could hear me either because he just went on moving his firm jaws, like the end of the film strip when the reel keeps turning.

## FOUR POEMS BY ESSOP PATEL

### NOTE TO KHATIJA

a union of stars engaged  
in a silent conspiracy  
with the urban darkness,  
unobtrusively  
life and death playing  
a game of dice

danger

d

a

n

c

i

n

g

in a shebeen.

under the street lamp  
an inebriated tramp

s

h

a

d

o

w

o g  
b x n  
i

with a black alley cat . . .

tonight  
baragwanath is breathing  
like a sedated babe  
in the arms  
of soweto

### NOTE TO GRECO

*Life,*  
immortalities fleeting car  
traversing the unpredictable freeway,  
passing through the disheveled scenery,

watching Grecian girls  
wading through the tide  
waving handkerchieves  
at departing lovers  
leaving on an Odysseyan voyage,

the night descends  
like a lover,

as the sun slots into the abyss of darkness  
like an old Hellenic coin.

### . . . TO MY SON

son,  
remember what your mummy said,  
give  
give your hand to every hand  
like  
your grandfather did in Mecca  
to  
to every black-bronze-brown hand  
and  
forget not the white hand.

### NOTES ON THE STEPS

in  
the midnight hour  
i heard  
a sad song

in  
the heat of the night  
i heard  
a dry groan

in  
the blistering dawn  
i heard  
a skull crack

on  
the prison steps  
i saw  
a broken guitar  
and  
my brother's blood.

**EVERYTHING IS JUSTIFIED**

I watched a man go through a test,  
As they laid his son down to rest;  
And bravely trying his utmost best,  
When they lowered him six-feet-deep,  
Never to crumble down and weep  
For the dear soul he could not keep;  
A priest said, 'Be not horrified,  
'Cause everything is justified.'

It occurs often in real life,  
In my street where robbery is rife,  
A man's life cut short with a knife,  
The while he tries to make ends meet;  
And now he lies cold in the street,  
A bundle wrapped in a white sheet,  
The widow's eyes, her grief implied;  
And everything is justified.

The murderer, playing hard-to-find,  
At peace among his own kind,  
Dagga-smoke coursing through his mind;  
Floating high in sweet oblivion,  
After a murder so wanton,  
Spinning records of Brook Benton,  
Blood-money bulging in their jeans;  
And the end justifies the means.

Now, a reasonable debate  
Concludes that no man chose his fate;  
We're all of us subject to hate;  
It consumes our minds like poison,  
Like the gaping gates of prison;  
Life and death march in unison:  
There's no cause to be mystified,  
For everything is justified.

Timothy Motimeloa Makama /Tembisa

**FLOWER SELLER**

The barren concrete is  
Bedecked with fast-waning flowers:  
In the bee-less shady stall  
She paces the concrete side-walk  
with a bunch of flowers  
in her gaunt hands.

Only faint whiffs of aroma  
Escape from the coloured flowers  
And mingle with the spreading  
Fumes of the afternoon traffic.

Her coarse and mournful voice is  
Lost amid the roaring traffic  
As she cries aloud,  
Hard-eyed,  
With a sad and sun-splashed face  
That repeats her poor business:  
'Flowers here, 75 cents a bunch!'

The greying hair on her head  
Is like the shrivelled head of a flower.  
She thrusts her peasant hand  
At the unwilling, unhearing passers-by.  
It moves like an uncoiled crane.  
'Flowers here, 75 cents a bunch!'

When the traffic subsides,  
Her rage unfurls like a flower:  
She loses her sweetness  
Faster than the flowers in her hand.

James Twala/Meadowlands

**FOR EXISTENCE SAKE**

My life is like an empty shell,  
The shape of which is hard to tell,  
Whose depth is of an ancient well;  
For not at all am I to know,  
In all the years that go by slow,  
The reason why I'm living now;  
'Cause anything I'd try to do,  
Would surely split my mind in two,  
And leave me broken-hearted too;  
For not a single step I take,  
The slightest difference will it make,  
So I exist, for existence sake.

My search has led me miles around,  
For simple reason true and sound,  
But this shall not be run to ground;  
My wings are clipped to slow me down,  
My shame I wear, a lifetime gown,  
And fear upon my head a crown;  
I jump no higher than a hop,  
To climb and never reach the top,  
Like who and what am I, full stop;  
A fruitless search for peace of mind,  
Has left me chasing miles behind,  
For truth was never mine to find.

To all my fellow faceless ones,  
The day you plant my flesh and bones,  
Weep not for me if only once;  
For death I hurry to expect,  
Before I lose my self-respect,  
A virtue, mine, that none suspect,  
Who read the cover of a book,  
And undermine the pains it took,  
The author whose intent they cook,  
In spices such as man can fake;  
I let them have their piece of cake  
Whilst I exist, for existence sake.

Timothy Motimeloa Makama/Tembisa

**DUSK**

He hears the people passing by.  
His hat,  
Empty at dawn,  
Empty at noon,  
Empty at dusk is  
Like his stomach as large as the gizzard of a sparrow.

He sits too low to be heeded  
By the carefree passers-by  
Who stretch his neck like a flamingo,

The subway becomes quiet,  
Silence surrounds him like friends.  
He knows it is dusk,  
A solitary dusk again.  
He stretches his arm towards his hat:  
It gropes painfully to and fro,

He staggers up and drinks the tasty smell  
Of home-made porridge and roasted tripe  
Floating in the air like yesterday.

James Twala/Meadowlands



**STREET KING** *a poem by Zwelibansi Majola*

Surely he was a king;  
though he's gone now and forgotten.  
An uncrowned king he was,  
Raised a prince of the gutters and the ghetto.  
Never the warmth of fire and rugs for his flesh,  
Never the love of man for his heart;  
nor proteins for his young body.

At six  
he went job-hunting in town.  
The wonders of the ghetto ceased to exist for him.  
Bare-footed he ran over the frost and  
the winter cold pierced his legs.  
At sunrise he rode staff on buses.  
In summer he braved rains and thunderstorms.  
At times he earned five or six or seven bob  
that went into benzine and dice.

At seven he should have started school,  
Instead he experienced the black side of life.  
Many a stolen loaf he carried under his arm;  
the only storage for stolen fruit was the belly.  
Sausage rolls were chewed on the run.  
Nobody cared, nobody knew;  
Not his father, nor his mother  
who disported herself in the arms of another street-king.

At fifteen he went for jewish.  
Florsheim kept his shiny feet dancing for hours on end.  
Baggy Saratoga and Brentwood hid his thin legs.  
London Fog was his night shelter.  
Jack Purcel gave him the easy run.  
On sunny days Viyella was his pride.  
In winter Pringle saw him through the nights.  
Never paid a cent for them.  
They were shed on acquiring new and better.  
The old and dirty were left to his underlings.  
He baffled men's outfitters.

At seventeen he dipped deeper into the pockets of the  
unwary.  
Wads were lifted out of back-pockets of fathers;  
Hankies left the warm bosoms of mothers.  
He was a king of the art.  
Dedicated, gifted, determined.

Not until he was twenty was he observed  
swimming in the happy waters of immortality;  
or breathing dagga.  
Then he was well-off;  
the king had arrived.

Only once did he confide in the fairer sex;  
and landed behind bars.  
He came out a master; a true king to be,  
hailed on both sides of the Bar Curtain.

The king didn't dig Noah's life-style;  
He was a loner.  
Except for a few nights here and there,  
quickly forgotten,  
Venus never smiled upon the king.

At twenty the king shed his sheath;  
A barrel protruded from his fist.  
Many a widow he made.  
Many a shopkeeper was ruined in front  
of his barrel.  
The king was a loner; he never talked,  
was never sold again.  
Everything was so closely kept in his chest  
that he became restless, sleepless, sickly.

At twenty-one the Mighty King begot the king  
and the silence ended.  
The king ditched the gun and dived for the Good Book  
in which he sought solace.  
In the filthiest shebeens he found recruits  
whether for a day or for life; for a moment or longer;  
The king had them singing; hailing Hallelujah and  
crying.  
The king picked them up, exposed in their  
suits of truthfulness; for what drunkenness conceals  
sobriety reveals.  
In the silent afternoon buses filled with the fatigued  
he cried for deliverance;  
In the noisy morning trains of the strong  
he prayed for the working-class.  
They came from all corners of the underworld  
to hear the king spreading His gospel.

Not everyone liked the changed king,  
least of all his underlings.  
For the king had withdrawn a rare talent from the sport.  
Unusual powers lay dormant.  
The underworld suffered an exodus from its ranks.  
Fear for the king mounted,  
So did hate.  
Then one day  
a crack was heard at the bus terminus, leaving a crack where the king's  
eye had been.  
With one eye, the other in flames of pain,  
the king saw a White dagga-dealer retreat.  
And the king was filled with hate.  
The gospel has no place for hate, so he withdrew:  
Medicine never stilled his pain.

The king saw, listened and understood.  
The breeder of misery stood revealed:  
Blackness, Apartheid.  
The king's sole eye viewed his clenched fist.  
Once more he ruled the streets.  
Brothers and sisters listened.  
In their midst dwelt a man,  
dedicated to the cause.  
The king denounced sweating for a pittance.  
He loathed sell-outs, foreign stuff,  
liquor, Mercedes-Benz, the lot.

Night and day the king stood his ground,  
Wrestling with the chains of oppression.  
He taught boys fist-fighting and soccer jiggling.  
He remembered his work at six and encouraged vegetarians.  
As always, he ruled.

Ruler though he was, his life was ruled.  
The hole in his head limited him:  
They fenced him into the hostel  
where he ruled a few months longer.  
With his single eye he commanded  
respect of the migrant blind.  
Such was the life he led.  
His brothers provided his daily bread;  
He had united them.

The king thwarted the powers-that-be;  
for what he fought was what he saw;  
what he preached was what he felt.  
He never referred to books.

The king's sole eye had seen better days.  
It was a cause of anguish.  
The king was tied to his bed in his doleful room.  
Those who knew him left for the homelands.  
The new ones did not know him.  
The king was down-trodden and forgotten.  
Welfare gave him his living.

And then one day  
en route to the welfare office  
(He knew the ghetto streets by heart)  
His fate was sealed.  
Stumbling through chanting crowds,  
uplifted by his brothers'  
freedom songs,

He never saw a machine unslung,  
aimed,  
a trigger pressed.  
Everybody ran.  
He was left alone in the street.  
The bullet thudded into his chest,  
and his life was cut short.

IT WAS ALL A MISUNDERSTANDING *a play by Shafa'ath Ahmed Khan*

THE PLAYERS: MESSRS. PIETER HURTER (TOWN CLERK) AND SHAFATH AHMED KHAN (THEATRE PERSONALITY)  
 PLACE: MR. HURTER'S OFFICE

*A knock on the door.*

MR. HURTER: Binne!

*Enter Mr. Khan.*

MR. HURTER: Oh!

MR. KHAN: Good afternoon, Mr. Hurter . . . . I am —

MR. HURTER: I know . . . Mr. Khan! Please take a seat.

MR. KHAN: Thank you . . .

MR. HURTER: Well, Mr. Khan, what can I do for you?

MR. KHAN: Quite a lot, Mr. Hurter!

MR. HURTER: What is it?

MR. KHAN: The Town Hall . . .

MR. HURTER: Yes, what about it?

MR. KHAN: It's the most central venue in town —

MR. HURTER: Naturally, it has to be. After all, it is the seat of all civic and cultural activities in our town!

MR. KHAN: Cultural activities?

MR. HURTER: Yes — stage-plays and all that!

MR. KHAN: Stage-plays?

*Mr. Khan smiles with satisfaction.*

MR. KHAN: Well, Mr. Hurter, I suppose we can now talk business . . . you see, Mr. Hurter, I want the Town Hall —

MR. HURTER: You mean you want to buy it?

MR. KHAN: Oh no, Mr. Hurter! How could I afford to reimburse the people of Ladysmith? After all, they have been paying their rates for such a long, long time now — how could I possibly deprive them of so rightful and central an amenity?

MR. HURTER: Of course you can't — I would protest!

MR. KHAN: Naturally . . . no, don't get frightened, Mr. Hurter, I just want to hire the Town Hall!

MR. HURTER: Oh, I see! . . . you j-u-s-t-w-a-n-t-t-o-h-i-r-e-it!

MR. KHAN: That's right — just for half-an-hour or so!

MR. HURTER: That's all? Ha! Ha! Ha!

MR. KHAN: Yes, that's all! Ha! Ha! Ha!

MR. HURTER: Ha! Ha! Ha! No problem, Mr. Khan!

MR. KHAN: Thank you, Mr. Hurter, I expected so much! Ha! Ha! Ha!

MR. HURTER: You must be joking! Ha! Ha! Ha! . . . Here, fill in this form! Don't omit to put down what you're going to do for that half-an-hour or so!

MR. KHAN: No, I won't!

*Mr. Khan quickly peruses through and fills the form.*

MR. KHAN: There you are, Mr. Hurter!

*Mr. Hurter runs through the form.*

MR. HURTER: Ha! Ha! Ha!

MR. KHAN: What is so amusing there, Mr. Hurter?

MR. HURTER: No, nothing! Ha! Ha! Ha!

MR. KHAN: Well, isn't it a wonderful idea? At least I could try it!

MR. HURTER: Oh yea! Oh yea! Ha! Ha! Ha! . . . You know, Mr. Khan, I can't understand this.

MR. KHAN: What can't you understand, Mr. Hurter?

MR. HURTER: Look — uh! . . .

MR. KHAN: Yes?

MR. HURTER: I — I know Ladysmith could be frustrating for a theatrical —

MR. KHAN: Damn frustrating!

MR. HURTER: Yes, but you can't be that —

MR. KHAN: Mr. Hurter, I said at least I could try it —

MR. HURTER: Really, Mr. Khan?

MR. KHAN: Well, why not?

MR. HURTER: Ha! Ha! Ha! Okay then —

MR. KHAN: Look how easy it becomes —

MR. HURTER: Alright, Mr. Khan! Ha! Ha! Ha!

MR. KHAN: The people will love it, Mr. Hurter.

MR. HURTER: Oh, will they? Ha! Ha! Ha!

MR. KHAN: Won't you, Mr. Hurter?

MR. HURTER: Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

MR. KHAN: It's something new for a country town —

MR. HURTER: For the whole world, Mr. Khan! Ha! Ha! Ha!

MR. KHAN: Imagine how they will flock —

MR. HURTER: Yea, sure! Ha! Ha! Ha!

MR. KHAN: Whites, Africans, Coloureds, Indians —

MR. HURTER: Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!

MR. KHAN: All of them will flock from offices, shops and supermarkets in Murchison and other nearby streets! You, too, will be delighted to nibble at your sandwiches and watch me and my cast entertain you! Something new for Ladysmith, isn't it?

MR. HURTER: Ja, seker, my hemel! Hoooh! Hoooh! Hoooh!

MR. KHAN: Oh, I'm so glad you like and thoroughly enjoy this whole idea

MR. HURTER: I do, indeed! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh!

MR. KHAN: Ha! Ha! Ha! Well, thank you, Mr. Hurter, I must get moving on — there's posters and all that to be attended to!

MR. HURTER: Ja, sure, I won't hold you any longer! Ha! Goodbye, Mr. Khan!

MR. KHAN: Bye, Mr. Hurter! Ha! Ha! Ha!

MR. HURTER: And good luck! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Ha! Ha! Ha! . . . W-h-a-t? P-o-s-t-e-r-s? . . . Mr. Khan! Mr. Khan! Mr. Khan!

*Mr. Khan comes rushing back*

MR. KHAN: What's the matter, Mr. Hurter?

*A brief silence prevails.*

MR. KHAN: Well, are you alright, Mr. Hurter?

MR. HURTER: Yes — no, thank you! Oh! Oh!

MR. KHAN: Why, is there something wrong?

MR. HURTER: Quite a lot so, Mr. Khan! . . . Mr. Khan —

MR. KHAN: Yes, Mr. Hurter?

MR. HURTER: Do I understand you intend inviting the Ladysmith public to view a stage-performance by you and your cast?

MR. KHAN: That's right, Mr. Hurter!

MR. HURTER: Well, I never understood this all along!

MR. KHAN: W-h-a-t?

MR. HURTER: I —

MR. KHAN: Mr. Hurter, did you think I'm a crank or something — that I was going to use the Town Hall stage to placate my soul?

MR. HURTER: No, no, Mr. Khan —

MR. KHAN: Yes, Mr. Hurter, you thought I was going to enact something all alone to an inanimate audience of walls and velvet curtains —

MR. HURTER: Oh no!

MR. KHAN: Oh yes, Mr. Hurter, you didn't think I needed the Town Hall for legitimate lunch-hour theatre! After all, it is the most suitable central venue, and it is the seat of all civic and cultural activities in our town! . . . I suppose your earlier decision is now reversed . . .

MR. HURTER: I'm sorry, Mr. Khan —

MR. KHAN: No, that's fine with me, but —

## PIETERMARITZBURG

**MR. HURTER:** But, Mr. Khan, I want you to appreciate it's government policy that stops us from acting the way we would like to act. Then there are no separate toilets, and separate this and separate that!

**MR. KHAN:** Oh ja!

**MR. HURTER:** And it's no use asking you to apply for a special permit because I know you will not prostitute with this sort of thing. Even if you had one the department will stipulate that only Indians may attend, or you may perform to mixed but separately-seated audiences provided there are these and those facilities!

**MR. KHAN:** And, of course, I would never have ceded a centimetre since it would essentially have been just another way of providing stratagem for – oh forget it!

**MR. HURTER:** I think so, too –

**MR. KHAN:** But remember what the prime minister once said – that many problems could be solved by local authorities at the lowest level?

*The telephone rings.*

**MR. HURTER:** Stadsklerk! . . . O hullo Matt! . . . Goed dankie, en jy? . . . Ja!

No, we must oppose them to the hilt – they've got to move out! . . . It's time the department left it to us to decide what is good or bad for our town! . . . Ja! Ja, okay Matt, totsiens! . . . O my heme! . . . Well, that's it, Mr. Khan, it was all a misunderstanding! I'm sorry I can't be of any help!

**MR. KHAN:** I suppose you could be – but you don't want to be.

**MR. HURTER:** Huh?

**MR. KHAN:** Well, I had better move out from here and leave you to be peaceful! . . .

## GRAHAMSTOWN



Izinkonjane Zasegini with Zithulele Mann

### ON EATING A PLUM

I picked a plum on a clouded day.  
It wasn't the best of its bough,  
there were small wooden flecks on its skin  
and it could have reddened some more,  
but I eased it from its open crib  
and brought it in.

And leaning across the kitchen sill,  
and keeping the sidestreet  
and chimneys in view,  
stroked away the purple  
which lay around its heat like haze.

Was this as studied as it sounds?

It wasn't the best of its bough  
but it gave of its sweetness,  
and was for a time as permanent  
as Jupiter  
or a parliament of saintly men.

### IZIBONGO ZIKACLEGG

Nkonjane eyakha isidleko sodwa,  
Phondolunye lwakwaClegg,  
Sithandwa sokhokho enyakatho nasenzansi,  
Ngamangala ngathi  
Lungolwakwabani lolululwane  
Izinduku luyaziphatha kodwa lumhlophe  
IsiNgisi luyasiqeketha kodwa lumnyama,  
Nkunzi esina emigwaqueni yaseGoli,  
Osina esitejini zasemayunivर्सithi  
Osina ehostelin'yaseJeppe  
Waze wasina nasemshadweni wengonyama,  
Mkhetwa wamadlozi enzansi nasenyakatho  
Athi 'Nangu umfana wesizwe jikele.'  
Mshayi wesigingci ocula noMchunu  
Bashaya izigingci bagingqise isizwe,  
Mvulindlela ovula izinqondo zabamhlophe,  
Sisho kuwe sisho kuwe  
Phambili wethu,  
Sikhombise indlela esizohamba ngayo kusasa.

**THE VOORTREKKERS**

Trek further white man  
 Powerless to love  
 Without any illusion  
 Recalling no vision  
 The hold is of the gun  
 The Laager swept clean  
 Hamburg Gronigen Haarlem  
 All ports of chance  
 Abandoned centuries ago  
 Find again the absent cities  
 Take up the threads of an  
 Eighteenth century dream  
 Lest the black sniper's bullet  
 Find soft marrow of bone  
 The wagon wheels have left  
 Only ruts in the road

Sheila Fugard/Port Elizabeth

**IT WAS THE PAIN . . .**

It was the Pain  
 that moved the pen  
 darkly  
 starkly  
 across the white of the page  
 attempting a trail of bits of life  
 for you to see  
 and understand

It was the Pain  
 that made me look back  
 and see the emptiness of yesterday  
 a time lived only for its sake  
 unaware  
 that 'the mystery of life is not solved  
 by success, which is an end in itself,  
 but in failure,  
 in perpetual struggle,  
 in becoming'

Australian friend\*  
 if those words were the only words  
 you ever trailed across the white of a page  
 the prize would still have been yours

Kriben Pillay/East London

*\* reference to Patrick White author of Voss and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature*

**A LETTER TO BANDI\***

This letter comes to you  
 empty of the things  
 I wanted to say  
 empty of the shock, the horror,  
 the pain of the day  
 framing only black marks  
 on a white page  
 framing only hopes  
 in a fearful age  
 this letter comes to you  
 with all my love  
 but  
 empty of the things  
 I wanted to say  
 framing only black marks  
 on a white page.

Kriben Pillay/East London

*\*This poem was written on the occasion of the detention of Bandi Mvovo, who was detained on 11 September 1978.*

**ON FRIENDS**

I invited You and You and You  
 to my home,  
 Friends I know and love,  
 to celebrate a special day.

But mother dear  
 Ever so queer  
 Reported to a friend  
 (as is the trend)  
 That there were present in her house  
 (she's liberal, she'll never grouse)  
 Two Blacks, (very decent),  
 Three Coloureds, (two old, one recent),  
 Two Whites, (pity so few),  
 And the rest Indians, (all Hindu).

I don't recall all these people,  
 Only You and You and You,  
 Friends I know and love,  
 Who came to celebrate a special day.

Kriben Pillay/East London

TRIBUTE TO MAPETHA

I pay tribute to you Mapetha  
son of Mohapi  
son of the soil

a memorial  
born of the memento  
you left in this world  
your footsteps of freedom  
your unremitting endeavour  
to the point of death.

I remember the day we were last together  
silently knowing this possibility  
in my cell  
at an academic concentration camp  
as we shared our hearts about Azania  
to the other side of the dead of night.  
When the next day dawned  
I thought it was Azania  
and am dead sure  
when the next day dawns  
it will be Azania.

Despite this turn in the road of our struggle  
we are still consociate  
as your blood was spilt  
our tears were shed  
and the black fist grows  
nourished by this interflow.

You were murdered  
as the enemy set  
the whole black world ablaze  
trying to destroy the indestructible  
the people's will to be free.

It once happened in Vietnam and Cuba  
while the guns roared the days were grim  
but their day dawned  
the gun was powerful  
yet the people were more powerful.

We were enraged  
as we lost scores of black lives  
But now we can see our land on the horizon  
like the sun at dawn.

Like Tiro  
the great psychological liberator:  
he was banned from Soweto  
yet Soweto was born.  
When he spoke  
his words were wrapped in a black fist.  
In spite of this casualty  
Your power lives  
    the black fist  
        the people  
            breaking the chains  
and Azania being conceived.

Bafana Buthelezi / Botswana

POEM

I looked into those eyes.  
I searched for a message.  
It was printed there.  
And I was reading:  
'Child, this life is dangerous: tread on softly.'

I lowered my eyes  
Hating advice  
Hating sympathy  
Hating knowledge  
Fearing Truth.

A gaze stronger than my hate  
A gaze mightier than my fear  
Cut through my bent head  
I lifted my eyes  
I looked through a glass window  
Into a room full of sunshine  
On the wall hung words  
Words engraved in gold on a plate  
'Child, my love is your guiding angel.'

I looked down on the ground  
I saw ants going in single file  
I wondered whether they were guided  
By the love of the mother of all ants  
How did they know where they went?

I doubted  
I doubted the truth in her eyes  
I doubted my power of interpretation  
I doubted doubt itself.  
Those eyes did not leave me  
I felt them bore through my bone  
Into my brain  
Into my soul.

I lifted my head.  
I looked into uncaring eyes  
I looked squarely into those eyes  
They sent a spark of defiance  
They challenged.  
My mother's eyes said:  
'Child, we are equal  
Age, books, experience are not authority  
This life is no stranger to you  
Than it is to me  
Courage is its authority.'  
I smiled and nodded my head.

Sophia Tlali / Lesotho

## Es'kia (Zeke) Mphahlele / WORKSHOP II / More guidelines for the short story

*Es'kia Mphahlele's new novel, Chirundu, will be published this month by Raven Press.*

'Come into my parlour,' said the spider to the fly. Don't be anxious. I'm not going to strangle you or tie you up with my web. I just want to show you how language is used with effect. You can fail your reading public by using anaemic or soulless prose. Good prose has energy, which in turn comes from powerful feelings well expressed. If your subject has weight or substance, has what is called 'high seriousness', you have something valuable to begin with. It looks for a language. You must let it lead you, the writer, towards that language. A subject does not have to be a sad incident to qualify for 'high seriousness'. Comic events, if they are not mere tomfoolery for its own sake, should be seen as another form of seriousness in the way they are related to other aspects of life.

In time, if you have the inborn curiosity of a person who feels the urge to write in his/her blood and bones, you will develop an instinct for the right subject. Listen to stories people tell you, read the newspapers and periodicals, move about with your pores open, as it were, your physical senses awake, your mind quick to sense that one incident, person or a crowd, does not emerge in isolation. It bears some relation to others. That is when you feel the compulsion to seek that relationship. In the process of searching for it, you are looking for a meaning. The meaning lies somewhere in the answer to the question: what *else* is being revealed in this incident, that person, this crowd. Chase after those relationships, pursue them relentlessly, to the farthest point your mind can take you.

We're in a workshop this time, not a parlour. Come in. You will find here newspaper cuttings, handwritten sketches, things begun and never finished, paper with candle-wax and paraffin smudges. But I've a corner that shows some order too: bookshelves ranged with books by good writers. I learned a lot from them as an apprentice; and even when I'd begun to publish, the younger ones had a lot to teach me, they showed me other dimensions of the human experience, other ways of viewing the same experience. And you never cease to be increased in this whole adventure, I can tell you that. You want to know the names of some of the short-story writers who have taught me a heap of things? Here goes:

*America:* Ernest Hemingway; Richard Wright, Langston Huges, James McPherson, James Baldwin (the last four being blacks)

*Russia:* Anton Chekov; Maxim Gorki; Nicolai Gogol; Tolstoy

*Britain:* Doris Lessing (born in Southern Africa); Arnold Bennett; D.H. Lawrence

*Ireland:* James Joyce

*Ghana:* Ama Ata Aidoo

*Nigeria:* Chinua Achebe; Cyprian Ekwesi

*Kenya:* Ngugi wa Thiong'o (formerly James Ngugi)

*Moçambique:* Luis Bernardo Honwana

*South Africa:* Nadine Gordimer; Charles Bosman; Alex la Guma; Richard Rive;

James Matthews; Alfred Hutchinson (deceased); Lewis Nkosi; Alan Paton; Dyke Sentso; Can Themba (deceased).

The following are excerpts from some of the works worth reading. We simply must read, read and read and learn how other and better writers go about the job. Good literature enriches us by increasing the measure of our feelings, by sharpening our awareness, by educating us. As long as we can understand it and are sensitive. No writer can hope to enrich us if his own knowledge, his range of feeling and of his ideas are limited to his family and township or district community.

Some samples of prose follow: read each passage carefully and understand it before you read the comments which follow.

#### Nadine Gordimer/ENEMIES

*Mrs. Hansen was giving last calm instructions to Alfred, her Malay chauffeur and manservant, whom she was leaving behind, and she did not look up. Alfred had stowed her old calf cases from Europe firmly and within reach in her compartment, which, of course, influence with the reservation office had ensured she would have to herself all the way. He had watched her put away in a special pocket in her handbag her train ticket, a ticket for her de luxe bed, a book of tickets for her meals. He had made sure that she had her two yellow sleeping pills and the red pills for that feeling of pressure in her head, lying in cottonwool in her silver pillbox. He himself had seen that her two pairs of spectacles, one for distance, one for reading, were in her overnight bag, and had noted that her lorgnette hung below*

*the folding table from its niche above the washbasin in the compartment, and placed on it the three magazines she had sent him to buy at the bookstall, along with the paper from Switzerland that, this week, had been kept aside, unread, for the journey.*

*For a full fifteen minutes before the train left, he and his employer were free to ignore the to-and-fro of voices and luggage, the heat and confusion. Mrs. Hansen murmured down to him; Alfred, chauffeur's cap in hand, dusty sunlight the colour of beer dimming the oil shine of his black hair, looked up from the platform and made low assent, used the sentences, the hesitations, and the slight changes of tone or expression of people who speak the language of their association in the country of their own range of situation. It was hardly speech; now and then it sank away altogether into the minds of each, but the sounds of the station did not well up in its place . . .*

Nadine Gordimer has a sharp eye for detail; whether it be visible, tangible objects or human behaviour or movements. She has the extraordinary skill of assembling this mass of detail and arranging it so that it may carry meaning forward. Objects become images (word pictures) which in turn tell us something about feelings that we normally associate with them. All the things Alfred had to put together for Mrs. Hansen make images, which together make a symbol: they represent the comforts women like Mrs. Hansen enjoy when they can afford a servant, black or white. They also represent the closeness that exists between employer and servant in South Africa. Notice, for instance, the medicines, the eyeglasses and so on that he had to take care to place where she could find them. Notice also that she has to give him instructions on the busy station platform, with the confidence that he will carry them out. The author does not have to tell us that Mrs. Hansen is a woman of means and going on in years. She lets the action and the surroundings speak for her. This should teach us an important technique. Do not tell us in bald statements that characters or things or places or events are boring or exciting or horrifying or funny or whatever. Let the action and the dialogue demonstrate such qualities. Instead of saying that 'It was a terrible

sight' or 'a ghastly sight', you should show that it was visibly ghastly. Then you won't need to explain.

### Dyke Sentso/UNDER THE BLUE GUM TREE

At first, a deep-rooted suspicion and mistrust and then a fear, ugly and profound. Men went about their daily work with their ears a-cocked, their eyes wide open. A rustle among the leaves, a whisper in the night... and men's hearts stopped still with misgiving. An unguarded word here, a misplaced word there and men strove feverishly to interpret them into an intelligible whole. Suspicion sprouted and grew... people waited with their breaths held in. Two years, four years... ten years... The people waited still. Ten years, thirty... all was still... Ha!...

But suddenly the suspicions were redoubled and a fear, stark and naked, throttled the hearts of men. They slept with their hearts in their throats, pistols under their pillows. During the day they practised shooting locusts... at night locusts shot them. In the cities they barred and barricaded their doors and windows... in the farms they hedged in their homes with barbed wire and thin meshed wire netting, and allowed huge dogs to saunter arrogantly within their yards. Then men slept better, with pistols for cushions and dogs for guardian angels...

Such was the time when our story begins...

The big white man stripped off his dull-white overall slowly and hung it on the wall, then he dropped himself easily on a couch and composed himself to sleep. But the sleep refused to come. It was Saturday and with his work finished, his mind sought some form of recreation, which, on the farm, he found difficult to find...

Notice the mood of expectation Sentso creates. There is suspicion and mistrust, then a fear (note that it is 'a fear' and not just 'fear'.) People (white) begin to sleep with guns under their pillows. The story is going to be about a white boy who shoots a black boy, son of his father's servant. Be careful that when you create such an atmosphere, it should be part of the story, and not something outside of it; it should be demanded by the theme, i.e. what the story is about. Sentso begins the story with this passage. But atmosphere (i.e. feeling produced in certain surroundings or among a group of people, e.g. fear, suspicion and so on) can be created in several other ways. As the story proceeds, lines can be woven in to create atmosphere.

### Death in the City

The air outside caught him suddenly in its cool grasp, making his skin prickle; and the glare of street-lights and windows made his head reel, so that he had to stand still for a moment to let the spinning of his brain subside. The spell of dizziness settled slowly, his head swinging gently back to normal like a merry-go-round slowing down and finally stopping. On each side of him the lights and neon signs stretched away with the blaze and glitter of a string of cheap, gaudy jewellery. A man brushed past him and went into the pub, the doors flap-flapping, and the murmur of voices from inside had the sound of surf breaking on a beach. A slight breeze had sprung up over the city, moving the hanging signs, and scuttling bits of paper were grey ghosts in the yellow electric light along the street. There were people up and down, walking, looking into the shop windows or waiting aimlessly.



Michael Adonis pulled up the zipper of his leather coat and dug his hands into the slanted pockets and crossed the street. The courage of liquor made his thoughts brave. He thought, 'To hell with them. I'm not scared of them. Of Scofield and the law and the whole effing lot of them. Bastards. To hell with them.' He was also feeling a little morose and the bravery gave way to self-pity, like an advert on the screen being replaced by another slide.

He turned down another street, away from the artificial glare of Hanover, between stretches of damp, battered houses with their broken-rib of front-railings; cracked walls and high tenements that rose like the left-overs of a bombed area in the twilight; vacant lots and weed-grown patches where houses had once stood; and deep doorways resembling the entrances to deserted castles... Adonis turned into the entrance of a tall narrow tenement where he lived... She came down and stood on the first step, smiling at him and showing the gap in

the top row of her teeth. She had a heavy mouth, smeared blood red with greasy lipstick, so that it looked stark as a wound in her dark face. Her coarse wiry hair was tied at the back with a scrap of soiled ribbon in the parody of a pony-tail...

Writers of fiction take note of the immediate surroundings where an incident occurs, or which matter, in order to create a real-life picture. They describe surroundings so that we have a concrete idea of how they look, feel, smell and so on. Writers are interested in objects, in details of behaviour, e.g. Adonis's skin prickles; he pulls up his zipper, digs hands into pockets, and so on. Such information explains a character and adds to the picture of real life. In this passage from a long short-story about the life and death of one of those free-coasting District Six youths, the author does not allow any object to escape his notice, in order to show that his characters are living in a real world, one that we can see, touch, smell, taste, listen to. Note the images;

the air outside, making his skin prickle; the glare of street-lights and windows; the blaze and glitter of a string of cheap, gaudy jewellery; the doors (of a bar) flap-flapping; murmur of voices; sound of surf breaking on a beach; people walking up and down. Adonis pulled up the zipper of his leather coat; artificial glare of Hanover... damp, battered houses... broken-rib of front railings; vacant lots and weed-grown patches.

And many more. All these add meaning to the story, to the character, they give a story volume. District Six is a slum, and the characters behave accordingly. This author in particular writes what is often called 'documentary fiction'. This means short stories and novels in which setting (place and surroundings) is minutely described (documented). This is done because the writer relies heavily on setting to explain the behaviour and attitudes of his people. Perhaps place even shapes character. This is one of the techniques we use to produce resonance, and therefore to explore meaning. It is also a way of orchestration, i.e. of recording sounds and sights and smells to accompany the telling of the main story. But such orchestration must add meaning to it and not be the product of a wild imagination. It should not be a kind of ornament, such as we can imagine on a man who is overdressed, strutting down the street like a rooster.

### A BALLAD OF OYO

## STAFFRIDER WORKSHOP

*Isbola (also called Mam-Tunji because her first son was Tunji) found a tramp on her counter slab at Oyo's central market, where she took her stand each day to sell vegetables and fruit. Furiously she poked the grimy bundle with a broom to tell him a few things he had better hear; there are several other places where he could sleep. She sells food off this counter, not fire-wood — like him; so he thought to lie on a cool slab on a hot night, eh? — why does he not sleep under a running tap? And so on. With a sense of revulsion she washed the counter.*

*These days, when market day began, it also meant that Isbola was going to have to listen to her elder sister's endless prattling during which she spun words and words about the younger sister's being a fool to keep a useless husband like Balogun in food and clothing. Off and on, for three months, Isbola had tried to fight against the decision to tell Balogun to go look for another wife while she went her own way. Oh, why did her sister have to blabber like this? Did her sister think that she, Isbola, liked being kicked about by her man the way Balogun did?*

*That is right Isbola, her sister, who sold rice next to her, would say. You are everybody's fool are you not? Lie still like that and let him come and sit and play drums on you and go off and get drunk on palm wine come back and beat you scatter the children — children of his palm wine-stained blood (spitting) like a hawk landing among chicks then you have no one to blame, only your stupid head (pushing her other breast forcibly into her baby's mouth for emphasis) . . .*

*Day and night the women of Oyo walk the black road, the road of tarmac to and from the market. They can be seen walking riding the dawn, walking into sunrise; figures can be seen slender*

*as twilight; their feet feel every inch of the tarmac but their wares press down on the head and the neck takes the strain, while the hip and legs propel the body forward. A woman here, a woman there in the drove has her arm raised in a loop, a loop of endurance, to support the load, while the other arm holds a suckling child in a loop, a loop of love. They must walk fast, almost in a trot, so that they may not feel the pain of the weight so much . . .*

A ballad is a kind of song that tells a story. The writer here uses a language that sings, alternating with dramatic language. The story opens with a dramatic scene: something is happening and harsh words are being spoken. The last paragraph switches to description, and poetic lines are used: 'they can be seen riding the dawn, walking into sunrise'; 'a loop of endurance'; 'slender as twilight', and so on. 'Road' and 'loop' repeated, as is typical in a ballad.

We are used to seeing ballads in verse, not in prose. But just as we can write a prose-poem, we should be able to conceive a prose ballad. This will not necessarily follow strictly the tradition of the verse ballad.

### Ama Ata Aidoo/THE MESSAGE

Note: The beginning of a short story, set in Ghana. A woman has received news that her daughter has given birth in hospital, but after a Caesarian. It is mostly monologue, but other voices are indicated by implication. The woman is on her way now to see daughter and child, but cannot get over the idea of a baby being taken out of a womb that has been cut open.

*'Look here my sister, it should not be said but they say they opened her up.'*

*'They opened her up?'*

*'Yes, opened her up.'*

*'And the baby removed?'*

*'Yes, the baby removed.'*

*'Yes, the baby removed.'*

*'I say . . .'*

*'They do not say, my sister.'*

*'Have you heard it?'*

*'What?'*

*'This and this and that . . .'*

*'Ah-h-ab! that is it . . .'*

*'Meewuo!'*

*'They don't say meewuo . . .'*

*'And how is she?'*

*'Am I not here with you? Do I know the highway which leads to Cape Coast?'*

*'Hmmm . . .'*

*'And anyway how can she live? What is it like even giving birth with an open stomach, eh . . . I am asking you — a stomach open to the winds!'*

*'Oh, pity . . .'*

*'I say . . .'*

*My little bundle, come. You and I are going to Cape Coast today. I am taking one of her own cloths with me, just in case. These people on the coast do not know how to do a thing and I am not going to have anybody mis-handling my child's body. I hope they give it to me. Horrible things I have heard done to people's bodies. Cutting them up and using them for instructions. Whereas even murderers still have decent burials. I see Mensima coming . . . And there is Nkama too . . . Now they are coming to pity me. Witches, witches, witches . . . they have picked mine up while theirs prosper around them — theirs shoot up like mushrooms.*

Often a writer may not indicate who is speaking, merely recording voices that suggest several persons speaking. This is how Ama Ata Aidoo begins her story. Listen to the woman mumble to herself: 'my little bundle, come . . .'

Mzwakhe Nhlabatsi's drawing introduces EYE, a new Staffrider column which begins in our next issue and will be devoted to visual art workshops and exhibition reviews. Artists who would like to illustrate Staffrider stories are asked to contact us immediately.

*Let us create and talk about life  
Let us not admire the beauty  
But peruse the meaning  
Let art be life  
Let us not eye the form  
But read the content  
Let creativity be a portrait of one's life*

Matsemela Manaka's poem



Mzwakhe  
79



Brenda Leibowitz reviews *Hill of Fools* by R.L. Peteni (H.E.B.)  
 Joe Masinga reviews *The Detainee* by Legson Kayira  
 Letlaka Sepenyane reviews *No Longer At Ease* by Chinua Achebe (Heinemann African Writers' Series)  
 Alex Levumo reviews *No Baby Must Weep* by Mongane Wally Serote (A. Donker (Pty) Limited)  
 Mshengu reviews *Mhudi* by Sol Plaatje

*Hill of Fools*/R.L. Peteni

A tragedy in which two lovers of warring clans, Bhuqua and the beautiful Zuziwe, arouse the anger and warlust of the two tribes by making amorous advances towards each other. Needless to say, on account of the ill-feeling between the groups, the jealousy of Ntabeni, an aged boorish type whom the heroine has promised to marry under pressure, the jealousy of other individuals in the town, and the tradition-based belief in fighting for revenge, a 'faction fight' occurs, during which a Hlubi dies and the Thembu warriors go to court, but talk their way out of a prison sentence by claiming that 'faction fights' are part of nature, a fact of life. Neither family will allow their son and daughter to marry the other, the two cannot escape to Port Elizabeth because of influx control, nor to the country areas, because of poverty of relatives, and to introduce just another factor, the irresponsible Bhuqua has made Zuziwe pregnant. The drama reaches an intellectual and emotional climax just before Zuziwe decides to abort her child and dies, where her predicament is set out as follows:

*But how could she go on living after giving up the man she loved and destroying his child? Why should she love so much the man she ought to hate? Why were the Thembus and the Hlubis such resolute enemies? The individuals were ordinary, decent, normal people with normal feelings and desires. It was the group feeling, the group hatred, which turned them into angry, unforgiving maniacs. In their madness they made a virtue of a vice. Was it part of the irony of life that she should be compelled to turn away from the man she loved, the man who loved her, and embrace a man she did not love; that she should be compelled to raise her hand against her unborn baby lying trustingly in the innermost recesses of her body? What cruel justice was this that was meted out to her, to her lover, to her innocent baby? Must she defy the*

*world and give birth to her illegitimate child, and allow it to face the taunts and jibes of a cruel world? No, she could not bear that. Must she then destroy her own child, the flesh of her own flesh, she, who ought to protect it and defend it to her last breath? No, she could not do that either. No! Again and again, no! (pp. 137, 138)*

It is evident from the above that the novel is didactic, but that at the same time it draws the reader's attention away from the didactic statement about war, authoritarianism and hatred by introducing the elements of fate and the cruelty of life, so that the blame for this tragedy cannot be squarely placed on specific social, political and cultural factors. To add to this confusion, the concrete elements of the tragedy are by no means unequivocal: there is tribal factionalism, but also apartheid, (pass laws, police, the courts) and although these are inadequately explored, if at all, there are factors which interfere, such as the hero's bull-headedness and irresponsibility, Zuziwe's beauty and the fact that she is protected and spoiled by her parents. The result is fairly frustrating for the reader, for although the emotions of the individuals as well as of the 'mob' are convincingly portrayed and the sorrow of Zuziwe acquires poignancy and a certain heroic stature, the description of black village life in South Africa and the problems besetting it, itself lacks incisiveness and direction.

The style is simple, and as one can see from the above passage, fairly unexciting. The scenario (Romeo and Juliet style) is unoriginal, and the river imagery, (Xesi or Keiskama — boundaries between warring tribes and symbols of life and death) is fairly obvious. However, the book is unpretentious and makes for pleasant enough reading.

*The Detainee*/Legson Kayira

Legson Kayira, author of four novels, shows us a perspectived view of Napolo, a simple villager caught in an intricate

political situation.

His mission to Banya to consult a white doctor is obstructed by the Young Brigade under the orders of the dictator, Sir Zaddock Mlingo. Jancha, commander of the Young Brigade, and his men terrorize Napolo. He is offered a lift to Banya and detained at I Snake Camp with the promise of being released.

Napolo's unsuccessful attempts to demand his release cease on the arrival of Jancha. Both Hona and Napolo are released at night, to be drowned in the river. Visitors from the World Council of Churches would otherwise be bound to know of the death of Mazito, suffered at the hands of the Young Brigade.

Napolo successfully manages to survive, is certified dead by a policeman, then escapes from the mortuary into another country.

This book portrays dictatorship engulfing African society today, affecting people regardless of their political beliefs. Kayira's crisp and witty writing illustrate every action in a clear-cut manner.

*No Longer At Ease*/Chinua Achebe

Obiajulu Okwonkwo, the only son of a retired priest, happens to be the bright boy of the village of Umoufia, and the tribe, through their organisation the Umoufia Progressive Union (UPU), delves deep into its meagre financial resources to send him to University in England.

Instead of studying law as has been fervently hoped by his tribe, Obi takes a degree in English and returns home with a B.A. degree — to the utter chagrin and dismay of the UPU.

This is soon forgiven him as his people are consoled by the fact that Obi will procure a well-paid 'European post.'

The UPU is, however, soon shocked at learning that Obi is associating with Clara, a woman who is an Osu and therefore belongs to the caste of un-touchables. Obi annoys everyone by his mulish obstinacy in continuing his amorous relationship with Clara whom he has met on a ship en route to Nigeria after his university studies. Clara has qualified as a nurse in England.

After the clash with the UPU (he owes them the tuition money for his studies), Obi is plunged into financial difficulties caused primarily by his hot-headedness and refusal to follow his better judgement.

The point of no return is reached when Obi accepts a bribe from a well-to-do Lagos businessman. Obi is soon trapped by the police with twenty pound notes which have been marked by his trappers. This is followed by his arrest for bribery.

Obi comes out of it all as a pitiable character who finds himself the victim of circumstances which lead to his own undoing. He has returned from an English University to a well-paid position in Lagos. He soon forgets the people who sacrificed enormously for his education and proudly enters the Lagos elite class.

He further erroneously assumes that since his people had deemed it proper to give him education and status they have a further duty to him in his new position. This attitude further estranges him from his people.

The UPU is still forgiving after his arrest and arranges legal representation for him, but to no avail as Obi is convicted of bribery and his future lies in ruins.

The author poignantly portrays the traditional prejudice of whites vis-a-vis the African, especially the educated African. The prejudice is personified in Green, the uncompromising head of the Government office where Obi is employed.

Green's virulent prejudice finds misplaced vindication in the fall from grace by Obi. He virtually gloats over the entire episode.

One cannot miss the lesson to be gleaned from this immensely readable book by Achebe. One is educated in order to serve, and therefore to plough back one's knowledge into the betterment and advancement of one's people.

*No Baby Must Weep/Mongane Wally Serote*

Serote's poem concerns the trajectory of the personal development of the subject/narrator of the poem. Starting from the earliest experiences that shape his subject's life Serote is determined to show that none of the influences are

random or chance but rather that they embody all the contradictions of the circumstances and times in which the narrator is living. Further, the poem is inseparable from the current moment of the narrator's mental and emotional state which is itself laden down with layer upon layer of turmoil inherited from the past.

The poetry itself seems to stem from the endless striving of the narrator for an understanding of the burden bequeathed to the current moment by the past. Serote tirelessly traces the connection between his subject's current anguish, the suffering of the past and what there may be to hope for in the future.

Serote is not primarily concerned with writing about overt political repression of the black man in South Africa. Instead he assumes this level, and leaves it behind in his search for some essential *meaning and significance* in the experience of dispossession and oppression. Serote journeys through the images and representations of the shared cultural experience of oppression of the black man in South Africa. It is in this sense that Serote's statement is a political work, an affirmation that there is meaning and significance behind the seemingly repetitive patterns of denigration that black South Africans have endured. Serote is determined to plumb the depths which hide in everyday realities the greater realities that consume the past and embody the future.

Serote embodies the past and all it contains in metaphors drawn from the flesh and the senses. The most important of these is that of the 'wound' that expresses all the particularities that history has impressed onto and into the narrator.

*... but this wound, this gaping wound, this throbbing wound is comfortable at the bottom of my soul...*

*i have pleaded with the voice of this time*

*past and coming  
but i sift on this chair  
the wound can't be born  
the soul lies sprawled like a woman  
defeated by her womanhood*

His subject is incontrovertibly a 'blackmanchild', and the experience Serote writes is formed by the poetic submersion of the particularity of the individual subject/narrator into the collective experience of the black masses. This crucial submersion is achieved through the metaphors of the river and the sea.

*... and along came the floodlights of a*

*car  
stretching my shadow along the donga  
into the dirty water that  
flows slowly  
perhaps destined for the sea,  
surely, the sea must be having a large  
red map from the waters  
of the donga, ...*

The movement to the sea reflects the space that has to be traversed by the masses in 'body and soul' in order to consummate the time of oppression in the time of liberation yet to come. The poem moves forward through a sustained traversing of the distance between the personal experience, development and formation of the subject and the total mass of history that the subject at times appears to be entombed in.

The subject is inseparable from the masses, and if the subject is entombed, it is the dead weight of the collective experience of the masses that appears as the subject's burden. The subject cannot *personally* transcend this burden. The only hope of transcendence into the time of liberation lies with the 'river'; with the subsumption of the subject to the flow of the river, in which the black man is seen as the inevitably rising tide.

Serote's poem involves the reader in personally experiencing something of the pain inherent in traversing this distance between masses, history and the personal realities of an individual subject. The irony and the pain in traversing this distance lies in the extraordinary loneliness that the subject, alone, has to endure once he has perceived the extent of the distance to be covered before liberation and the resolution of some of the contradictions of existence.

In this work Serote has isolated the essential political and psychological reality of Africa today; the double bind that in one breath separates the individual from the masses through the culture of oppression/exploitation and at the same time renders the individual's future in separation from the masses inconceivable.

Serote's is a great work of sustained poetic exposition. He hides nothing, without ever resorting to glib glossing over of the immense complexities of the milieu in which his writing is itself destined to orbit, awaiting its true rebirth with the rebirth of culture in South Africa that is surely coming.

*Missionaries, Liberals and the Elite: Sol Plaatje's Mbudi*

During the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th a sizeable group of black Christian intellectuals came in-

to being in South Africa. Educated at mission schools, they cultivated a 'western' lifestyle. For this educated elite there seemed little doubt that Christianity was a force for progressive change in Africa. They saw the mass of their people as still lost in the 'darkness' of what they themselves called 'primitive society' and they saw the Europeans as possessing a vital Christian civilization in which it was their ambition to participate. Thus by embracing Christianity and a western education they distanced themselves from the majority of the people and came to occupy a middle position between them and the Europeans.

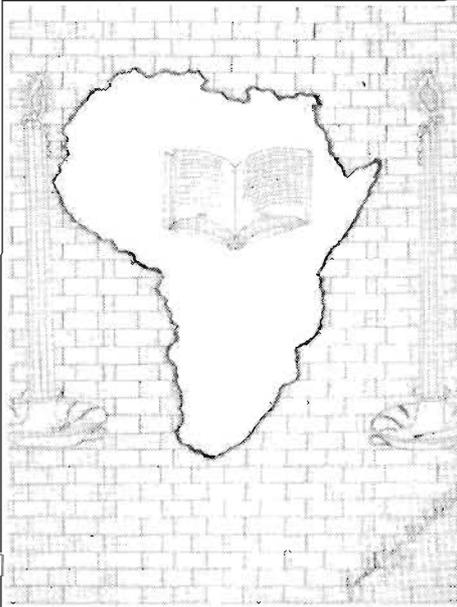
At first they believed that they only had to show that they were both educated and Christian i.e. 'civilized', and the European would open the doors of his society and let them enter to share the fruits of 'civilized' life. However it soon became apparent that those in power and the majority of the Europeans had no such intention. No matter how 'civilized' the elite became, the door remained tightly shut.

This is not the place to look into the political behaviour of the elite – though their politics resembles in many ways their literature – but rather into the problems posed by their creative writing. These are important problems as it is they, the elite, who for a long time have done the lion's share of the writing. In fact it is only recently that unscripted theatre based on improvisation and publications like *Staffrider* have challenged their monopoly.

How do we evaluate the work of the elite of thirty, forty, even sixty years ago? I think it is important to appreciate their literary skills – the craft, the language and the imaginative richness. It is also important, I think, to study their works in the context of their own time. But surely we must consider, *above all*, the effect of their works on readers *at the present time*? If they are seen to contain attitudes which in our modern times have a reactionary, in other words harmful, effect then isn't it our duty as critics or educators to expose these attitudes and to warn our readers or our students about them?

In a nutshell the problem is this: our early writers were important initiators in the history of our literature and their achievements have been an inspiration and a source of pride to us. Unfortunately however most of them were the captives of their class and time, alienated from the bulk of the people by their education. Many of the thoughts they expressed are, seen in the light of our own time, repugnant and dangerous. For instance, that otherwise inspiring

and perceptive mind, H.I.E. Dhlomo, writes in his play *She Killed to Save* of the collapse of the Gcaleka after Non-gause's prophecy failed and sees this great tragedy as a god-given opportunity to convert the Gcaleka to Christianity and 'civilized labour' – for the white farmers and the missionaries, of course. Similarly, though we may admire a great deal in Sol Plaatje's *Mbudi* – especially when we consider it in the context of Plaatje's life and time – we nevertheless find much that is not admirable when we consider the novel as something to be read by South Africans now.



*Mbudi* is set in the South Africa of 150 years ago at a time when the Boers were just beginning to penetrate into the interior. There Mzilikazi and his amaNdebele held sway over a minor empire of vassal Sotho and Tswana clans. One of these clans, the Barolong of Kunana, made a fatal mistake and seized two of Mzilikazi's indunas and put them to death. In retaliation the Ndebele sacked Kunana and slaughtered thousands of Barolong. Ra-Thaga flees from the devastated town and after much wandering in the game-infested wilderness he meets up with another Rolong fugitive, Mhudi. They fall in love and eventually make their way to Thaba Nchu, where the Rolong remnants have sought refuge with Moroka. When a party of Boers is relieved of its cattle and yoke-oxen by Ndebele soldiers, Moroka rescues them and they too pitch camp at Thaba Nchu. Eventually a powerful party of Boers, Griquas and Batswana sets off to fight Mzilikazi. The Ndebeles are routed by the guns of the Boers and forced to flee across the Limpopo. Ra-Thaga and Mhudi have the satisfaction of seeing the massacre of their people, the Barolong, revenged and they return home in an old ox-wagon, given them by Ra-

Thaga's friend, de Villiers.

Tim Couzens's very informative introduction gives a more than adequate account of what is good in Plaatje's novel. He describes Plaatje's industrious, varied and selfless life. He defends Plaatje's style against unfair criticism and notes his use of proverbs, songs and folktales. He convincingly interprets the various political elements the novel contains: it is a 'defence of traditional custom', 'a corrective view of history' and 'an implicit warning' of the inevitability of revolution 'if certain conditions continue to prevail'. These are some of the very positive reasons for hailing the achievement of one of our earliest writers. As Mothobj Mutloatse wrote in *The World*, 'Sol Plaatje, by any standard, was a giant in his time'.

However the novel was republished last year (1978) and as I wrote above it is not only its importance in Plaatje's time that we have to consider. Its appearance *now* compels us to revalue it in the light of *present* circumstances. And in this light problems are revealed which Tim Couzens, Bessie Head, Nadine Gordimer and company do not even begin to mention.

In the introduction *Mbudi* is compared to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: 'for just as Achebe does in the later novel, so Plaatje portrays a traditional society at a crucial stage of transition. Throughout the novel he explores the qualities of traditional life which seem to make it more attractive than the life of its usurpers.' But would Achebe have referred to Okonkwo's wives as 'the simple women of the tribes' (*Mbudi* p. 25)? Could he have written 'strange to relate, these simple folk were perfectly happy without money' (*Mbudi* p. 27) or 'she slept – as the Natives would put it – like a wolf that could be skinned when asleep without waking' (*Mbudi* P.153)? Or referred to Queen Mnandi's clothing and jewellery as 'barbaric splendour'? *Mbudi* is filled with the phraseology of Plaatje's colonial mentors. He freely uses terms such as 'primitive', 'simple' and 'barbaric' to describe traditional Tswana life.

No, not only would Achebe not have written like this but Dikobe, author of *The Marabi Dance* did not either. Achebe, Dikobe and others, Casey Mosisi for instance, wrote about the people's experiences from within, whereas Plaatje like many other writers of the elite was writing from without. He interpreted 'the Native mind' to his European readers, as one 'civilized' man talking to another about the 'uncivilized'.

Yet if Plaatje's description of *Tswana* traditional life and his use of vernacular

proverbs and expressions is almost always condescending and even apologetic, he reserves for the Ndebele a more forthright vocabulary. In the Introduction Couzens claims that 'in *Mbudi*, Plaatje is concerned to defend the customs of the traditional life of the Barolong (and, to some extent, by extension, of the blacks generally)'. This claim just doesn't square with the facts. Most of the time Plaatje's descriptions of the Ndebele differ in no way from even the conservative white historians that we all were made to read at school. All the degraded terminology is there - 'Mzilikazi, king of a ferocious tribe called the Matabele' (p.28), 'hordes of Matabele' or 'the Matabele hordes', 'courtjester' for *imbongi* (p.50), 'ever louder and louder droned the barbaric music' (p.52) for Ndebele music at the celebrations of the Battle of Kunana. He attributes an excess of superstition and witchcraft to the Ndebele. He also suggests that their customs were by comparison with those of the Barolong especially distasteful. For example, he claims (on p.29) that

the Ndebele 'were in the habit of walking about in their birthday garb thereby forcing the modest Bechuana women and children to retire'. Later he claims that the Ndebele fought their battles stark naked. Yet all this is as nothing in comparison with his lurid descriptions of Ndebele warriors cutting down women and children. For instance: 'Ra-Thaga saw one of them killing a woman and as she fell back, the man grasped her little baby and dashed its skull against the trunk of a tree' and again 'a Matabele withdrawing the assegai from the mother's side, pierced her child with it, and held the baby transfixed in the air' (p.32).

Whatever the historical accuracy of the above claims and descriptions, Plaatje was aware of the animosity which (even in his day) many tribalistic Sotho-speakers entertain for what they call 'Matabele' - always a word of contempt - i.e. Zulus, Xhosas, Swazis etc. This is shown in a quote from his own writings on p.10 of the Introduction: (for nearly three-quarters of a century

thereafter the Matabele and all the tribes allied to them (e.g. Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi, Shangaan, etc.) were regarded with awe, and the Bechuana would have nothing in common with them. It speaks volumes for the magical force of Christianity if their descendants now intermarry with members of such tribes as Plaatje did himself. Can he not have been aware of how his novel might exacerbate such animosities? At the present time when tribalism is to be fought and solidarity is so important surely we can ill afford novels which dwell on the past hatreds of Rolong for Ndebele, Xhosa for Mfengu, Sotho for Zulu?

There is a lot that can be said about other attitudes expressed in Plaatje's novel which however understandable for a member of the educated elite of Plaatje's day are offputting and disturbing in the context of our own. We can leave them to the reader, who has now been put on his guard, to think about for himself.



## CHILDREN'S SECTION



International Year  
of the Child 1979

Staffrider's new children's section is our contribution to the International Year of the Child. In this issue we publish the first part of a story written for children by Marguerite Poland, a poem by Shadrack Phaleng, and the photographs of Moikangoa and Robert Magwaza. The drawing which signposts this section is by Frankie Ntsu kaDitshego.

Everyone agrees that our literature lacks stories suitable for children who will help to make a new society. We hope that the Staffrider Children's Section will encourage writers to close the gap.



Frankie Ntsu kaDitshego

## VUSUMZI AND THE INQOLA COMPETITION / a story by Marguerite Poland

Vusumzi Ntuli was coming home from school. It was twelve o'clock and the sun was high and bright. His books were tied together with string because he had no satchel. His old black blazer bulged round him as the wind shrieked across the flats from the river, hurling dust and gravel at the house. Smoke from the four great chimneys of the power station lay sideways in the sky and even the orange and cream buses toiling down Daku Road seemed to lean against it.

Vusumzi Ntuli was excited because there was to be an inqola, or wire-car making competition, at the youth club and Vusumzi was determined to win it. The prize was a guitar and there was nothing he wanted more. He had been to the music shop with Mrs. Dladla and others from the club to choose it. They had decided on a shiny red-brown guitar with steel strings and a glossy cowboy transfer pasted on it.

The music shop was next to Super-Save Stores where his mother went on Saturdays and while she shopped he

would peer in the window where the guitar was displayed with a ticker propped against it saying, 'Reserved for the Kwazakhele Youth Club'. He wanted to touch it and pluck the silver strings but he was afraid to ask. The young man who worked in the shop was known to everyone. He wore jeans and a black 'J' shirt and important-looking sunglasses. His name was Boxer Nxumalo — of course because he was quick with his fists — and Vusumzi, being only ten, would rather avoid him.

At home he stacked his books carefully under the bed, looked into the pot on the primus stove and scraped out a crust of cold mealie-meal. Eating this he went into the back yard where his grandmother was washing. He greeted her, listening to the whoosh-whoosh of the clothes rubbing against the washing board. Grandmother seemed very old to him yet when she bent down to the big tin bath her legs and back were straight and strong. She had soapsuds on her forehead where she had wiped her hand across her face.

'Weh Vusumzi, mntan'am,' she said smiling. 'What have you learnt today to tell your grandmother?'

Vusumzi was impatient to search for wire for his inqola but he was always respectful to her. 'Many things Mkhulu,' he said. 'Reading and sums and how to plant beans so there will be many.'

'Eehhh,' sighed grandmother. 'You must plant here so Mkhulu can grow fat because I am very old now and tired of work and the food is not much, my child.'

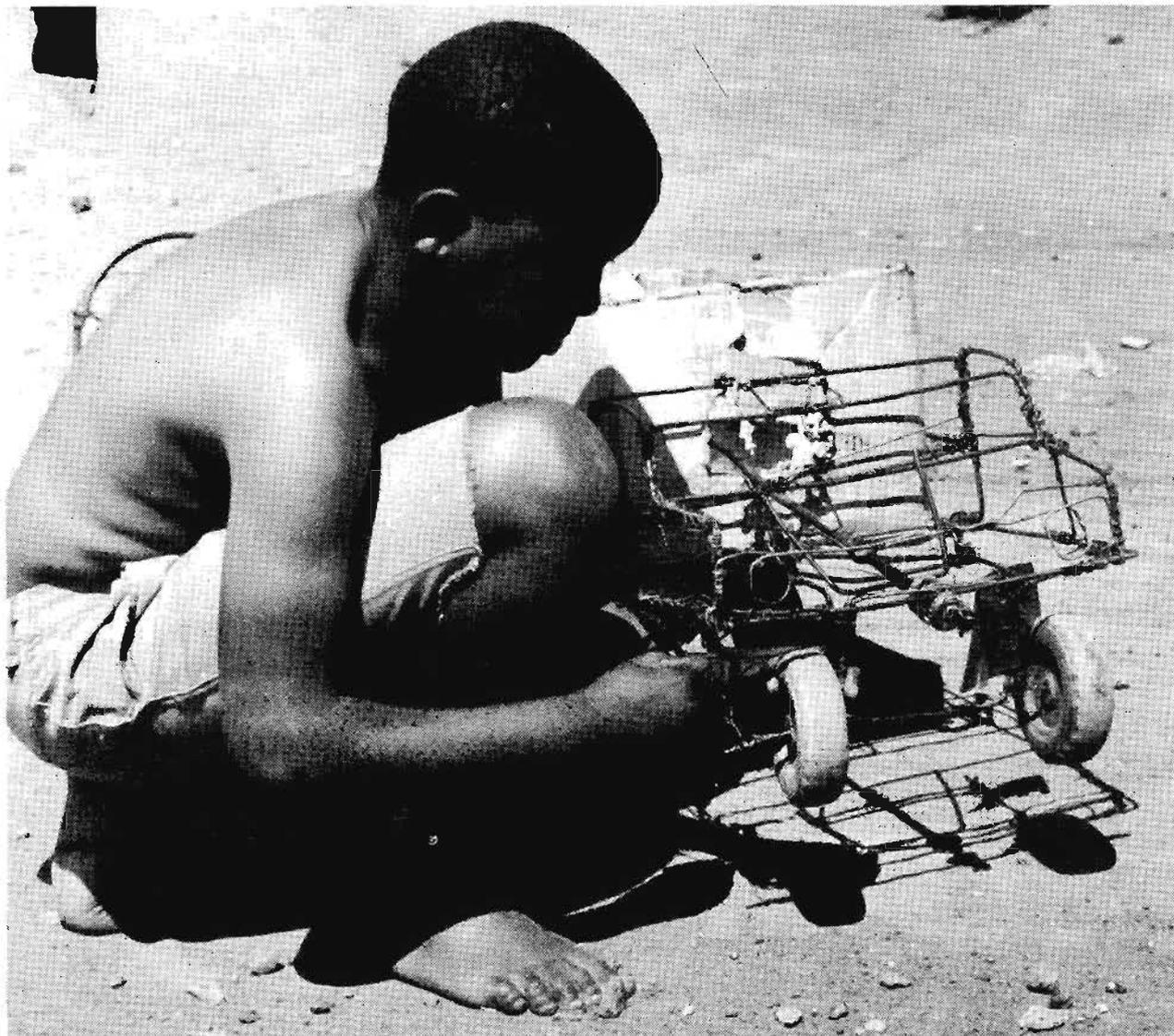
'Yes Mkhulu,' said Vusumzi scratching the sole of one foot against his other thin, rough leg.

'There must be homework for you to do Vusumzi,' she began.

'Only a little,' said Vusumzi sniffing loudly and rubbing his nose with the back of his hand.

'Well, you had better do it,' she said firmly. 'Oh those fowls!' she cried looking up from her work. 'Chase them! Chase them out!'

Vusumzi chased the fowls away from the big paraffin tin in which his mother



## CHILDREN'S SECTION

made ginger beer to sell at her hawker's stall. 'Shoo! Shoo!' he cried as he scattered the long-legged chickens. Grabbing a stick he raced round the yard after them, then slipped through the gate into Njoli Road and away from Mkhulu and her ideas about homework.

He went to the youth club. Mrs. Dladla was sewing with the girls and some boys were kicking a ball on the gravel outside. Vusumzi stepped over a group of little ones watching the game from the doorway and found his friends Thomas and Siphwiwe who were playing darts. Two older boys, Josiah Penxa and Velaphi Mpofo, came over and, pushing the smaller boys away, snatched the darts and began a boisterous game. Thomas protested but Josiah launched a dart threateningly towards him. Thomas started bravely after him. 'Just leave him Thomas,' said Siphwiwe grabbing his arm and pulling him away.

Other children were making their wire-cars and Mrs. Dladla left her sewing and waddled among them clucking admiration and encouragement.

'We need more wire,' said Vusumzi. 'Let's go and find some.'

'Best place is Yeko's store or behind the garage,' said Thomas.

The three boys went across the open land near the Welfare Offices where the grass was short and scrubby bushes grew at an angle because the wind was always blowing. An albino mule with odd pink eyes grazed here and a few yellow dogs hunted among the grass for scraps and mice. The boys poked at the bushes with their sticks and trotted along the edge of the commonage where a fence had once stood. They found some wire — mostly rusted and old, but too good to throw away.

'Let's ask Mr. Yeko if he has any,' said Thomas.

'Yo!' exclaimed the others. 'He will chase us.'

'Why should he?' scoffed Thomas, much the bravest of the three.

They climbed up the steps to Yeko's store, the others hanging back while

Thomas went forward hesitantly. Mr. Yeko was leaning on the counter talking to a customer. A fat woman in a bright overall was weighing sugar into small brown packets which she slapped on the shelf behind her once she had stuck down each with a strip of sticky brown paper. Thomas stood in front of her for many minutes picking at the corner of the wooden counter with a dirty finger.

'Yes?' inquired the woman vaguely without looking up.

'We want wire,' said Thomas, 'for making cars.'

'Wire?' She frowned. 'How much you got?'

'No money. We want scraps.'

'There's no scraps here,' said the woman tucking a stray end of hair under her scarf. She turned away.

'Can I speak to Mr. Yeko?' asked Thomas.

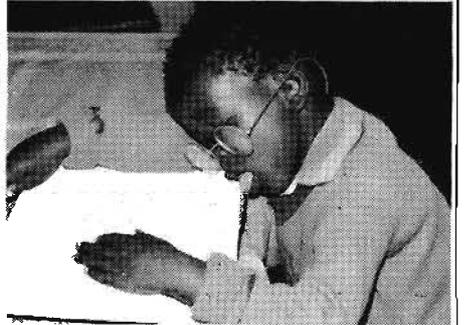
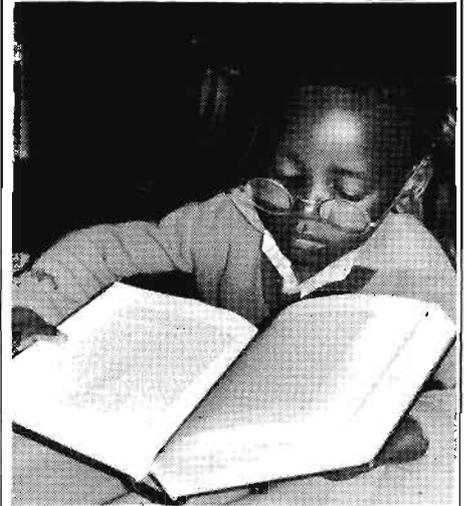
'He's busy,' she snapped. But as Yeko came over at that moment and wrestled with the cash till, she said in a lazy voice, 'This boy wants wire scraps or something.'

'Wire?' said Mr. Yeko looking over his glasses.

'Yes, Mnumzana,' murmured Thomas respectfully. Mr. Yeko was a fat man with a shining bald head which he rubbed often and vigorously with a blue and white handkerchief. He was very stout and very shrewd. He listened as Thomas told him about the inqola competition.

Being a patron of the youth clubs in the township, Mr. Yeko did not like to refuse the request, so he took the boys out to the yard where many cartons and fruit boxes were piled, along with an old motor car without wheels. The fruit boxes were fastened together with strands of wire and the boys pried these loose.

They ran back to the youth club with three large plastic packets of wire. Mrs. Dladla gave them a pair of pliers to share and they sat together in a corner sorting their pieces.



### AS A CHILD

I saw as a child  
A large and beautiful space  
With children and playing facilities  
And I never knew why  
I was prohibited from the park.

I saw as a child  
A large double-storied building  
With children and compulsory education  
And I never knew why  
I was prohibited from the school.

I saw as a child  
A large building with a cross  
With a minister and congregation  
And I never knew why  
I was prohibited from the church.

I saw as a child  
A large advertisement-placarded building  
With refreshments and meals  
And I never knew why  
I was prohibited from the restaurant.

**Shadrack Phaleng**

### CAPTION COMPETITION RESULT

On the back cover of **Staffrider** Vol. 1 No. 4, we had a competition for the best caption to a photograph. We are happy to announce that Mr. M.D. Mmutle is the winner, and we'll be sending him the R10,00 prize.

### NEWS FROM SOUTHERN AFRICAN PEN CENTRE (JOHANNESBURG)

The Centre is at present working in three main fields: (1) organization and co-ordination of readings in the Reef area ; (2) workshop activities; (3) assistance to harassed or imprisoned writers and their families.

Readings are at present taking place approximately once a fortnight. For information on forthcoming readings, availability of transport, etc. telephone the chairman of our Centre at Johannesburg 39-1178 or the secretary at Johannesburg 724-4033. All **Staffrider** readers are cordially invited to read their work or join the audience on these occasions.

The PEN Centre sees it as its task to secure *the right to write*, free from institutionalized harassment, for all South African writers. It is therefore taking up cases of alleged harassment whenever these are reported, and asking writers to stand firm and united on this issue. It is also raising and distributing financial support for the dependants of imprisoned writers.

**Membership Form/** To be posted to Southern African PEN Centre (Johannesburg), P.O. Box 32483, Braamfontein 2017

I am a writer and would like to be a member of the Johannesburg PEN International Centre. I enclose the annual membership fee of R3,00.

Name: .....

Address: .....

Telephone: ..... Writers' Group (if any): .....

### Staffrider Subscription

Please send me the following numbers of **Staffrider** at R1,50 per copy (overseas R2,00):

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I enclose my cheque/postal order to cover the issues of **Staffrider** at R1,50 per copy that I have marked above, plus 4 per cent GST (S.A. only).

Name: .....

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# FUBA

presents

## TWO PLAYS BY ZAKES MDA

Opening at Diepkloof, Soweto on 14th February 1979.

### DEAD END

Charlie	James Mthoba
Voice	Richard Mgemane
Tseli	Nomhle Nkonyeni

There will be an interval between the plays

### WE SHALL SING FOR THE FATHERLAND

Amstel Merit Award Winner 1978

Sergeant-Major	Edward Soudien
Janabari	James Mthoba
Offisiri	Eddie Nhlapo
Banker	Richard Mgemane
Businessman	Eddie Nhlapo
Young woman	Nomhle Nkonyeni
Old woman	Nomhle Nkonyeni
Clerk	Eddie Nhlapo

Directed by

**BENJY FRANCIS**

Designed by

**NORMAN COATES**

Stage Manager

**Morris Mohlala**

PERFORMANCES AND VENUES:

Maseru - March 5 and 6  
Bloemfontein - March 7 and 10  
Lobatsi - March 12  
Gaborone - March 13 and 14  
Turfloop - March 16 and 17  
Northern Transvaal - March 19 until March 24

IN THIS ISSUE

Covers/ The art of NKOANA MOYAGA the words of INGOAPELE ('Black Trial') MADINGOANE  
Writing and art from the new groups/ MADI (Katlehong)MBAKASIMA (Sebokeng)/GARTASSO (Ga-Rankua)/  
MALO POETS (Durban)  
Also featuring/BAYAJULA (Kwa Thema)/KWANZA (Mabopane East)/GUYO (Sibasa/Nzhelele)/CYA (Diepkloof)  
Stories by/RICHARD RIVE/MTUTUZELI MATSHOBA/AMELIA HOUSE/JILL BAILIE



STAFFRIDER IS NOW A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

IN THE NEXT ISSUE (APRIL) EXPECT

Stories by MOTHABI MUTLOATSE, K.F.S. NTULI, MICHAEL SILUMA, MTUTUZELI MATSHOBA, CHRISTOPHER WILDMAN,  
LETSHABA THUBELA and others

Poems and art from the new writer's groups: MOROPA ARTS ASSOCIATION, ZAMANI ART ASSOCIATION, DURBAN OPEN SCHOOL  
Regular Soweto Speaking writer MIRIAM TLALI will be back from Iowa, USA where she has been attending the International Writing  
Programme.