

# Staffrider

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**Weinberg & Mofokeng:** Going Home  
**Jeremy Cronin:** Insurgent South African Poetry  
**Ellitha Jawahirilal:** Art and Exile  
**Paizer Nyatumba:** The Shadow of Socrates  
**New Stories, Poetry, Reviews & Letters**



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**Cover:** *Mobilize*  
*Lallitha Jawahirilal*

**Back Cover:**  
*Paul Weinberg and Santu Mofokeng*

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## COMMENT

It has perhaps become time in South Africa for a searching overview and examination of the theories and pseudo-theories which underlie and govern the various practices of literary criticism in this country. The necessity for this has been recognized by various writers. One example is Richard Rive, who shortly before his untimely death, published an essay 'Writing or Fighting,' in *Staffrider* Volume 8 Number 1, in which he explores the dilemmas facing South African writers. He puts forward the necessity to challenge, analyze and review the criteria employed by some critics to distinguish between so-called good and bad literature in South Africa. This will not be a simple undertaking but given the long history of critical conflict in this country it is an undertaking that cannot be postponed much longer.

If matters are left as they are, the confused eruptions which occur from time to time will remain a feature of South African literary life. While the short-lived excitement which accompanies this might well be entertaining, such eruptions very often hardly make any significant contribution to reaching greater clarity concerning the presuppositions, prejudices, theories and expectations which inform the various local practices of literary criticism. This vague, confused and frequently destructive state of affairs might suit the reactionary sectors of South African cultural life. However, a search for greater conceptual clarity regarding the nature of the various literary forms in relation to the multiple traditions to which they are connected, in conjunction with their critical reception and role in society, is, however, in the interest of those who seek to facilitate literary change.

Because of the rigid racial moulds in which the social and political life of South Africa is set, literature written in English has almost invariably been received in terms of racial categories, with little attention given to class factors, the multiple generic and aesthetic traditions or the social roles of this literature. In retrospect, it will probably become apparent that the tendency to simplify these intricate and complex matters to crude racial dynamics, has in many ways, and particularly at the level of literary evaluation, duplicated the hierarchies and assumptions of superiority which serve to rationalize the political economy of this society. The task of a radical literary critique will firstly be to reveal this, and secondly to proceed towards advancing a more analytical, many-sided and sophisticated approach.

This approach will have to avoid the dangers of authoritarian tendencies to advance and enforce a single undifferentiated aesthetic system. It will have to come to terms with the phenomena of aesthetic heterogeneity as well as develop the conceptual means to trace, analyze and situate the literary work within the context of both its literary self-definition, its material and ideological determinants, its symbolic projections and interplay with social historical questions. This implies that abstract universalisms have to be replaced by concrete analyses which seek to establish the basis whereby factors such as class and ideology shape aesthetics. It calls for a comparative analysis which will enable the elaboration of a substantiated criticism capable of resisting crude generalizations with universal pretensions.

In this regard, Jeremy Cronin's essay on the new forms of radical oral poetry, and Dirk Klopper's reviews of two recently published poetry collections, must be seen as

points of departure for a wide-ranging but conceptually precise debate on all aspects of South African poetry which *Staffrider* would like to initiate. Consequently, I want to take this opportunity to invite cultural activists, literary critics and theorists to contribute to this process by taking up issues touched on in previous editions of *Staffrider*, or elsewhere in the South African literary scene, with the aim of giving sharper focus to the relationship between culture and questions such as class, race, history, ideology and aesthetics. It is, I believe, only by tackling these questions head on that the process of social and cultural change can be undertaken with the clarity marked by an interplay of theory and practice which is essential for radical cultural production.

*Andries Walter Oliphant*



*Stranger in a Strange Place: No exit allowed*  
Jane Duncan

## The Shadow of Socrates

*Kaizer Mabhilidi Nyatumba*

**T**hey had told him long before he came back that great things were expected of him. They had not put it in so many words, of course, but, not being a child, he understood. After all, he was the eldest male child in the family, and now that he had finished his studies everybody looked up to him. Their suffering was over, they told themselves, because he would get a good job, earn a lot of money and build them a beautiful house as soon as he started working.

And so letters were sent from the village of Memeza in the

Eastern Transvaal to New York congratulating him on finally obtaining his BA degree in Philosophy, and gently reminding him that his education was not his alone but his family's as well. The letter politely reminded him too that the four-roomed shack the family was living in when he left was now old and dilapidated. It could be wiped out by the next storm or heavy rain. It did not have to be a hurricane, really – the shack was so old even a mild breeze could destroy it, said the letters.

Mecca was preparing for his final exams at the State University of New York when he received the letters. Hard as he tried to put them out of his mind and concentrate on his studies, he always found himself thinking about those letters. He had inherited new dependants overnight! He counted them – there were his aged father, his sickly mother, his three brothers and his two sisters and their children. Of his three younger brothers, the two who came after him were still at school, and Nzuzo, the last born, was the black sheep of the family. He and school were aliens to each other, he having abandoned school when he was in Standard Three. Street life was for him. He moved in circles notorious for crime. At the age of 17 he was the terror of the village.

At least Siphwe and Sandile were more like him. The former was a Standard Ten pupil at Nkululeko High School, and the latter was training to be a teacher at Izwe Lethu College of Education. They were following in his footsteps, Mecca thought to himself.

His sisters' case was worse, though. The first born, Ntozakhe, was in matric when she became pregnant and dropped out of school. The father of her child remained unknown. Zanele, the second born, also fell by the wayside. She was a first year social work student at the University of Zululand when the same fate befell her. She lost her scholarship and had since been unable to get another. She had given up hope, and she and her sister Ntozakhe stayed at home bringing up their children. All these people were waiting for him to return.

Then he thought of Sophie, his fiancée back home. She had been waiting for him all these years he was away. And their little daughter Leah – how was she? When her mother last wrote to him she enclosed a picture of her which was taken at her first birthday party. All he knew of her was what he had seen in the photos, because she was born three months after his last visit to South Africa. In his letters he remarked that Leah looked more like her mother than himself.

Sophie was likely to put more pressure on him now to marry her.

All these years they had known each other he always hid behind his studies when she brought up the marriage issue. Let me finish my studies first, darling, and then we'll get married, he always told her. Faithfully she waited for him to come back, to marry her and get a home for her and their daughter. With an American education this would be easy for him to do, she told herself. Whenever members of her family at Dube in Soweto scolded or punished her daughter, Sophie would tell little Leah: 'Don't worry, my child. We'll soon go away from this home of theirs; your father will come back and build us our own home.'

And then Mecca thought about the future. What was he going to do when he went home? Would any of the universities to which he had applied for a lecturing post take him? Where would he, his daughter and his fiancée live when he returned to South Africa. His parents' home was overcrowded and he did not want to live with his prospective in-laws.

'Study now, Mecca boy. You will think about that once your exams are over,' he would tell himself and go back to his work.

Mecca had saved enough money in the States to enable him to buy presents for the people back home. During his last year at university he had accepted a job as a teaching assistant, and so he was able to save some money. Also the \$750 monthly stipend he got from his sponsors was enough to take care of his basic student needs, and he was able to put aside a few dollars every month and even to send money back home when the need arose. Not one who had grown up swimming in money, he knew well how to take care of it.

Mecca often recalls the day he returned from the States. He remembers it so well that all he has to do is close his eyes and the day's drama unfolds again in his mind. His fiancée, Sophie, with their daughter Leah, was at Jan Smuts Airport to meet him. His brother Sandile and his girlfriend Lucille, and a handful of friends and relatives were also there. All these people were glad to see him, and so was he to see them.

Leah, however, seemed to be the happiest of them all. Although the little girl had never seen her father, she immediately took to him when her mother pointed him out. Poor girl – she had heard so much about him, had seen his photos and had had his letters read out aloud to her. Now here he was at last, the very man she had heard so much about.

Almost three years old at the time of his return, Leah jumped to

her father and clung to him. She sobbed against his chest. 'Daddy! Oh daddy, mama says you will build us our own house,' she said. Everybody was surprised, including Mecca himself. Unsure of what to say, he only caressed the child and quietened her. He was a real father! All along he had been an invisible father whose presence was manifested to his daughter through photos and letters. Now here she was, calling him daddy, showing confidence in him and looking up to him.

As Mecca greeted everyone, Leah and her mother were at his side. After he had exchanged American dollars for South African rands at the airport bank, they all proceeded to a restaurant to have breakfast. Afterwards Sophie, Leah, Mecca, his brother Sandile and his girlfriend were left alone. They boarded a Maxi Taxi to Johannesburg, where they checked into an hotel before visiting Sophie's home.

The following day they left for Memeza in the Eastern Transvaal. His family was happy to see him. But while his father urged him to sit down and tell them about the far-off land, Mecca moved up and down the house, surveying things. Remembering the kind of letters he used to receive, he took a good look at the house. This is the shack they kept telling me was about to fall down, he thought to himself.

'You are not listening to me, son,' his father gently reproached him when he saw that Mecca was thinking about something else.

'No, I'm listening,' Mecca said, sitting down on an old chair.

'I asked you how you found it in America.'

'Oh, it was cool, dad, real cool.'

'I don't mean the weather, son, I mean the place and the people?'

'That's exactly what I mean, dad. I found both the place and the people real cool,' Mecca said.

'Well,' his father said, 'I must say I never thought you would come back here!'

'Why not?'

'Well, because people tell us it is nice in America, and black people are equal to white people.'

'I see.'

Nzuzo, who had been quiet all the time, cleared his throat to ask: 'But is that true, buti?'

'Yeah, I guess it is,' Mecca said indifferently.

His mother, who sat next to him, was looking at him with pride. On her lap sat Leah, also looking at her father. They told him

about people who had died while he was away, children who were born to his friends, relatives and neighbours and other things that had happened. Mecca listened impassively.

Then they moved on to important issues. A new house, they said, had to be built for the family as soon as possible.

'You must be kidding, dad, I don't even have a job yet,' Mecca protested.

'You'll get a job,' said his father.

'But even if I should get a job, who says I *ought* to build you a house first? I have my own priorities, you know.'

'Your father is right, Mecca my child. We do need a better house,' said his mother, breaking her silence.

'I don't deny that, ma, and I haven't said I'm not gonna do it. All I've said is that I have my own priorities,' he replied.

'But if you are not going to build a house immediately, then where are you, Sophie and your child going to stay, because, as you know, this shack is overcrowded as it is now?' his father asked.

Mecca smiled. 'Look, dad, we are not going to stay here. I can't live in a place like this.'

'What do you mean you can't live in a place like this? You grew up here, you know.'

'Believe me dad, I know that, but things are different now.'

'Is this . . . what education has done to you?' his father asked angrily.

'What?'

'Has education made you look down upon the place where you were born and grew up?'

'Dad, I don't want to argue with you, especially not on our first day together after a long time. But the truth is, there is nothing intellectually stimulating here. There are no cinemas, no theatres, no stadiums, no recreation centres. I don't want to stagnate here.'

'But you grew up here.'

'That's right. I was not educated then, and I was not exposed to as many things then, as I have been since. I don't want my child to grow up like I did. I want her to explore the world at an early stage.'

'I see you have become a white person, and when you speak you spice your Zulu with English words . . .'

'Can I help it, dad, after spending such a long time in America?'

' . . . Tell us then *baas*, where are you going to live?'

'Listen dad,' Mecca said angrily, 'I said I don't want to argue

with you, and I meant that. Okay? Now don't ever call me *baas* again.'

'But you do go on like a white man, Mecca.'

'I go on like a white person? What hogwash. Who says that because a person is black then he should not live a decent life, and if he aspires for something better then he is being a *baas*?'

Clutching the little girl closer to her, Mecca's mother spoke: 'Don't speak like that to your father, Mecca my son. You will be followed and plagued by bad luck if you speak like that to your parents.'

'What does he care about bad luck? He is a *baas*, isn't he?' his father said sarcastically.

'Dad, don't you understand?'

The atmosphere in the kitchen where they were sitting was now tense. Nzuzo, Sipiwe, Ntozakhe and Zanele shifted uneasily in their seats. When Mecca looked at them, he read in their eyes complicity with their father. They were all against him; he was the outcast, he thought. Only Sandile seemed less bothered by the whole exchange. If Mecca had hoped to read something on Sandile's face, then he was disappointed because his brother's face was as expressionless as ever.

A long silence ensued. Sophie, who had conveniently left the kitchen when the argument began, was unpacking their clothes in Ntozakhe and Zanele's room. Seated comfortably on her grandmother's lap, little Leah was playing with a new doll her father had brought for her from the United States. Speaking softly now, Mecca's father broke the silence: 'You have not yet answered my question. Where are you going to live?'

'In Johannesburg,' Mecca replied tersely.

'What?' his mother asked incredulously.

'Yes ma, in Johannesburg. In Soweto in fact. Day after tomorrow I have an interview with the head of the Philosophy Department at the Soweto branch of Vista University about a lecturing post. I am sure I will get the job,' he said.

'You mean you are deserting us, son?'

'No ma, I'm not deserting you, and I would never do that. But I need to be in an intellectually stimulating place where there will be no danger of stagnating. Besides, I can't get a job here.'

'If it's teaching you want,' said his father, 'then you can go teach at the local Izwe Lethu College of Education. I'm sure they would love to have you there.'

'That may well be so, dad, but that's not what I want to do. I am

a philosopher. They don't teach philosophy at a college of education. I'm sorry, but that's too parochial an institution for me,' Mecca said.

'Now what about building us a decent house, son?' his mother asked.

'I will do that, ma, but it can't be my number one priority. If I get the lecturing job at Vista then Sophie, Leah and I will live at the lecturers' quarters in Soweto. I will build you a house in due course.'

'I hope it will be before I die,' his mother said.

'Of course you will still be alive, ma,' Mecca assured her. 'You won't die.'

'One never knows, son. I would like to share in my son's success before I die,' she said softly.

'You will, ma.'

There was another silence. Then Mecca dropped the bombshell: 'By the way, Sophie and I are getting married.'

'What?' the whole house chorused.

'We are getting married.'

'You can't be serious,' Ntozakhe protested. 'How can you get married just when you finish your studies, before you have worked for your family?'

'Say that again, Ntozakhe my child. Your younger brother here wants to do nothing for us,' his father said. 'He wants to get married so that whenever we ask for something from him he can hide behind his family. "My family also needs money," he will tell us!'

'I can't believe you,' Mecca said, looking from one to the other. 'I really can't believe you. You know that Sophie and I were engaged to be married, and yet you feign ignorance and surprise now. That over there is my child, and she needs to have a mother and a father who are married.'

'And when are you planning to get married, my son?' his mother asked.

'As soon as there is enough money for it, ma. Probably in December.'

Mecca did get the lecturing job at Vista University, and for a while all seemed to be going well. They had a free house to live in and privacy, which he had come to value while in the States. There were three bedrooms in the house, a sitting room, a dining room, a kitchen, a bathroom and a small study. It was just perfect for a

man who was always engrossed in books.

The house had been occupied by another lecturer who left at the end of the first semester. The house also had a phone, which meant that Mecca did not have to file an application and wait for months for the phone to be installed. He considered himself extremely lucky. He could not live without a phone, he thought. In the United States he had come to realize that a phone was not a luxury, but a necessity. So was a television set. And so was a car.

Mecca bought both things on credit. When not reading or preparing the following day's lectures, he, Sophie and Leah sat watching television in the evenings. It was the American soap operas he liked. However, he never watched news on TV. 'These SABC-TV guys are clowns, man,' he had once said to Sophie. 'Do they think the propaganda they are showing us is news? They should go to America and watch ABC News, CBS News or even NBC News and then they will know what real world news is.'

Not knowing much herself, Sophie gave him that 'of course you are right' smile.

And so Mecca never watched news on television or listened to it on radio. Instead, he voraciously read newspapers. He always made sure to read at least *The Star* and the *Sowetan* every day.

On weekends he and his family would drive to town to watch a movie, or to visit Shareworld to entertain themselves. On Sundays when he returned from church he watched soccer on television. He lived like this for a while. Then he received a letter from home. They wanted to know if he had forgotten about the house he had promised to build them.

'Damn them,' he said after reading the letter. 'Where do they think I get all the money from?'

'What is it now, honey?' Sophie asked him.

He gave her the letter and said: 'They want me to send them R300 for the house.'

Sophie read the letter but did not comment. Mecca resumed reading the newspaper.

'Seeing that we do have a house of our own,' Sophie eventually said, 'maybe you should make a small house a priority. I don't want them to think that it is because of me that you are not sending them money.'

'I should make that a priority, you say. Now what about our wedding in December? We will need a lot of money for it, won't we?'

'Yes we will, but remember my parents in Dube are taking care

of that. After all, it is they who are marrying me off. And, fortunately, you paid the bride price a long time ago while you were still studying in America.'

Mecca scratched his head, evidently thinking. 'Look, love,' he said, 'it is not that I don't want to help those people at home. I do. But the problem is money. You know we have the TV and the car to pay off every month.'

'I don't want to be a nuisance,' Sophie said, clutching her daughter in her arms, 'but I did warn you against buying a car so soon. I understood about a TV, but we could not afford to buy a brand new car only the second month after you started working. While I like the car, I believe it was too expensive and that we rushed things a bit.'

'Sophie, you don't understand. I'm probably the only black philosopher in Soweto – I know I am here at Vista University – and I have been educated in the US. People have certain expectations of me, you know. As a philosopher and an American-educated academic I am expected to dress well, live luxuriously and drive a beautiful car.'

'But a brand new car, Mecca?'

'Yes, a brand new car. Surely it would be *infra dig* for me to drive an old jalopy. A brand new Skyline is just the right car for me.'

'Sometimes I think you care too much what people think.' After a thought she added: 'And people don't even understand you.'

'What do you mean?' Mecca demanded.

'Why, I mean just that. People don't understand you. For instance, you insist people should phone us first before they come to visit us, and not just pop in.'

'That, my dear, is only being civilized. Where in the world would you just go visiting people without their knowing about it in advance? That's a serious violation of people's privacy, you know.'

'There you go again with that privacy of yours. You seem to be obsessed with that concept since you've come back. Anyway, what I mean is: where should the people get the phones to call us and make an appointment in advance? You know only a few people have phones around here.'

'Yeah, I know that. But still that does not mean people can come here as they please without telling us in advance.'

'But Leah's father, please be practical. Unlike us, most people don't have phones. And, once they are here, you still want us to go on as if they were not here. You do not even acknowledge their

presence. Now that is cruel. Remember the other day some friends of yours arrived unannounced at dinner time?’

‘They could have found us in bed, for that matter. Which is why they should phone before they come. Anyway, when you prepared supper that day you had not included those three guys; they were not invited for dinner, nor had they called to say they were inviting themselves to dinner with us. I was not going to stand by and watch you halving our plates so that they could also get food.’

‘But you know how things are in the black community. Should someone come unexpectedly at a time when we are eating, we scrape our pots, halve our plates or even starve ourselves so that the guests have something to eat.’

‘Not so any longer, baby. All that has to change with the times.’

Sophie looked at her common law husband. ‘America has changed you, Leah’s father,’ she said. ‘You used to be one of the most kind and compassionate men I’d ever known.’

‘I still am. It’s only that one cannot pretend to be Christ today in the late twentieth century, you know.’

‘One more thing,’ Sophie said, ‘people complain about your speaking English all the time, and never Zulu or Sotho. ‘Moreover, you speak English like an American, and greet people like Americans do on TV: “What’s up?” Is this all to show you were educated in America?’

‘Don’t stretch my patience too far, Sophie, okay? It is not elastic, you know, it can stretch only so far. I can’t help it if I have spent four years in America, can I?’

‘No, you can’t help it, dear,’ she said sarcastically. Then she added slowly: ‘I am beginning to agree with your father. You are behaving like a white man.’

Preparations for the wedding were going well. Mecca was worried, however. Not about the wedding, oh no. He was happy about the wedding, and he was looking forward to it. After all, in common law he was already Sophie’s husband, because he had paid *lobola* a long time ago.

What worried him was the fact that he was losing friends left and right. This, he knew, was inevitable. Old friends who had been educated at local universities and those who had not gone to university would be intimidated by him, and would therefore keep a distance between him and themselves. This was to be expected. What bothered Mecca was that he was losing friends at a much faster rate than he had anticipated. In fact, he could not keep

friends at all. Nor could he make new ones.

People just shied away from him. Did they feel inferior and intellectually dwarfed by him? He never knew the answer. Strangely enough, it was only among his white colleagues in the Philosophy Department at Vista University that he felt at home. And in front of his students in the lecture halls. This was his world. Here he felt perfectly at home. They, as he liked to tell Sophie at home, discoursed on Plato's dialogues, the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant, the rhetoric and poetics of Aristotle, Henry B. Veatch's *Rational Man: A Modern Interpretation of Aristotelian Ethics*, Germain Grisez and Russel Show's *Beyond the New Morality – The Responsibilities of Freedom* and many other philosophical concepts and books on philosophy. This was his world.

He was convinced that people did not understand him. After all, was not the great philosopher, Socrates, misunderstood by his fellow Athenians in his day? No, he would not change his way of living simply to make people happy.

He had once told Sophie that what was happening to him was not unusual. The world, he said, did not understand him just as Socrates's countrymen never understood him. The world, he found himself in complete agreement with Socrates, had to be run by philosopher-kings.

'Faced with death,' Mecca told his wife, 'that wise Athenian philosopher did not panic. He told those who stood in judgement over him that even if they promised not to kill him if he stopped being a philosopher, he would still continue. "Many thanks indeed for your kindness, gentlemen," Socrates said, "but I will obey the god rather than you, and as long as I have breath in me, and remain able to do it, I will never cease being a philosopher, and exhorting you, and showing what is in me to anyone of you I may meet, by speaking to him in my usual way." That was a great philosopher,' Mecca concluded.

Letters had come in great numbers again from home. Money was needed for this and that, and would he please send a few hundred rands, almost all the letters said. They came from his parents, his two sisters at home, his two brothers at school and from relatives who had nothing to do with his education; relatives he never knew existed.

All the letters worried him. Surely these people did not expect him to feed and clothe the whole world. Where did they think the money came from? They never thought about that. All they knew

was that he was educated and was consequently getting a lot of money. They could not understand why he always replied to say he did not have money.

Sometimes he did send his parents the money they asked for, but not the relatives he did not know. This was not every month, though. He sent them money only when there was enough remaining after he had paid various monthly bills.

His people would never be satisfied. They would write back to thank him for the R250 he had sent, and gently remind him that it was R300 they asked for. Would he please add the outstanding R50 to the coming month's R300 to make up a total of R350. It was not easy for Mecca.

One afternoon Mecca was lying on the sofa, watching television and thinking about his problems. Leah sat next to him, and busied herself by pulling her father's hair. Mecca did not mind. This had become his daughter's favourite pastime. Whenever he lay on the sofa to watch TV, she never failed to assail his permed hair with her fingers. He had warned her against the game a hundred times, telling her that the dripping perm would dirty her hands. His warnings and pleas went unheeded. And so every day after watching TV, both he and his daughter would disappear into the bathroom, he to re-comb his hair and she to wash the oil from her hands.

And so as he lay on the sofa in front of the television set that Friday afternoon, his daughter's fingers were rummaging through his curly hair. His wife was in the bedroom taking a nap. Fridays were good days for Mecca. He had only one lecture in the morning, and then that was it. Around 2 p.m. he and his wife would drive to town to fetch their daughter from the multi-racial crèche in Bellevue East. On the other days he drove his daughter to the crèche in the mornings. His wife would fetch her in the afternoons. But Fridays afforded them an opportunity to be together.

It was around 3.30 p.m. when the post office messenger knocked on the door.

'Come in,' Mecca said, without taking his eyes away from the TV set.

In walked the postman, holding a telegram in his hand.

'Are you Mr Camble?' the postman asked.

Mecca nodded. 'Yes I am,' he said, thinking of Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* – 'I think, therefore I am.' He was born Nkambule, but in the US his friends and professors could not

pronounce his surname, and so he changed it to Camble. It was easier that way. Although his family and friends back home found it strange that he had actually changed his surname in order to be accepted in America, they called him Mr Camble nonetheless. Whoever called him Mr Nkambule immediately earned Mecca's wrath and a place in the young man's bad books. This included his parents.

'I have a telegram for you, Mr Camble. Will you sign here please,' the postman said, showing Mecca where to sign. He reached for a pen on the coffee table, signed on the line shown to him, put both the telegram and the pen on the table and went on watching TV as the postman bade a farewell and left.

Telegrams were familiar to Mecca. Unlike many black people in the country to whom a telegram is synonymous with sad news of death, to him a telegram was simply another convenient mode of communication. He was himself in the habit of writing telegrams to friends to wish them a happy birthday, or to make an urgent appointment with those acquaintances he called friends who did not have telephones at home. And so telegrams did not scare him.

He went on watching television until his wife woke up and joined them in the lounge.

'I see you have received a telegram today,' she said as she sat down next to him.

'Yeah, the postman brought it in a few minutes ago. Did you enjoy your nap?'

'Oh, yes. Thanks,' Sophie said, yawning shyly. 'Aren't you going to open the telegram, honey?' she asked.

'I'll open it.'

'When? Its contents may be important, you know.'

'Okay, I'll open it now,' he said nonchalantly, reaching out for the telegram on the coffee table. He showed no sign of expectation, fear or trepidation. His hands were steady and controlled as he opened the telegram. Then he turned to look at it. His fingers started trembling, slightly at first, and then violently. The telegram fell from his trembling hands as tears flowed down his face.

Leah ran to the bedroom.

'What is it, honey?' Sophie asked inquisitively. She had never seen Mecca in that state before. He had always struck her as a very brave man who would never stoop to the level of showing his feeling through tears.

'What is it, Mac, love? Please do tell me.'

'My mother! Oh, my dear mother,' he cried, pointing to the telegram on the floor.

Sophie was now the level-headed one. There in front of her was her common law husband writhing like a child, and in the other room her daughter was crying at the top of her voice as if she had been beaten. Sophie walked to the TV, turned it off and came to sit next to her husband again. She picked the telegram up and read:

MA DEAD COME HOME QUICKLY

Sophie lost her composure and screamed hysterically. She could not believe it. Only five more weeks to go before their white wedding, and now her mother-in-law was dead! If only it was all a bad dream. But there was the telegram on the floor. Mecca picked it up and read it again. Sophie took it from him and also read it for a second time. The message which had shattered their Friday afternoon was still there.

The whole house was full of different kinds of crying. Little Leah, who did not know what had happened, was crying just as much in her room. Nobody was comforting another. There did not seem to be time for that. Alarmed and surprised, neighbours came rushing in to find out what was happening. Their questions fell on deaf ears, because nobody answered. Instead, the family went on crying louder. Sophie and Mecca pointed at the piece of brown paper which caused their misery, lying on the floor.

After a while, physical wounds heal and only a minor scratch or scar remains. Many years later, new skin cells develop and erase the scar so that only the observant see it. Not so the wounds of the spirit.

The wounds of the spirit bleed ceaselessly like the flowing of rivers for years on end. A scar in the spirit is like a gaping wound which stubbornly refuses to heal. When it tries to heal, germs invade it and make it fester and bleed anew. And then the pain multiplies, for pain temporarily forgotten is like a venomous snake which is sure to strike again.

So was it with the Camble family at Vista University's lecturers' quarters in Soweto. Long after the death of Mecca's mother, happiness continued to elude the family. There were bright and sunny days of course, but for Mecca most of them seemed cloudy.

Sophie and Mecca did get married in a church at Dube after all. Both families were well represented. But Mecca sorely missed his mother at this special event in his life. How he would have liked

her to be at his side on that day! As they and their groomsmen and bridesmaids paraded up and down the streets of Dube, his heart was bleeding inside. When the women sang with joy and shouted '*Kwakhle kwethu!*' his heart bled even more. How he would have loved his mother to be among those women!

But the wedding is long over now, and life goes on as usual. There are the problems about money, of course. Instalments for the car and the television set, have to be paid, and letters from home still come streaming in. The request is always the same: money.

But Mecca tries hard to be sensitive to the needs of his father and his family now. He sends them more money whenever he has it. What else can he do, when he is openly accused of causing his mother's death? It has been said, both to his face and behind his back, that his mother died of a sudden heart attack because she was always worried that Mecca had deserted them.

'*Thixo*, how could he desert us when I trusted him so much? How could he, my *own* son, desert us when we need his help most?' the old woman is said to have asked rhetorically as she sat brooding on her bed, tears flowing down her wrinkled face. Before her death, she is said to have been in the habit of constantly talking about her son Mecca, mentioning his name five to ten times a day. When he did send them some money, she complained less and gave most of it to her unmarried daughters. And so people concluded that it was Mecca's indifference to the family's plight which killed his mother.

This kind of talk hurt him. It hurt him terribly, and he could not hide it. It affected him at work and at home. 'Ever since *mme* died my husband has never been the same again,' Sophie was heard confiding to friends.

Recently there have been rumours that it is America which gave Mecca a stone heart and made him indifferent to his family's suffering. Rumour-mongers have eloquently pointed out that before he left for America Mecca was a very nice and kind-hearted young man. But he went to America and came back a different man. He became callous, and did not care a damn about his aged parents, and the brood of brothers and sisters.

'He is a been-to, and thinks he knows everything,' those who have nothing better to do than to gossip and spread canards in the townships said. Others added generously: '*Ja*, that's ambition for you. South African universities were not good enough for him, the ultimate black genius, so he had to go to America. Look at what

that education of his is doing to him now. It is literally tearing him apart, man.'

This talk hurt Mecca. Oh yes, it hurt. So often did he hear these things said that he started to believe that his mother's death must have had something to do with him. He felt guilty no matter how much his wife tried to point out to him that his mother had always been a sickly person. He carried all the world's guilt on his shoulders, and walked the streets of the township with his face always down. He never looked anybody in the eye, because in their eyes he saw his guilt written.

Sophie urged him to see a psychiatrist but he refused, angrily accusing her of suggesting he was mad. And so Mecca's once sharp mind deteriorated gradually. Sometimes he took long to respond when he was spoken to. Once he told his wife that he was hearing voices in his mind, one of which seemed to be his mother's calling him to join her where she was. He started talking to himself, and one day he was heard wondering out loud if it was still worth it for him to continue living.

## A Condition of Service

*Michael Shackleton*

Jaap Malan, the town clerk, listened incredulously to what the priest was saying. He had been leaning comfortably in his chair, with the other opposite him across his desk. He jerked himself forward.

'You want to build a Roman Catholic church in the town,' he said lamely. 'But your people are all coloureds. They have their own church in the location, haven't they? You have no whites living in Skadupoort. Don't you know that it's against the law for non-whites to worship in a church in a white area?'

Father Heinz Klein had been nodding gently in acknowledgement of each point Jaap Malan made. Now he stood up. He was nearly fifty years old and had been caring for the coloured people of Skadupoort's location for ten of them. He was based across the mountains at the railway-junction town of Oosterrand and came weekly to the prefabricated church in the coloured area.

'Before I comment, Mr Town Clerk, I must point out that you are wrong about the law. The Group Areas Act states that no non-white person may *occupy* premises in a proclaimed white group area, and occupation means sleeping there, spending the night there. This does not apply to worship in a church.'

Jaap Malan was impressed. He lacked a legal mind and had only a veneer of interest in the intricacies of the law.

'Ah,' he protested, 'that makes no difference. Even if it is not a law it's a custom, a social observance, whatever you'd like to call it. I can't recommend that the plans you've presented for a new church in the town should be passed by Council. There are two almighty obstacles blocking the way. Firstly, you're a Catholic, and this is a Protestant town. Secondly, you've got no whites, and this is a white town.'

The town clerk's bald head was mottled with a million freckles that had trespassed down his nose and jowls. In moments of high emotion they each seemed to glow with crimson brightness. Observing them, the priest felt he must score while his listener was being receptive.

'You may not be aware,' he said levelly, 'that most of the Italian and German farmers in the district are members of my flock. They usually attend church across the pass. A small number go to the location for mass. They all would most certainly attend church here

if we had one. You know how wealthy they are. On Sundays the high street would be lined with expensive cars. And the church itself would be a gem. It has been designed by an eminent Italian architect, using marble from Carrara, mosaics from Ravenna, and murals and stained glass of the most exquisite and expensive materials. The cupola will be bronzed and will catch the radiance of the sun like a mirror. Tourists will come in droves to inspect the only all-Italian church in the Little Karoo. Perhaps souvenirs will be sold. Think of how money will pour into Skadupoort, the town with *two big churches.*'

'And who,' protested Jaap, blushing with annoyance, 'is paying for all this foreign splendour?'

'Mr Ponti d'Alba,' Heinz replied and paused. He saw Jaap's eyebrows lift in surprise, and added: 'You know, our local farmer, the well-known Italian millionaire.'

Sneaking from between his podgy lips, Jaap Malan's tongue began to betray his agitation as it passed back and forth across his mouth. He coughed coarsely and then slowly rose from his seat. He was not as tall as the priest and appeared squat and thick-set by contrast.

'It's quite out of the question,' he grumbled, his voice dropping solemnly, even sadly, as he spoke. 'The Council will never be able to agree with your proposal, not even if a hundred millionaires came to church here.' He moved away from his desk towards the door. The priest quickly stepped forward and obstructed his progress. Jaap was again impressed. He paused and gaped, waiting to see what Klein was up to.

'On your desk with the plans is a formal letter from my bishop requesting your Council's permission to purchase the vacant plot in the high street and to erect the church upon it. The letter also authorizes me to act with all legal powers on the bishop's behalf. I expect you to refer the letter and plans to your planning committee and to let me have an official reply from them.'

Stepping back, the priest opened the door and went out without another word. Jaap Malan remained where he stood, staring through the open doorway, his eyes revealing the sudden reverie that kept him rigid for several moments.

That night Jaap called on the dominee, Fanus Joubert, spiritual leader of the church at Skadupoort. They were old friends, having grown up on adjoining farms, and had been through school together. While Fanus had been away in Stellenbosch doing his theological studies, Jaap had built up a career as a gentleman

farmer with an interest in civic affairs. He loved his job as town clerk, for he was a busybody by nature. He and Fanus had become prominent in the town at the same time. Their firm friendship was acknowledged and respected by everyone there.

The pair sat on a wide sofa in the large living room of the pastorie with its high ceilings supported by gigantic oaken beams. The plans for the Italian-style church were draped loosely between them across the backrest.

Fanus looked like anything but a minister of the church. Before dark he had been using a pick to break up some hardened soil behind the pastorie, preparatory to planting a new lawn there. Like most of the local people, he felt fully at home working with the soil and its produce in this fruit-growing region. His khaki shirt was still stained with sweat under the armpits and his faded blue trousers were filthy from kneeling among his compost-enriched flower-beds. He uncrossed his legs and bent awkwardly across Jaap to stretch for his pipe on the low table before them.

'Fanus,' Jaap was saying eagerly, 'it's really a beautiful design. I mean, you've always loved the arts and architecture of Italy. You were there during the war. I can just see you appreciating a little bit of Italian culture right here in your own place.' Jaap lifted the ample mug of coffee that the dominee's maidservant had brought to him earlier. He gulped down a satisfying measure. 'And Fanus,' he enthused, his freckle-blotches glowing ardently as he spoke, 'Skadupoort will become famous. I've always said that this town could become something. Another church, frequented by prominent and wealthy farming people, would make us so different from all the towns around us. It would give us prestige and bring tourists in droves. From my viewpoint as town clerk, I really would like to see this church put up and bring honour to Skadupoort.'

A haze of pungent tobacco smoke had hidden Fanus's craggy face from view. Jaap waved his hands vigorously to dispel the smoke as he searched for his friend's reaction.

'Why are you telling me all this?' the dominee asked him bluntly, his eyes half closed and quizzical.

Jaap put down his coffee mug with slow deliberation. 'Because you are my friend, and you know what it would mean to me to improve our great little town. And because your opinion and influence here probably carry more weight than anybody else's. If you agree to the new church – purely for civic and aesthetic reasons of course – nothing could stop it being built.'

Clearing his throat noisily, Fanus Joubert leant his head back

against the embroidered cushion behind him. In a soft voice he said slowly, 'We are the children of the Reformation. We could not tolerate a Roman Catholic church in our very bosom.'

With a leap Jaap was on his feet. He was not angry but anxious. 'Is that your only objection, Fanus!' he demanded.

The dominee glared back at him. 'That would be my *first* objection as a churchman. And leaving aside your thin reasoning based on civic pride, my *second* objection is that of a law-abiding citizen. The Roman Catholics are overwhelmingly coloured around here and I would not tolerate the brown people attending church services in a white town. In fact,' he thumped his knee sharply with his pipe, 'I would be horrified if whites and browns sat in the same pews together. The next thing to happen would be a brown clergyman preaching in the town!'

Bewildered and disappointed, Jaap began to meander about the richly-furnished room. His freckles were now exhibiting themselves unashamedly. He was beginning to realize how much he wanted the new church in the town. He turned to Fanus. 'And your love of things Italian? Your hundreds of Italian opera records? Your big books full of the Renaissance painters? Your replicas of Michelangelo's sculptures? Fanus, you are well known for being a scholar of the Italian culture. You've even been commended by the Italian President for your articles and promotion of Italian arts. Didn't you go to Cape Town to get some kind of medal from the ambassador there?'

A worried expression spread over the dominee's face. He stood and moved about distractedly. 'Of course, you are right. I would really enjoy having a building of Italian origin and style here. I would love being consulted about its architecture and features. But,' he widened his narrow eyes and shook his head, 'not a Roman Catholic church.'

'Well, like it or not, you are not going to get an Italian millionaire offering to donate a Florentine public toilet or a Venetian canal to Skadupoort. Look at the plans. They're ready and clear. It's a case of take it or leave it. We either have a church or nothing at all. And poor old Skadupoort misses the opportunity of an era to get national – even international – recognition.'

Jaap had snatched up the architect's plans as he spoke. He flung them down on the sofa. 'Take another look at these,' he bellowed, 'and I'll call for them on Sunday after the service.' He strode furiously from the room. The way he slammed the front door left Fanus in no doubt about the town clerk's viewpoint.

Albertus Johannes van Blom had been mayor of Skadupoort for three years. He was one of the wealthier farmers of the district who, among other achievements, grew a fine muscat grape in his vineyards which was considered the best by those who preferred their wines sweet and strong. His farm was several kilometres from Skadupoort. He seldom journeyed to the town except for the monthly Council meetings and for church on Sundays when he would discuss civic affairs with anyone and everyone, and even sign official documents which his secretary would bring with her, folded up in her hymnal or Bible. His informality and approachable style were as popular as he was himself. A stomach of breathtaking dimensions was his best-known attribute. It was instantly recognizable by all, and seemed to lend him an aura of paternal benignity.

The road that led to the homestead from the entrance to the mayor's farm was narrow, with high shrubs and hedges on each side. Its gravel surface was rough and pot-holed and, for some reason, invariably muddy in places. Fanus Joubert's Mercedes-Benz made its ponderous way along it now. Every so often Fanus, who was attired in his formal clerical black suit and white tie, caught glimpses of vineyards, fruit orchards and tobacco plants. He could hear the splash of mud against the tyres and bodywork, and told himself to remind Albertus to pave the road and so remove the necessity of his visitors having to wash their cars on returning to their homes.

He parked in the shade of a tall eucalyptus tree, although the worst heat of the sun had waned for the day and birds were already gathering towards their nests. As he mounted the stone steps to the mayor's wide verandah, he met Albertus himself emerging from behind a vine-covered trellis. Albertus greeted the dominee with a bruising handshake and motioned him towards a wrought-iron table with a heavy wooden top upon which sat an opened bottle of Albertus's renowned red muscadel wine and two crystal goblets.

'I recognized your car and thought you'd appreciate a glass of welcome,' he boomed.

Fanus sat and watched Albertus pour with expert ease. He accepted the goblet with its brimming contents glowing as clearly as a polished ruby, and raised it in salute.

'You know I never drink when I am on house visits, Bertus,' he apologized.

'I know, I know,' the mayor chuckled, 'but you just can't refuse

me because I'm such a persuasive host.'

Fanus sipped and felt the raisin-like savour comforting and warming his palate. He swallowed sensually and licked the sweetness from his upper lip.

'It's your persuasive powers that I've come about,' he declared, putting the wine to his mouth again and knocking back almost half of it. 'I need you to do two important things so as to convince others about that new church the Roman Catholics want to build in Skadupoort.'

With a brief smile of understanding, Albertus recharged the goblets and lowered his portly frame gently into a chair. He moved the chair away from the table as he did so, in order to accommodate his spectacular paunch. He did not speak. He knew the dominee as a logical, clear thinker in the best Calvinistic tradition, and awaited the presentation of the two important things.

Bolt upright, Fanus sat and gazed steadily from the verandah across the farmlands to the mountains which were hazy in the early-evening shadows.

'The Town Council must be persuaded that the presence of a new Italian-style church will be for the civic benefit of everybody in Skadupoort, and . . . ,' he hesitated only momentarily as Albertus gasped in astonishment, 'and the Roman priest, Klein, must be persuaded that permission for the building of the church will be granted absolutely on condition that he agrees to permit only whites to go there.'

The dominee was resolute and definite. Nothing would make him change his mind once it was committed to a set course of action. Everyone was aware of that, not least the mayor who had come to learn, during his few years in office, who really was the public guardian of the daily do's and don'ts of life in and around Skadupoort. He sighed and lifted the bottle, tilting it towards the dominee. Fanus quickly placed his fingers across the rim of his glass and shook his head.

Refilling his own glass liberally, the mayor shifted stiffly on the uncomfortable chair.

'Jaap Malan told me that you were dead against the Roman Catholics having a church at all. Even if we see to it that only whites worship there, which in my opinion would be doubtful, how can we, the children of the Reformation' – he stressed the words meaningfully, glancing at the dominee's austere face – 'tolerate Roman Catholic ceremonial religion in this dyed-in-the-wool bed of Protestantism?'

'We are already doing so, in so far as a large proportion of our brown people are Roman congregants. Logically, if we allow a Roman Catholic church in the location among them, we ought not to forbid a church in the town among the whites.'

'But surely,' the mayor went on, scratching with his forefinger at the convex expanse of his abdomen, 'we can let the Romans do missionary work among the coloured heathen, as this fellow Klein does, but we cannot encourage them to invade a white place where everybody accepts the Reformed faith.' He drank another quantity of muscadel and waited expectantly for Fanus to respond.

'That is an irrational argument, Bertus. The reason is that the coloured folk are as Christian as we are. There are no more missionaries in their midst looking for candidates for baptism. We must stop regarding them as ripe for evangelization. They are evangelized. The reason why we and they keep apart is simply that they are not yet ready to share our culture. They can't understand it or have a feeling for it. And that is why I insist that we can allow the Roman Catholics to build their church provided that the non-whites are kept out of it at all times.'

'And you want me to tell Klein just that,' the mayor mumbled.

'Just that,' the dominee repeated, 'but in writing!'

Albertus broke into a thunderclap of a belly-laugh. 'I agree with you. In fact, as far as I am concerned, the coloured people have a funny way of singing hymns, peculiar to themselves. I find it terribly irritating. As long as they sing them in the location, it suits me fine.'

As Albertus began to pour himself another draught, the dominee rose from the table and marched intently towards his car.

The prefabricated affair that was passed off as a church in the location was far too small for the weekly congregation. The portable altar, which had gradually been moved nearer and nearer the wall as the people's numbers swelled, was now so close to it that there was barely space for the officiating priest to genuflect.

Every Sunday Heinz Klein took mass at eight in the morning. During the service today he had noticed that his flock was becoming fidgety, apparently being aware of something he did not know. Only as he stood outside in the glaring sunshine, greeting his parishioners as they took their leave, did he espy the mayor's car. It was parked alongside his own on the ground that slanted down towards the river. At first he wondered why the luxurious vehicle was not surrounded by admiring onlookers, for his people

were incorrigibly inquisitive. Then he saw that there was someone in the driver's seat, and he identified the distinctive paunch.

When he knew that the priest had seen him, Albertus opened the door and stepped out of the car. He stood politely, debating within himself whether it would be more courteous for him to make the first approach, or wait till the priest came over to him. Deciding that he should choose the former alternative, he traipsed up the incline.

Heinz Klein welcomed him warmly. He took his hand and, it seemed to Albertus, pulled him into the cool interior of the empty church. They sat side by side on the backmost pew. The mayor spoke first.

'Father Klein, your recent interview with our town clerk has been referred to me. Before the matter is presented to our Building and Planning Committee, I feel I must tell you of a condition that will have to be laid down, and which you will have to accept.'

Very uncomfortable, because only one of his buttocks was supporting him as he angled his body on the narrow pew to address the man beside him, Albertus writhed his legs beneath the weight of his overhanging stomach. He thrust his hand with difficulty into his jacket pocket and extracted an envelope from which he drew out a document.

'This,' he announced, as he unfolded it, 'is a declaration I'd like you to sign.'

The priest took the piece of paper from him and immediately read its contents aloud. 'I, the undersigned Heinz Klein, hereby declare that I am the minister of religion in charge of the Roman Catholic congregation in Skadupoort and that, if the Town Council of Skadupoort should grant permission for the erection of a Roman Catholic church within the proclaimed white area within its jurisdiction, I undertake to permit only members of the white population group to gather in the said church for public worship, and to prevent members of the non-white population groups from entering the church during the hours of such public worship.'

The mayor poked his finger towards the paper. 'There's a place for signing your name,' he explained unnecessarily.

No reply came from Heinz Klein. He sat brooding, enveloped in his voluminous green liturgical vestments.

Albertus coughed in discomfort. 'Will you sign it?' he encouraged, smiling broadly.

The priest straightened himself on the bench. 'What if I do?' he asked carefully. 'What, then, would be the prospects of the Council

actually approving the building?’

‘I can honestly tell you that there will be no objection, but, of course, I’m telling you this off the record.’

‘Then, can I also tell you, off the record,’ the priest whispered, emphasizing the last three words, ‘that I’ll abide by the condition?’

Albertus, who was still trying desperately to adjust his huge torso to the inadequate pew, shook his head briskly.

‘No, no, I must have your signature to that document.’

To Albertus’s surprise, the priest slid away from him along the bench. Into the space now created between them he put down the paper and signed it at once, using a ball-point pen he had taken from beneath his robes. He handed the paper to Albertus who beamed with undiluted pleasure and signed his name as a witness below the priest’s scribble. With a struggle he rose, relieved to move freely again.

‘You will hear from me,’ he said, and was gone.

Heinz Klein stayed where he was and listened to the sound of the mayor’s swift footsteps outside. He heard the car’s engine hum into life and gradually fade into the silence of Sunday morning. He bent forward, covering his face with both hands.

There was not a living soul in the length and breadth of the Little Karoo who did not know of the building of the Italian-style church in Skadupoort. That it had been allowed and sanctioned in a traditionally Calvinistic town was a bone of contention which many were keen to bite on. Nation-wide conservative church publications, careful to stick to a religious perspective, warned the whole country that this was the start of the undermining of hard-won Protestant values. The opposite viewpoint was expressed by liberal urban editors who praised the municipal officials of Skadupoort for their tolerance and foresight. Spectators convened daily to watch the slow, steady development of the church’s foundations, walls, doorways and windows. Media men and women were frequent visitors, and the number of luxury cars parked ostentatiously in the high street, most with out-of-town registrations, grew noticeably. Yet public awareness never took in so much as a whisper of the condition that had been laid down to permit the church to take shape at all. The inhabitants of Skadupoort and its surrounds never seemed to doubt that, since the church was in the white section, it would be the preserve of the whites. On the other hand, people who lived in the cities further away took it for granted that any church was open to all, and gave no thought to the contrary

possibility. And if they did, they said not a word about it.

Among those often seen clambering among the scaffolding, planks and building machinery was the dominee. At first he had been a mere observer from his car window as he drove to the building site on occasions. He became progressively bolder in a matter of weeks, and was soon on enthusiastic speaking terms with the architect who had come from Italy, and also the Italian builder whose construction company was one of the largest and most respectable in South Africa. He had them both to dinner at his home and delighted in exchanging information with them about their respective lands of origin. He explained that Skadupoort meant The Gateway in the Shadows, and was so called because the town lay at the entrance to a fertile valley and so caught the shadow of the adjacent mountains. He showed them his collection of Italian artifacts and replicas and was thrilled by their reciprocal enthusiasm.

Together the three would inspect the materials that arrived in enormous pantehnicons at the building site, and Fanus spent hours hovering about the marble and other selected stone that had been gently and carefully stacked in readiness for the masons. People began to remark that he spent more hours at the new church than at his own, and certainly many more than the Roman Catholic priest who put in an appearance on Sundays only, and then for not very long.

After nearly a year had passed, the size and grandeur of the new church became apparent. When the foundations had been laid, there had been no doubt in anybody's mind that the floor area was much smaller than that of the big Reformed church in the town. Now it seemed unbelievably greater. The edifice itself, in typical Baroque manner, deceived the eye. The beholder's first impression was that the entire structure was imposingly large. Yet by stepping inside, one's impressions became mixed, for it was very difficult to judge the precise proportions of spaces, arches and columns which were really not as vast as they were perceived.

The invitation to the blessing and opening of the church arrived with Jaap Malan's morning mail. He immediately telephoned Albertus.

'Bertus,' he chuckled, trying not to let slip his excitement, 'did you get an invitation to . . .'

'You and I shall be going,' Albertus interrupted flatly. 'I've discussed it with the dominee. He also got an invitation but we think that it would be diplomatic if he refused, which is easy to do

because it's on a Sunday and he'll be too busy with his own spiritual duties.'

Jaap was delighted. 'Did you hear that the millionaire who put up the money, Ponti d'Alba, will be there, and also the Italian ambassador? It'll be a fantastic day for Skadupoort. We'll never forget it – the start of a new era of fame and pride.'

Sunday, the twenty-ninth of June, was the day fixed for the formal blessing and opening of the church. This was the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul in whose honour it was to be dedicated. Although the ceremony was to begin at ten o'clock in the morning, there was considerable commotion on the previous night as television technicians set up their paraphernalia to record the event. The townsfolk flocked to the scene to watch them and to chat with the strangers who were showing such uncommon interest in a local affair. Everybody was enchanted by the publicity. The Skadupoort Hotel, a normally unpretentious establishment, had never seen such a commercially successful Saturday night and the bar, which was generally closed by ten o'clock, remained open till well after midnight, nobody noticing or caring that this was beyond the lawful trading hours.

At nine thirty the next morning Albertus, Jaap and their wives met in the town clerk's office. This seemed the sensible thing to do. They would prepare themselves there and then stroll unhurriedly to their destination where they were required to be seated by nine forty-five.

Hettie, the mayor's wife, an erect and severe-looking woman, was dressed in her best frock, the one she had made for their son's wedding five years before. It was of bright green, the colour she had chosen to complement the red of her husband's mayoral robes. She stood next to him now, adjusting his chain of office which had a habit of sliding ungracefully about his paunch. She spoke to the others.

'I hear that crowds of people from the location are pouring into town to see the comings and goings today. They had better not try and get into the new church.'

Jaap's wife, Christina, who had been tugging at her husband's ceremonial wig to settle it less precariously on his brow, stopped abruptly. She was the smallest of those present but was noted for having a strong personality and will.

'They won't get into the church,' she announced in a piercing voice. 'That priest has undertaken to keep the place white, and we have that in writing, haven't we, Bertus?'

The mayor nodded. 'I think it's time we went,' he said.

They set off in a stately procession down the white-washed steps of the town hall. The mayoral couple led the way with dignity. The morning was uncomfortably warm for early winter. The sun was not very high but its rays dazzled them as they walked towards it. Ahead of them they could clearly make out the smart cars already parked beside the new church. A huge multitude of coloured folk was swarming around the place. Christina became uneasy. Seeing so many coloured people at once was a new and strange experience. She slowed her pace so that Jaap had to take her arm and hasten her along beside him.

'The brown people love to watch a good spectacle,' he sniggered, patting his wife's gloved hand soothingly.

'Well, they'll get their money's worth today,' the mayor laughed, tapping his cocked hat twice.

A red carpet had been laid up to the entrance of the church where Heinz Klein, mantled in a glorious golden chasuble, stood to welcome the honoured guests. The spectators buzzed with excitement and their laughter and chatter resounded from the walls of the church and rose into the clear morning sky. The appearance of the mayor and town clerk and their wives, bedecked in all their formal regalia, caused a gleeful roar of appreciation. Pressmen aimed their cameras and lights flashed in their faces as they mounted the steps. The priest bowed to them gravely and shook their hands. He led them into the vestibule across the cool marble floor and entrusted them to an usher who asked them politely to follow him.

The interior that quite suddenly confronted them was magnificent. Seemingly endless rows of Corinthian and Ionian columns flanked the capacious apse, yet they were broken by intervals of space into which lights from unseen sources flooded downwards strongly. The domed ceiling soared upwards, sweeping their captivated eyes towards the skylights around the inside of the richly-decorated cupola above the high altar. From these, parallel, oblique sunrays darted in brilliant colours and splashed against the entablatures below. The light-brown hue of the stonework cast a tranquil benediction on the entire assembly which was increasing in numbers. As they lowered their stares and began to take in the congregation into which they were entering down the central aisle, they all simultaneously stopped in their tracks. They looked about them and at each other with growing consternation. The assembly was practically all coloured people who were entering in droves

through the side doors. Albertus saw the usher beckon him to the place of honour next to the Italian Ambassador who was already seated. He faltered and turned towards Jaap. But it was Jaap's wife, Christina, who instinctively knew what to do. She grasped Jaap's arm and proclaimed in a voice loud enough for the three others to hear: 'This is a breach of the agreement which the priest signed. Let's get out of here!'

The Italian Ambassador showed surprise as the party turned and marched in disarray from him. He spoke but his words were lost on them. They reached the vestibule just as Heinz Klein was saluting Mr Ponti d'Alba. The blinding lamps of the television crews caught them as they halted. By now Albertus had worked himself up into what he considered to be a state of righteous indignation. Ignoring everyone except the astonished priest, he was about to address him when Jaap, apologizing to nobody in particular, pushed him bodily behind a pillar and screened him from the cameras.

'Bertus,' he panted, 'don't be a fool – not in front of all those TV cameras. What you have to say can be said privately. I'll fetch Klein. Let's talk to him here.'

He was back in an instant with the priest. Father Klein was trying to preserve his dignity as the two wives shouted at him and shoved him. The mayor immediately silenced them with an imperious flourish of his cocked hat which had slipped off in the commotion.

'Father Klein,' he reproached the priest, trying to keep his voice down, 'there are brown people in this church. Yet the Town Council holds a document signed by you in which you undertook not to permit coloureds to attend services here. More than that, you undertook to prevent them from attending.'

'That is so,' the priest replied very calmly.

The background noises were suddenly enlivened by the congregation starting a hymn in loud and lusty voices. The mayor rolled his eyes in anguish as he recognized what he had called a funny way of singing. 'Is that all you can say, Father? You have deceived us. You have permitted and *not* prevented them! You have chosen to defy us by not observing the clear condition upon which this entire building exists.'

'That is so,' the priest said again. 'But if you don't want these people in here then *you* throw them out. *You* stop them from coming in. Call the police if necessary, but I warn you, their presence here is not illegal!' His calm exterior began to crack as

he blinked and bit his lip.

For a moment there was silence. Hettie broke it with an emphatic challenge. 'The mayor *will* throw these people out,' she snarled impetuously. Christina immediately supported her. Turning on her husband she took his hand and tried to pull him towards the entrance to the aisle. 'Jaap, you and Bertus get in there and order those people out.'

The mayor nearly wavered but a glazed look of determination entered his eyes. He strode forward only to be blocked firmly by Heinz Klein. The priest held up a warning hand. 'Remember there are TV cameras in there,' he admonished.

It was Jaap who understood what might ensue if rash deeds were publicized. He gripped the mayor's shoulders tightly and shook them. 'Bertus, get back into the church and go through with this.' He was agitated and out of breath but there was a hint of a plan in his urgency. 'Please do as I say.' He turned his attention to Hettie and Christina. 'Go with him,' he ordered.

Christina knew her husband. 'And what are you going to do?' she demanded.

'I'll be back soon,' he replied. He waited until the three of them had unruffled themselves and moved back towards the aisle followed by Father Klein.

Jaap was relieved that the congregational song had drowned out the little altercation that had just taken place. The media people could not have heard a word, although flash bulbs had popped and it was probable that some of the drama had been photographed. With as much decorum as he could muster he sauntered down the red carpet, smiling at the stragglers of the press. He expected at least one of them to ask what had prompted him to leave the solemn proceedings, but no one addressed him and he made his way out of sight by crossing the street and taking a side road. His destination was the dominee's house. He began to run, knowing that Fanus Joubert would by this time be preparing to go to his own church for the main service of the day. He found Fanus already garbed and groomed for the pulpit, his black frock-coat looking spotless and natty. He was talking to one of the church elders in the living room. Jaap's sudden intrusion caused both men to raise their eyebrows. In his official regalia, which he wore so seldom, he cut a ludicrous figure. Without greeting, he took Fanus by the arm and ushered him into the adjoining dining room, closing the door behind them.

The dominee stood erect, his face impassive. Jaap pulled up a

convenient chair and sat.

'Fanus!' he blustered, 'that priest Klein has defied us. He has lied to us. He has filled his church with brown people after promising he wouldn't. I asked Bertus to stay there because of all the TV cameras. But now I want to know what to do. The brown people are there legally but the priest is a damned liar! From now on they will be going to the new church and there's nothing much we can do to stop them. Ah, it's a shame.'

Fanus remained standing and looked at his wristwatch. Jaap was concerned that his friend seemed unperturbed. He shook his head in disbelief. Fanus then sat too and spoke softly.

'From the moment that Klein signed that document I knew this was going to happen. That man is not a fool. How could he sign away his right as a pastor to bring his people to church, not prevent them, especially when it was quite legal to do so? He put his signature to it knowing full well that he could not be held to it.' There was a glint of humour in the dominee's eye which confused Jaap again. Jaap scratched his bald head fiercely and glowered at Fanus.

'What are you saying?' he growled.

'I'm saying that Klein behaved shrewdly.'

'But he was dishonest,' Jaap protested, letting his jaw sag in horror.

'Perhaps you could call it that, Jaap.' The dominee actually grinned now. 'But there is a little bit of Machiavelli in most men of the cloth.'

'Machiavelli?'

'Machiavelli was an Italian, a nobleman of Florence who lived in the sixteenth century. He is famous for holding that when a leader has big responsibilities it is sometimes necessary to deceive people in order to guide them wisely.'

Jaap's face became a blank. He was thinking deeply. Then his eyes widened and a new realization dawned as he stared at the unblinking dominee.

**'EVEN UNDER THE RINE OF TERROR . . .': INSURGENT SOUTH  
AFRICAN POETRY**

**Jeremy Cronin**

In the recent treason trial of sixteen United Democratic Front and trade union leaders, the apartheid prosecutor produced a weighty indictment running to over three hundred pages. The bulk of the indictment consisted in long quotations from the proceedings of political rallies. The speeches were taped, one presumes, by police informers and then transcribed: there are extensive quotations from speeches made and quotations and translations of songs sung and slogans chanted. There is also evidence on the wording on banners, T-shirts, buttons, pamphlets, and flyers. Among this mass of forensic detail, as part of the allegedly treasonable material, there are a few poems, also taped and lovingly transcribed from the same events.

Besides the obvious question (Just who and what *is* treasonable in apartheid South Africa?), there is another irony in this indictment. The state prosecutor has understood more about current black poetry in South Africa than many an academic commentator. The prosecutor has, unwittingly, anthologized the poetry more accurately than is commonly the case in academic appraisal, for this is a poetry that can only be understood and analyzed in its relationship to a range of traditional and contemporary oral and verbal practices: songs, chants, slogans, funeral orations, political speeches, sermons, and graffiti. It can be understood only in terms of the context of its major mode of presentation and reception. The book and the small magazine are perhaps not entirely insignificant modes of presentation and reception for this poetry, but they are mostly secondary and exceptional. When the book or magazine arrives within the university library, or in the academic's study, it tends willy-nilly to be collocated within a continuum that runs, if South African poetry is in question, from Thomas Pringle through Roy Campbell and William Plomer. Without wishing to disparage the academic reproduction and consumption of poetry, I find it necessary to understand that the conventional modes are more or less entirely inappropriate to deal with much contemporary black poetry in South Africa.

To talk about this poetry, written over the last two or three years, we must contextualize it within the rolling wave of semi-insurrectionary uprising, mass

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stayaways, political strikes, consumer boycotts, huge political funerals (involving anything up to seventy thousand mourners at a time), factory occupations, rent boycotts, school and university boycotts, mass rallies, and physical confrontation over barricades with security forces. This wave of mobilization and struggle has spread into the smallest rural village. It has interwoven with a substantial organizational renaissance: youth, civic, religious, women's, trade union, and student organizations have sprung up and spread countrywide.

An emergent (and insurgent) national political culture is an integral part of this rolling wave of mass struggle. Journalists, photographers, and television crews are the only ones so far to have described some of the features of this emergent culture from the outside. Very little academic analysis has yet been done. The *South African Labour Bulletin* has had a brief and lively debate on working-class culture. There have been a few articles on trade union theatre. Some of the earlier academic writing on 'Soweto poetry' is relevant, but somewhat left behind by the speed of unfolding events.<sup>1</sup>

In the hope of assisting tentative beginnings, I shall present, descriptively, and to the best of my ability with all the limitations of the written word, a sampling of poetry performances that have occurred in the last two years. Through adopting this somewhat empirical approach, I hope to give at least an idea of the crucially important context of the poetry. I have drawn selectively, but I hope representatively, from the more than one hundred occasions when I have been either an active (it is difficult not to be that) participant member of an audience, or an actual performer of poetry at political rallies, funerals, protest meetings, and vigils in black ghettos all over South Africa.

### **A Student Conference**

Glynn Thomas Hostel, Soweto, July 1984 – AZASO, the black university and college students' organization is holding its national conference. Five hundred delegates from all over South Africa, some from AZASO branches in the bantustans where they are compelled to operate clandestinely, are present. The atmosphere is vibrant; for three days the student delegates are locked in intense political discussions, papers, reports, workshops, and elections. The debates and discussions flow over into the hostel rooms and reach into the small hours of the morning. The national question, socialism, Afghanistan, the trade unions – the topics are diverse. For plenary sessions delegates pack into the hostel canteen. There is barely enough space and not enough chairs; one-third of the delegates are left standing, crammed up against walls and into corners. Sometimes emotions run away, and the chairperson or an older guest speaker is compelled to ask for discipline. 'Please, comrades, our task is not to make it easy for the enemy to arrest us. This place is certainly bugged.

Comrades must please refrain from wild rhetoric; let us preserve a militant discipline.'

At the end of a paper, or discussion, to give minds awash with stimulation a moment of relaxation, the hall takes off on a series of liberation songs. The singing unfailingly brings the half-dozen stout mamas on the kitchen staff dancing and ululating out from behind the sinks and dishes. They do a little swaying, clapping lap of honour, down the aisles, up to the makeshift stage and round again. Cheers, *amandlas*, vivas, and then silence again as delegates return to the next discussion paper.

The interludes are not all song. Through the three days of conference, there are several poetry performances, notably by two young students from the University of the North, Turfloop. In fact, their performances are in popular demand. 'Poem! Poem!' is a request that gets called out fairly frequently between breaks in the days' sessions. The poetry of the two Turfloop students consists in a set of chanted refrains, one voice leading: 'Cuppa-ta-lismmmma! cuppa-ta-lismmmma! cummmma to me-e-e-e!' with the other voice weighing in behind in response, 'I-I-I-I a-m-m-m-m-a cuppa-ta-lismmmma.' They have obviously worked out a broad structure and a basic set of refrains, but the performance is considerably extemporaneous. Sometimes the two voices are at separate ends of the canteen, more by chance than design, I guess. They then call to each other across the heads of the five hundred delegates:

Cuppa-ta-lismmmma, cuppa-ta-lismma  
 A spectre is a hauntinnnga you  
 This accordinnnga the gospel  
 Of Marx and Engels  
 Cuppa-ta-lisssmmmma!

The interplay continues for some time with the second voice ('Capitalism') finally fading away with a long groan to enthusiastic foot stomping from those present.

The voices perform the poetry with a slow lilt, and from the reaction of the audience, much enjoyment is derived from the phonetic exaggeration. The principal features of this are an increased stress and duration of the repeated nasal sounds, particularly *m* sounds. Some of these are held for a full two or three seconds. There is also a tendency to lengthen penultimate syllables or to shift lengthened final syllables (particularly nasals) into penultimates with the addition of a little, lilting schwa as in 'I'mmmmmmma' or 'cuppa-ta-lismmmmmma'. This gives the English a pronounced, indeed, an exaggerated African texture.

The poetic thickening of language carries a playfulness as well as implica-

tions of appropriation and nationalization. 'Capitalism', the signifier, is taken over, smacked about on the lips, and transformed. Stylistically the poem bears all the marks of its context and function — a relaxing interlude that is, nevertheless, in key with the political ambience.

### The Political Rally

Poetry performances somewhat like the above occur fairly often in a variety of contexts, such as mass funerals for political martyrs, rallies, and commemorative church hall meetings. Perhaps the finest current practitioner of this line of poetry is Mzwakhe Mbuli. It was he who brought the house down with his poem, 'I Am the Voice of International Anger', before an audience of fourteen thousand at the national launch of the United Democratic Front in August 1983. Mzwakhe<sup>2</sup> is tall and angular with bulging pop eyes. His rhythms are somewhat influenced by the reggae, or dub talking poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson.<sup>3</sup> He performs at speed, with a heavily syncopated intonation, the mostly three- and four-beat rhythms poked out in the air with two long forefingers.

Ig — nor — rant  
 I am ignorant  
 I am ignorant  
 I have been fortunate  
 In the business of ignorancy  
 I am South African  
 Without residency  
 I can read,  
 I can write,  
 However ignorant I may be  
 I know Mandela is in Pollsmoor jail  
 Though I do not know why.  
 Oh people of Afrika  
 Help me before it is too late  
 Emancipate me  
 From my ignorancy.

Mzwakhe breaks the rhythm, stops, leans into the microphone, and whispers:

For freedom is getting rusty  
 On the pavements of oppression.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes Mzwakhe performs alone. At other times he performs with his

group, Khuvangano. Some of the poems are then spoken by one voice, pitched over a freedom song that has dropped down to a hum in the remaining three or four voices of the group. The audience will also tend to take up the humming, particularly if it is a well-known freedom song. This style of declamation over a backdrop of humming might derive from African church rituals.

I say this because I have seen very similar oral performances (he does not call them 'poetry', but 'prayers of remembrance') by Aubrey Mokoena. Mokoena is a well-known political figure and was one of the sixteen charged in the treason trial mentioned above. He is also a part-time preacher. The two occasions on which I have seen him perform were at a mass rally of the Cape Youth Congress (CAYCO), and at the funeral of seven alleged ANC guerrillas gunned down in Guguletu, Cape Town. On both occasions Mokoena led the hundreds-strong audience in singing the mourning song, 'Thina Sizwe'. After a minute or so of singing, Mokoena asked those present to drop down to a hum while, microphone in hand, he paced the dais, invoking a long litany of fallen martyrs, of leaders languishing in jail, and of those forced into exile. Mokoena's phrasing is more preacherly, more grand compared to the jerky syncopations of Mzwakhe. But there are also many common elements.

### A Trade Union *Imbongi*<sup>5</sup>

It is the AGM of the local branch of a trade union. The setting is the dance hall of the Belmonte Hotel in Bellville South, an industrial suburb outside Cape Town. Broken bottles and glasses from the night before have been shuffled away behind the stage as several hundred workers cram in under union banners and posters. In between reports, given factory by factory, on percentages of signed-up members, recognition agreements, strike actions (won, lost, deferred), there are cultural interludes. Among them are several African freedom songs. '*Manyanani basebenzi*' ('Workers, let us unite') is rendered as 'Money, not Mercedes Benzes' by some of the 'coloured' workers. An imported 'We shall overcome', sung by the whole hall, is drawn out in a true Cape Flats croon, 'some day-ay-ay'.

Later, an African shop steward in her mid-thirties steps forward. As she moves toward the platform, she is encouraged in song by other women workers from her plant. Some of the male workers cat-call, still others ('Jeyy, thulani, man!') hush them. She wears animal skins, or at least a cut-out and pinned-up plastic bag imitation of skins. On stage she takes the microphone boldly in hand and begins to pace to and fro as she incants at a furious pace, like an old-style *imbongi* (praise poet). She delivers a praise poem to the union and to the collective strength of the workers. Many do not understand all the Xhosa words but, with whispered help, we get the drift. At the end there is enthusiastic applause and shouts for 'More! More! Hmmm!'

## A Poetry of Testament

There is another poetry which is fairly widespread, but which is first written down, or even scratched out, before it is performed. This is a poetry of testament, inscribed on cell walls, smuggled out of jails on rolls of toilet paper, or left behind under pillows in the townships. These are poems that involve a slight heightening of language to carry a special meaning, to give significance to the unspeakable. On what evidence I have, I would guess that all over South Africa there are black mothers with little pieces of paper, four- or five-line poems left behind by a son or a daughter who has gone in the night to join up with the clandestine liberation movement. The poem, found a day later, is sometimes the last a parent will hear of a child. In the samples I have seen, the language is often clumsy, or formulaic ('for the motherland', 'shed my blood'). But, however spurious this may seem to a literary criticism that measures the 'authentic' in terms of 'individuality' and 'originality', the sincerity and meaningfulness of those little scraps is real enough. The existential acts with which they are integrated speak as loud as the words themselves.

A similar poetry is being smuggled out of jails. The following poem was written by a young member of the Bridgton Youth Organization, Bridgton being the 'coloured' ghetto in Oudtshoorn. The writer is probably a high school student. The poem, entitled 'Mothers of Bhongolethu' (which is the local African township), is dated '9.45 am, 30/6/85'; it is very much a poem of time and place. It was written in detention immediately after one of the countless massacres and widescale arrests:

Mothers of Bhongolethu,  
 You gave birth to the most  
 oppressed youth of our nation  
 . . .  
 The enemy rejoiced in their death  
 But we don't mourn.  
 Mothers of Bhongolethu,  
 let us mobilize,  
 to continue their struggle.  
 Let us avenge their death.

Our sons and daughters were  
 not armed on that day.  
 But the soldiers of Africa  
 are marching into our  
 townships.  
 The day will come when we

will be ready,  
 ready to avenge the death  
 of our martyrs.

Mothers of Bhongolethu  
 do not despair.  
 Do not mourn . . .  
 But take courage in the  
 blood of our children.  
 In the blood that nurtures  
 the tree of Freedom.

The most moving of all are the short poems that come from the political prisoners on death row. On the eve of his hanging, young Benjamin Moloise sent out this poem:

I am proud to be what I am . . .  
 The storm of oppression will be followed  
 By the rain of my blood

I am proud to give my life

My one solitary life.

The last poem of Moloise, like that of Solomon Mahlangu, another young guerilla executed in Pretoria Maximum Security Prison, has since been repeated at many mass rallies, and so, like most of the other poems we have considered so far, it achieves its major form of reception in public gatherings. Indeed the words of both Mahlangu and Moloise have been incorporated within dozens of longer performed poems.

### Some General Poetic Features

I have, in passing, already noted many of the poetic features of the poetry I have been describing. In the interests of moving in the direction of a little more analysis, it is useful to consider in more general terms some of the notable features.

*The gestural.* The poetry is, clearly, largely a poetry of performance. The bodily presence of the poet becomes an important feature of the poetics. Arm gestures, clapping, and head nodding are often used expressively and deictically. The poets also draw freely from the current political lexis of gestures: the clenched fist salute of people's power (*Amandla ngawethu*); the index finger

pointing emphatically down to signal *Ngo!* ('Here and now!') after the chanted call *Inkululeko* ('Freedom'); or the slow, hitchhiker-like thumb sign to signal 'Let it come back' (*Afrika . . . Mayibuye*). These latter collective gestures are used freely within poems and, more often, as framing devices before and after the performance of a poem. The slogans and gestures will be taken up by the whole audience. They act phatically, as channel openers or closers and as a means of focusing attention on the performer.

The clothing of the performer should also be noted. As often as not it is unexceptional. However, quite a few poets, especially those who adopt a more bardic tone, don dashikis as an integral part of their performance. The several trade union praise poets also tend to wear special clothing, traditional skins and ornamentation, or a modern-day facsimile of the kind already noted.

*Verbal stylistic features.* The most notable verbal stylistic features are those commonly associated with principally oral literatures: the style tends to be additive, aggregative, formulaic, and 'copious'.

In Qwa Qwa  
 I found no one  
 In Lebowa  
 I was unfortunate  
 In Transkei  
 I talked about pass laws  
 Transkei citizenship card  
 Was the answer  
 In Bophuthatswana  
 I talked about democratic and social rights  
 Sun City was the answer  
 In KwaVenda  
 I talked about people's security  
 The building of Thohoyandou police station  
 Was the answer  
 In Ciskei  
 I talked about trade unionism  
 The banning of SAAWU  
 Was the answer  
 (etc., etc.)  
 Ma-Afrika,  
 I have travelled!<sup>6</sup>

The repetitive and formulaic features assist the performing poet mnemonically. But these features also assist the audience to hear and understand the poem.

Walter J. Ong notes the limitations of oral, as opposed to written, communication:

Thought requires some sort of continuity. Writing establishes in the text a 'line' of continuity outside the mind. If distraction confuses or obliterates from the mind the context out of which emerges the material I am now reading, the context can be retrieved by glancing back over the text selectively. Backlooping can be entirely occasional, purely *ad hoc* . . . In oral discourse, the situation is different. There is nothing to backloop into outside the mind, for the oral utterance has vanished as soon as it is uttered . . . Redundancy, repetition of the just-said, keeps both speaker and hearer surely on the track. (39-40)

Apart from these universal features and limitations of the oral, it should be remembered that the poetry we are considering is often performed in the worst imaginable acoustic situations. It is sometimes performed, for instance, in open township soccer fields or crowded halls with no public address systems. The poets are also pitching their poems to audiences that are generally very different from the quiet, reverential salon audience that will occasionally receive poetry of another kind. The poets have to take their chances in between militant mass singing, rousing political speeches, or routine organizational business. They perform to an audience that, generally, warmly acclaim their poetry. But it is an audience which, nevertheless, does not sit tightly in respectful silence. There are women with crying babies on their backs; there are youngsters crawling and toddling underfoot. People are getting up or sitting down. And all the while, hovering just outside the venue, radio transmitters bleeping, are the police with, as often as not, a helicopter rattling overhead.

*Agonistically toned features.* Another significant feature of much of this poetry is, again, noted by Ong as typical of all oral cultures.

Many, if not all, oral or residually oral cultures strike literates as extraordinarily agonistic in their verbal performances and indeed in their lifestyle. Writing fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another . . . By keeping knowledge embedded in the human lifeworld, orality situates knowledge within a context of struggle . . . Bragging about one's own prowess and/or verbal tongue-lashings of an opponent figure regularly in encounters between characters in narrative: in the *Iliad*, in *Beowulf*, throughout medieval European romance, in *The Mwindo Epic* and countless other African stories . . . in the Bible, as between David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17:43-47). Standard in oral societies across the world, reciprocal name-calling has been fitted with a specific name in linguistics: flyting (or flit-

ing) . . . The other side of agonistic name-calling or vituperation in oral or residually oral cultures is the fulsome expression of praise which is found everywhere in connection with orality. (43-45)

There are, in South Africa, strong indigenous traditions of praise poetry. We have already noted the existence, specifically within the trade union movement, of a proletarian reworking and updating of this tradition. But strong agonistic tones are a feature throughout:

Even under the reign of terror [pronounced 'rine']  
 The land is still mine  
 My land is immovable  
 I am the beats  
 Admire me  
 I am the beats  
 From the drums of change  
 In Afrika.<sup>7</sup>

However, the most notable case of agonistically toned performance is the marching, defiant *toyi-toyi* chant. It is the national favourite with militant youth on the barricades, in their street battles with the army and police armoured cars. The *toyi-toyi* involves a lead voice incanting a long litany of names, some admired like u-Nelson Mandê-ê-ê-ê-la, Ol-eeee-va Tambo, or Joe Slovo, with appropriate epithets: *ubaba wethu* ('our father'), i-chief commander, and so forth. Other names are vilified: Le Grange, P. W. Botha, Gatsha Buthelezi. While the lead voice, mostly hidden anonymously deep within the folds of the crowd, incants, the rest of the squad, group, or crowd, as the case may be, replies to each name with approbation:

Hayyyiii! . . .  
 Hayyyiii! Hayyyiii!

or with contempt:

Voetsek! . . .  
 Voetsek! Voetsek! ('Go to hell!')

All the while, the entire group will be marching or marking time, knees high, at the double. The *toyi-toyi* litany is also freely sprinkled with onomatopoeic evocations of bazookas and 'ukka four seven' ('AK 47') assault rifles being fired off, of land-mines exploding, and of 'freedom potatoes' ('grenati') going off:

Goosh! . . .  
Goosh! Goosh!

Whether the *toyitoyi* is a song, a chant, a march, a war cry, or a poem is a scholastic point. Functionally, like much of the emergent culture and all of the poetry I have described, it serves to mobilize and unite large groups of people. It transforms them into a collective that is capable of facing down a viciously oppressive and well-equipped police and army. In acting together, under the shadow of the apartheid guns, the mobilized people are forcing open space to hold proscribed meetings, to elect and mandate their own leadership, to discuss basic matters, to resolve crime in their streets, to bury their dead, to raise illegal banners, to unban their banned organizations, to discover their strength, and even to make their own poetry. In short, through it all, liberated zones are being opened up in industrial ghettos and rural locations, where the people are beginning — tenuously it is true — to govern themselves in this land of their birth.

#### NOTES

1. See Sole and Naledi Writers Unit. In addition to the first Sole article, the *South African Labour Bulletin* 9.8 has articles on trade union praise poetry and theatre. For a useful anthology of critical writings on contemporary black poetry, see Chapman. See also Cronin (“‘The law . . .’”).
2. Mzwakhe Mbuli is known by, and performs under, his first name.
3. An informant, Steve Gordon, tells me that Mzwakhe has also been influenced by tapes of Jamaican performance poetry, closely related to dub poetry.
4. This partial transcription of a Mzwakhe poem is, like others quoted in this paper, taken from performances I have listened to and from tapes. Mzwakhe’s full-length tape of his poetry, *Change is Pain*, released by Shifty Records, Johannesburg is banned.
5. A version of the following description has already appeared in my review of Jeff Opland’s *Xhosa Oral Poetry* (Ravan Press).
6. From a poem by Mzwakhe Mbuli.
7. Ibid.

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*Anguish: L. Jawahirilal, 1983*



*Lallitha Jawahirilal: Photo by G.U. Masokoane*

### THE ART OF LALLITHA JAWAHIRILAL

*Lallitha Jawahirilal was born in South Africa and studied at the Royal College of Art in London where she presently lives and works among other exiled South Africans. During a recent visit to South Africa she spoke to Andries Walter Oliphant about her experiences at home and abroad and the importance of this for her art.*

**STAFFRIDER:** The fate of being born and growing up in South Africa has been and still is a harrowing experience for the majority of South Africans. Could you give me some indication of what your childhood was like?

**JAWAHIRILAL:** Sure. I was born and grew up in Ladysmith, Natal. As a South African exposed to statutory discrimination and political oppression, I had, comparatively speaking, a relatively good early childhood. But like most South African children I was soon exposed to the cruelty and injustice of Apartheid. However, when I look back today I cannot help but feel that under the prevailing circumstances I was very fortunate as a child.

I spent my early childhood in a very comfortable and supportive environment. The house I lived in belonged to my grandfather and all my aunts and uncles lived in the house. It was a typical extended family. For me as a child it was a very warm and protective domestic environment. It was so protective that my first separation from it, when I had to start school, was very traumatic. It was so painful that I hated going to school. Fortunately, disaster was averted by the fact that the headmaster of the school was my grandfather's brother. He pampered me and made the idea of spending long hours away from home less frightful for me.

The school itself had no formal art curriculum, except of course for the widespread practice of playing and working with Plasticine and sewing. I did not like any of these activities, and as far as I am concerned, school in South Africa neither encouraged nor generated any creativity in me. Most of my early creative experiences go back to the home in which I grew up. Some of my uncles were writers and there was a tradition of eccentricity among them. There was a stream close to our home where I spent many hours as a child in a world of fantasy facilitated by nature.

This protective world of my childhood which was made possible by the relative wealth of my grandfather soon crumbled in the face of forced removals and the subsequent disintegration of our close-knit family. The area in which we lived was declared white and we had to leave. My parents moved to a new area known as 'Scheming House'. Our lives changed overnight: comfort and security were unexpectedly replaced by hardship and poverty. My grandfather who lost his land which was our means of livelihood descended into alcoholism.

My father took up a job as chef in the Royal Hotel and my mother went to work in a peanut factory.

All this happened when I was approximately thirteen years old. By then I had entered secondary school where the educational emphasis was on languages and mathematics. Art did not exist here.

*STAFFRIDER:* Your own work displays stylistic and thematic aspects associated with the genre of children's art. Is your South African childhood and the present situation of children in South Africa related to it in any way?

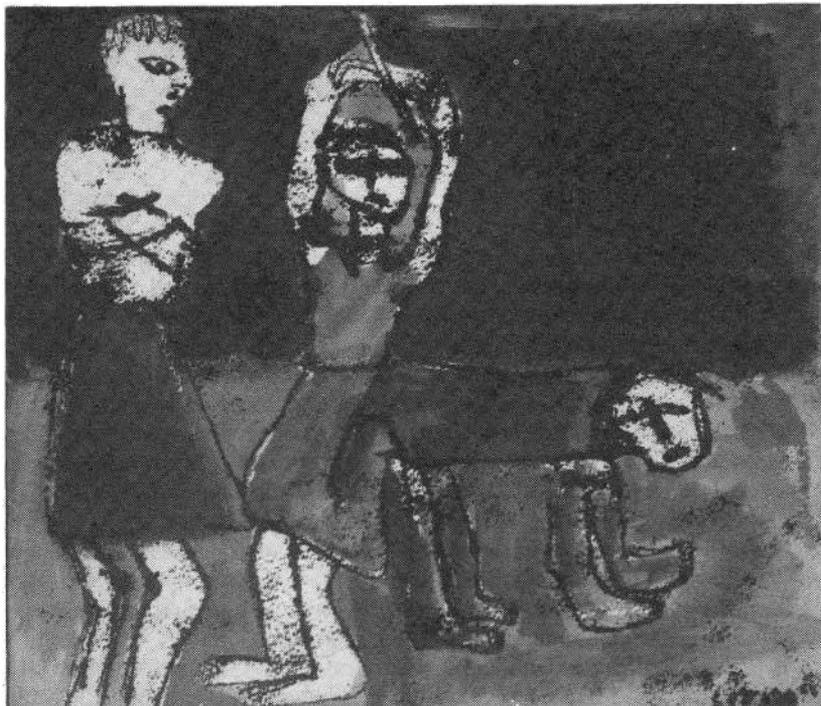
*JAWAHIRILAL:* Yes. The exposure to forced removals and the restrictiveness of South African education and society have given me an insight into the horrors which South African children have to face daily. In my own case the Group Areas Act was directly responsible for the impoverishment of my family. I remember not having suitable clothes or warm socks and shoes to wear to school. The physical and psychological effect of this was harrowing. This affected me profoundly and has made me sensitive to the causes of such deprivation in South Africa.

The suffering which children have had to undergo since the declaration of the State of Emergency has increased to such an extent that it has led to a world-wide condemnation of Apartheid. This system has not only deprived children of secure and happy childhoods, it has also placed an enormous and morally unacceptable responsibility on them to resist the oppression of Apartheid.

In response to this I have made a number of paintings and etchings with children as subjects. I have tried to focus on children in prison. In some of my work you will notice the figures of children with hands outstretched. This is an attempt to symbolize the sacrifices involved when children become victims of Apartheid. The cruelty of this is confounding because it involves young people who are first systematically deprived of the most basic human rights and then when they demonstrate their rejection of this state of affairs, they are subjected to even greater outrages. In my work I try to highlight this. Whether my work has succeeded in this is of course debatable. It has nevertheless given me the opportunity and the platform to bring to the attention of people outside South Africa, who would otherwise be indifferent to social and political injustice, the nature of the crisis in the country.

To this I have to add that the heroism displayed by the oppressed South African children in the face of violent repression is also something that has not gone unnoticed. I have tried to render this in aesthetic terms which draw on the spontaneity of childhood as well as the boldness which characterizes the self-representation of children.

*STAFFRIDER:* You have studied, worked and lived abroad for a considerable time. Why did you leave South Africa and how has this affected your life and work?



*The end of the sacrifice: L. Jawahirilal, 1988*



*I can console you: L. Jawahirilal, 1988*

*JAWAHIRILAL:* Well, when I completed high school there was no money available for my further education. I wanted to do something in the arts but had to become a factory worker. I could not resign myself to a life of exploitation and decided to take up nursing as a profession. I was trained at Baragwanath Hospital. During this time I met a cross-section of the South African population and was once again struck by the suffering caused by Apartheid. I completed my nursing course but was still unhappy. Subconsciously I was preoccupied with making pictures.

After completing my training I went to Cape Town where I lived and worked for some time. When I had enough money I bought a single ticket and left for the Middle East where I worked among the Arab peoples as a child minder. From there I left for England where I resumed nursing. My long-term aim, however, was to study art. After three years I would qualify for free education. In the meantime I took part-time art lessons and devoted the rest of my energy to assisting children who became victims of drug abuse in England and to cultural work amongst the South African exile community. As soon as the three years lapsed I applied and was admitted to Camberwell School of Art where I began studying towards a degree.

During my studies I extended my collaboration with the exile community. I worked with writers, musicians, sculptors, painters, photographers and film makers who represented the entire political spectrum of exiled South Africans. Initially, I was the only woman in the group.

*STAFFRIDER:* Has your work with the exiles been limited to art and culture or has it extended to broader social and political issues?

*JAWAHIRILAL:* It encompasses the full spectrum of life as it affects South Africans and exiles from other parts of the world. For instance, through the group of exiled South Africans I was able to hold two exhibitions in Sweden. At that stage some of my work was mainly portraits of South African resistance leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, Solomon Mahlangu and others. Apart from my cultural work I also became involved in social issues such as housing problems which face all third world exiles in England. This involvement has ensured that my art remained rooted in social realities in a cultural context where escapism is the order of the day.

Our cultural work also involved giving classes to children. We have arranged exhibitions and raised funds which were donated to South African organizations involved in assisting the victims of Apartheid. We regard it as part of our duty to give practical assistance to people in South Africa as well as to document and assist developments at home and abroad in relation to the struggle for liberation.

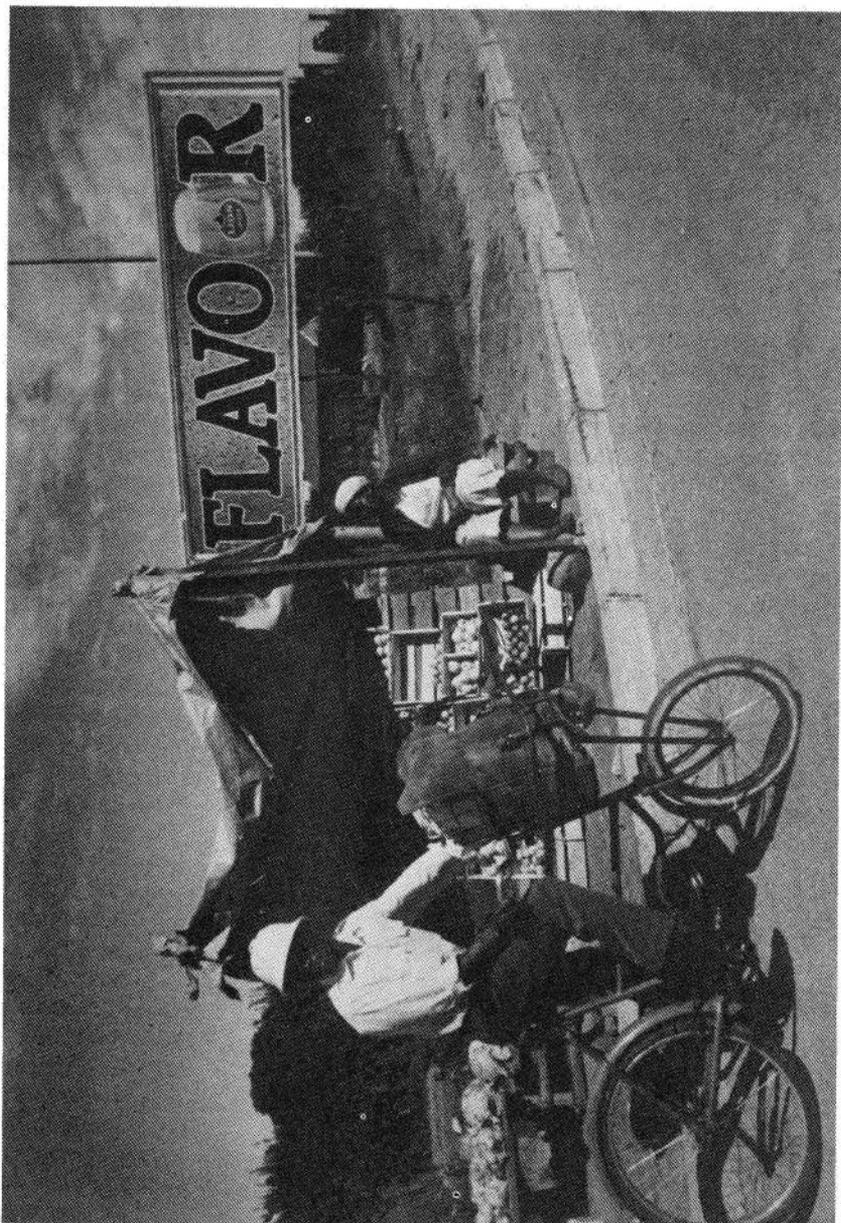
*STAFFRIDER:* To conclude, could you give me an indication of how your art developed over the years?

*JAWAHIRILAL:* I began as a self-trained artist, basically because of the lack

of facilities for black people in South Africa. My early work consisted of family portraits and life in my community. These were mainly drawings. Abroad, still largely self-trained, I concentrated on portraits of liberation leaders. Stylistically, my work was based on renaissance conventions.

When I entered art school, figurative art still remained my focus. Gradually, however, the emphasis was placed on form, texture and colour. This led to experimentation and an exploration of African, Oriental and Latin American art. South African artists like Dumile Feni, Louis Maqubela and Pitika Ntuli, now living in exile, gave direction to my own work. They alerted me to the possibilities of working symbolically and mythologically without neglecting the social dimensions of art. The study of African art enabled me to move away from academic realism to the radical simplification of forms suggested by African sculpture.

These changes in my work led to conflict with my academic art instructors. They were appalled by what I was doing. Later, however, they came to understand, appreciate and encourage my way of painting. Despite my inadequate South African education I won the highest honours in both painting and print making. I am currently working towards a masters degree at the Royal College of Art in London.



*Welcome to Soweto, Orlando: Santu Mofokeng*



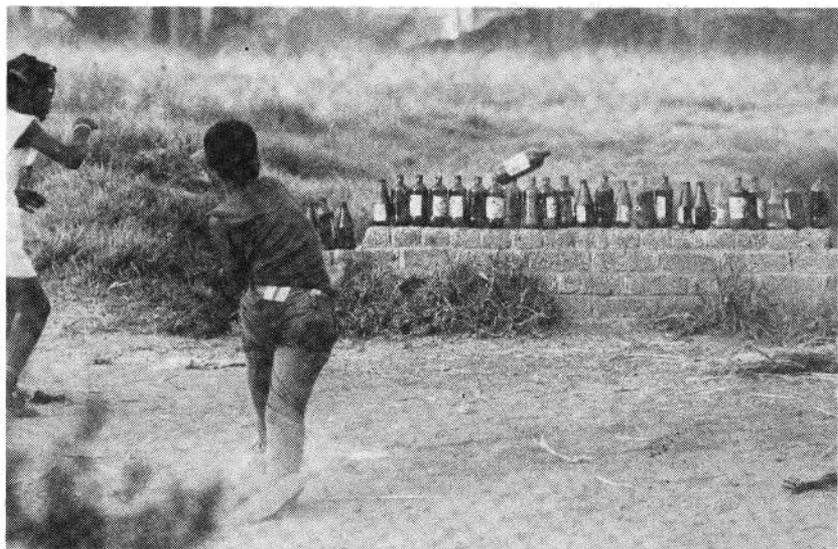
*Shebeen, White City: Santu Mofokeng*



*Sello's Mother, Dube: Santu Mofokeng*



*Mma Polo's Home, White City: Santu Mofokeng*



*Target Practice, Mofolo: Santu Mofokeng*

### *Going Home*

The views of Paul Weinberg and Santu Mofokeng

*Photographers Paul Weinberg and Santu Mofokeng's new joint exhibition in which they explore their respective backgrounds opened in Pietermaritzburg in March. It moved to the University of Cape Town in May, to Wits University in June and to Soweto in July. They spoke to Staffrider about their roles in South African photography and the objectives of their current work.*

**STAFFRIDER:** Could you, in turn, briefly sketch how you became involved in social documentary photography?

**WEINBERG:** Yes. I was studying law at university during 1976 when, in the light of the historical events, I began to question whether a legal career would satisfy my personal and social needs. I eventually gave up law and pursued the study of photography as a means towards finding an outlet for what I realized were repressed creative needs coupled with concern for the social and political problems in this country.

After acquiring the necessary technical skills I set out to explore the South African reality. In the process I became part of the new generation of social documentary photographers that emerged in the course of the Seventies.

**MOFOKENG:** I first worked in a pharmaceutical laboratory and later came into contact with photography as a darkroom technician. I was basically involved with the production of specifications. It was restrictive and boring. I felt I had to take up something that would provide a greater challenge.

I was taking photographs on a casual basis as a means of supplementing my income. I had acquired the basic technique of taking a well-exposed picture. The challenge, however, was to move from casual photography to a position in which it became a full-time activity.

**STAFFRIDER:** What were your individual and collective aims when you embarked on your current project?

**WEINBERG:** Since we share the same work space Santu and I often exchange ideas about photography. In the course of this

we hit upon the idea that it might be time for us to make personal statements through our work. We had thus far both been involved in mainly social documentary photography.

We felt that looking at our own personal lives and backgrounds would provide new challenges to produce images which speak for themselves through a lyrical narrative. The aim was to move away from the generalized nature of the work we had done before.

*MOFOKENG:* Yes, in fact, I remember clearly how this project 'Going Home' was first conceptualized. It was a Friday afternoon, we were sitting at Afrapix, chatting about the things we have in common: like working in the same photographic collective; that we were both almost the same age. We ended up asking ourselves what does it mean for each of us when we say: 'I am going home.' What does this mean in a society like South Africa? As can be expected, for each of us, it conjured up different sets of associations and experiences.

*WEINBERG:* For me the first consequence of the statement 'I am going home' was to get into my car, drive off, and reach home within a matter of minutes.

*MOFOKENG:* For me, on the other hand, it meant walking to the bus stop or the station and often spending more than an hour commuting home.

*WEINBERG:* We became aware of the reductive forces which operate in this country where separation is upheld and seen as absolute and unchangeable. There is a tendency to think that life in the white suburbs and life in the townships have no relationship to each other. The destructive effect of this is nowhere more evident than in the manner in which the personal and the biographical are viewed as intimate dimensions which have no relationship to the public spheres of life.

By tracing our personal histories we have tried to bring into the open the obstacles facing our belief in, and our quest for non-racialism.

*MOFOKENG:* This meant that the worlds which lie behind the routine of going home had to be looked at and juxtaposed with each other in an honest and exploring fashion.

*WEINBERG:* Incidentally, our home towns Pietermaritzburg and

Soweto happen to be the flash points of South Africa. Soweto is closely associated with the history of resistance to apartheid and Pietermaritzburg is the centre of the political violence and repression which is currently rife in Natal.

*STAFFRIDER*: A project such as this is in some danger of being misconstrued as a perpetuation of the segregationist realities in South Africa. Do you think that you have managed to overcome this in your work?

*MOFOKENG*: Our aim was to avoid stereotypes and go beyond rhetoric towards a greater degree of mutual understanding. Whether we succeeded in overcoming the problem of segregation is of course another question. The two perspectives have to be viewed alongside each other to make this judgement.

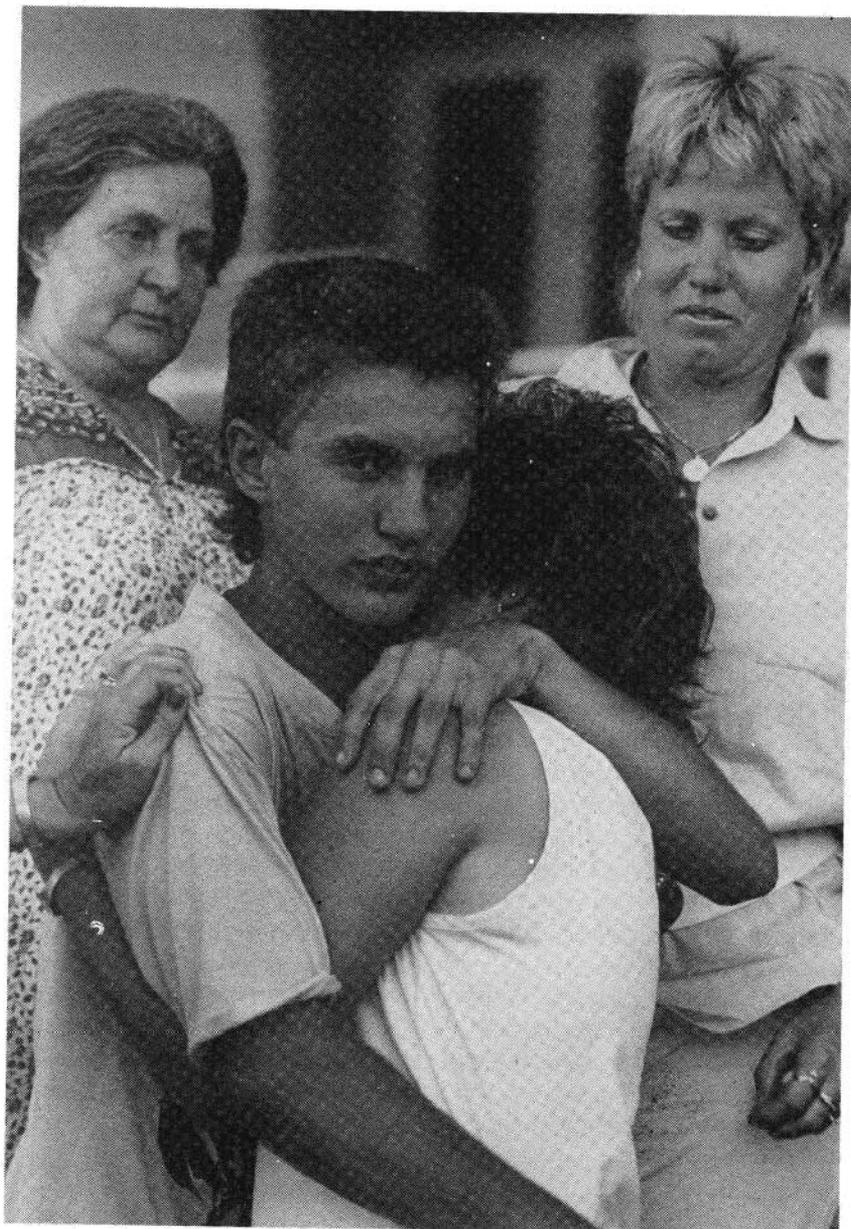
In going to Soweto I have tried to search for the human aspects, the dehumanizing forces, the suffering, the courage, the resistance and the beauty which people manage to maintain against great odds. I tried at all points to avoid the stereotyped images that are marketed abroad.

*WEINBERG*: Our common link has been our shared humanity and our understanding that the cultural diversity which we bring to our work is something which simultaneously unites and enriches us. Mutual respect, collective work and sharing form the basis of this. Against this background I wanted to look at my own home town, to explore the realities which operate there and to share it with others.

I feel I can only speak with validity and authority of my own experiences. So I went home to look at the people caught up in the webs of Apartheid and those who struggle against it, those who liberate themselves and those who capitulate and perhaps become victims.

*STAFFRIDER*: A general criticism levelled against social documentary photography is that the distance which exists between the photographer and his or her subjects often results in a loss of intimacy. Is this a valid criticism and how did it affect your approach to this project?

*WEINBERG*: It's definitely valid. Documentary photography is burdened by universalisms in the choice of its subjects such as 'poverty' or 'war' which are often presented from a distant



*Off to the Army: Paul Weinberg*



*Busstop, Pietermaritzburg: Paul Weinberg*



*Mayor's Walk Road: Paul Weinberg*



*Drama Workshop: Paul Weinberg*



*Maritzburg Country Club: Paul Weinberg*

perspective. Photography, however, requires to be made accessible, it has to permit the subjects to become part of the photographic process. A photographer who claims to care about people and who wants to make statements about their humanity must get close to the people he or she wishes to portray.

In this project, I feel, it is the closest I've ever been to the people who were part of my work. Therefore, whatever statement I make, it is at the same time a statement about myself, my past and the place in which I grew up. In a sense I've laid myself open. It is unavoidable if one wishes to get beyond platitudes and abstract universalisms.

*MOFOKENG:* Personally, I have always approached my work by trying to get a feeling of what I see while at the same time keeping my distance, in other words, remaining uninvolved. I've been thinking about this. In the past I felt that whatever I did was aimed at symbolizing that which I thought was behind or inherent in the things people do. I felt secure in my knowledge that I was in no way compromising myself or anybody.

Lately, I have come to question this method of working. It has become a matter of concern to me that the people I represent should not be anonymous or unknown to me. The necessity is to get closer and to produce a photograph that will say more than the obvious, but reveal aspects of the subject which are not immediately apparent.

*STAFFRIDER:* Did you experience any encounters which proved problematic or enriching in the course of the project?

*WEINBERG:* Well part of the project involved tracking down old classmates. In my case I knew that some of my former classmates were still in Pietermaritzburg. I anticipated that some of my encounters would involve resistance to my presence and to the project. There was also the disjunction between their memories of me as a schoolboy, a prefect and sportsman and the fact that I rejected many aspects of my past.

In one particular case an ex-classmate told me that he had been informed of my radicalism, the fact that I am untouchable and not worth relating to. I engaged him in conversation in an attempt to overcome his resistance to be involved in the project.

In the process we got to learn something about each other. At this stage a new problem emerged: when one moves so close to people that one begins to understand their most intimate fears it becomes morally unacceptable to exploit them.

What was very enriching and valuable to me was the fact that I could involve the people in the project by showing them the pictures as I progressed. I invited them to the opening of the exhibition. They brought their children along. It gave them a sense of being part of the whole exercise.

*MOFOKENG:* In my case I know of encounters and non-encounters. In going home I also went in search of my former classmates and school friends. The one case which stands out for me was in fact a non-encounter. I went in search of Sello Matau. He was a school friend with whom I spent a great deal of time, especially after matric. We were part of a group that met regularly to discuss a wide range of topics such as politics and the prospects of our various futures. Then one day, at the end of 1975, Sello said that he was going to disappear. It did not mean much to me at first. Then in 1976 he did in fact disappear. No one seemed to know where he went to or what happened to him. The general assumption was that he had skipped the country. Eleven years later, in 1987, I received the first news about him. He had been killed in Swaziland. His death made the headlines.

When I went to his place to take photographs a great many things went through my mind about the various things that happened to all of us who were part of the class of '75. I wanted to give something back. It was a highly personal thing to me and the process was difficult and painful.

*STAFFRIDER:* To conclude, how does this highly personal approach to photography relate to matters such as the struggle for democratic change in South Africa and the role of socially committed cultural workers?

*WEINBERG:* This is an immense question which could quite easily be avoided or responded to in a rhetorical fashion which will meet with approval. For myself this project 'Going Home' was an attempt to find a creative way of dealing with the social and political realities I am confronted with. As a photographer

and cultural producer, creativity constitutes the spark of personal and social consciousness which forms the basis of my attempts to participate in the process of broader historical and political change.

By avoiding rhetoric and developing the means of creative self-criticism as well as working with photographers and other cultural organizations, I hope to contribute to the struggle for change in South Africa.

*MOFOKENG:* Personally my struggle is a search for excellence in photography. It is only when I am good at what I do that I can be of use to other people and society. I have a need to communicate what I see, feel and think as well as to explore my own position and role in society.

Since I have a profound abhorrence for the status quo it makes me gravitate towards others who are working for change. By participating in the organized struggle for social justice I am also involved in the struggle for self-realization.

## Waiting

A snake of human beings in the queue  
Winds and meanders like a matured river.  
Some are tall, others are short,  
The problems also differ.

The nearest to the table stands  
To greet the clerk who wishes to be greeted,  
Who wants to quench his thirst.  
They hide in the nearby corner,  
The nearest has his hand in his pocket  
And all his problems are solved for today.

Our buttocks glide against the wooden bench  
As if we are putting the final touches to it.  
At the head of the queue we check  
If our buttocks that polish are not polished  
By the bench that has not been polished for years.

My documents are next to me,  
My neighbour has reminded me.  
The thirty pieces of silver are ready,  
Either to quench his thirst  
Or to help him foot the bill  
At a Greek's cafe for the bunny-chow.

I stand with a professional smile.  
He stares at me with professional seriousness.  
I give him my personal documents and the fifty pieces,  
He then returns an unprofessional smile  
Which I respond to with the seriousness of the innocent.

He jabs his fat finger in the air  
To show me another queue as long as his.  
I join it in the tail  
With a hope of ending at the head  
And losing another five notes in the fracas.

Fortunately I reach the head,  
And I part with the precious notes,  
Only to be told again that Time  
Requires the patience of six months  
Which Pretoria shall honour.

I'll come again, this time with more  
To join the queue.  
Perhaps next time I won't be told  
To wait for the Pretoria I have never seen.  
Had I known her I would despise her,  
For she keeps me waiting  
For what she forces me to take.

*Simon Jabulani Mzaliya*

#### **Four Good Reasons**

Once,  
in a Kuruman back alley  
I leant over a Vibracrete wall  
after hearing some song,  
and dark laughter,  
and I said something to  
the gathering too pertinent  
in Zulu,  
and smoked, and talked  
to a young migrant worker  
with the bland slabs between,  
about Reggae and Thaba Bosigo;

Charged with Trespassing.  
Suspected of Links with  
A Communist Pressure Group.

Once for Illegal Possession . . .  
Of brandy.

Once for actual Drunkenness,  
Arrested by drunken MPs.

Once for walking with a stagger  
By the zealous Vredendal constabulary.

And I am White!  
All right.

*Etienne de la Harpe*

**Prisoner No. 400/123**

He joined us for the pigs' breakfast this morning,  
His face was swollen from the previous night's beatings.  
We waited for him to perform his customary eye-wink,  
But he proceeded with his task like a deaf mute  
Which though life giving, is nerve wrecking to say the least,  
To be handed food like a hungry mongrel  
When he is but as manly as all men,  
Including those who proudly wait upon him.

His outfit was hanging too loose from his body,  
Reminding me of the scarecrow which guards my father's garden.  
The shaven head had the reflections of the mirror,  
I appreciated his swollen eye with serious concern  
Because he is a scapegoat harked at by the bullies  
Who try to get to his brain through an insignificant eye  
But his poise and composure I marvel at,  
They remind me of my arching and bending body and bones.

The charge they threw at him has no basis,  
It shifts when the shifter finds no more space to shift.  
They say he spoke against the powers that be  
Who being the powers that be tolerate no intellectual power  
Which will prove theirs futile, wrong and immoral.  
We marvel at the way they try to rob him  
Of the courage and power to register dissatisfaction.  
They may break the bones but not the spirit of No. 400/123.

*Simon Jabulani Mzaliya*

**Flood '88**

Then the gorge of the thirstlands rose;  
blood  
is sandwiched between  
that 'seventy-five, and this 'eighty-eight;  
A Dagwood in the jaws  
of an iron god  
are the troubled times;  
the struggle between; pausing  
from the muster of the maimed  
of bloody winters:

Those crimson Junes dissolve now  
into pink, into brown;  
and now into the new tides  
rioting redly about  
the slaked and steadfast Harveytile  
atoll apexes  
of Free State farmsteads:

Blood in the sand is water now.  
Could they truly have been?  
(Never Khayelitsha, nor Duncan Village  
and their bulleted nannies;  
Guguletu sleeps, Soweto dreams of peace)  
But Saracens (it seems)  
can float; their gunports  
Clamp closed;  
it seems, too,

That when the reigning clubs of clouds disband  
and sky returns,  
That hyacinths burgeon, as always  
In iced Aryan eyes.

*Etienne de la Harpe*

## A Place without Sleep

I

I awake  
A sleep tied to a thousand year tree  
A word tree  
So banal  
The tin soldier with wood axe  
Cuts the stairs from a sycamore  
For an empire built upon bricks  
Fired with wood  
Back to the earth brother  
Back to dust  
To be a brick in a monument  
To woodcutters

The bed rock  
A place without sleep  
Without trees  
Without a breath  
So quiet  
Unrefined  
Not dead  
Not alive

Yes beauty ate the beast  
That is my mother  
A hair  
A tooth  
A root  
A word route  
Where the mud spiders  
+ the air that kisses leaves that are lips  
Of water smiles

II

Teeth rites  
The deep dogs of the earth bore my soul  
+ now I awake  
A voice strikes the dust bricks  
Of tin men  
Secretly  
Without pain or love

Just floating  
Above + between  
The dust city + machine  
Eating gently  
Returning to the fire  
Beyond the seas  
The eagles  
Return to my mother  
A bread mother  
Baked in ancient fire  
Eaten by vultures  
To be baked yet again  
In a bird cake  
For bird men  
Where a bird soldier cuts a bird tree  
From its sleep

*David Crocket*

### **Ghastly Choreographers**

The chilly pitch-black night  
enters the dark bottomless hole  
of my head.

Filtering through the seams  
of my window are shrill,  
ghastly shrieks  
– I can't help but  
take a cautious peep.

There, out there  
blazing white forms  
stain this charcoal night.

The ghastly choreographers  
wiggle and wallow  
in this pitch-black night  
evoking in me a trepidation  
that conquers my consciousness  
– I slip into sleep.

*Fred Khumalo*

**how**

you have manacled hands  
built the imprisoning schools  
broken bones  
burnt books  
divided families

but how will you contain  
the spirit like the wind  
blowing through the bending grass  
rattling the hidden spears  
speaking the truth

*R.S. Hallatt*

**poem for a friend**

from the fountains of pain  
the sweetness

nectar of aloes  
bleeding in winter

sustenance for the sunbird  
and the caged man

*R.S. Hallatt*

**The Drum is a Way of Life***for Nelson Magwaza*

1

No, not a lattice  
 nor a web  
 nor a

promenade for maestros to saunter on,  
 tipping their hats to melody:  
 not a polite backwards sort of a  
 shush-shush behind the star under the spotlight,  
 grinning clown wearing clarinets / neé crow / whiteface pomaded  
 how-many-of-you-in-the-audience-I-can-lay bullshit  
 to waltz the night away

but a landslide tumbles in your gut  
 (and thunder from a blue sky)

GOTCHA! wait-for-the-rhythm ignore-the-rhythm  
 I'm no part of this sneak behind them

what they feel they don't  
 to cover their confusion

the contra /  
 the back /  
 poly //

tongue            wrists  
 out                tensed

when least expected

THERE!

the beat

2

to learn

most precisely

when to strike

***Kelwyn Sole***



and in each other satisfied.

So many things start  
to pull me away from you  
that I talk less of what you know  
while the heat of your limbs in bed  
moves eventually away,  
each night

and I  
    lose again  
that enclosed and living home  
where I float with no fear  
before (being) pushed  
— reluctant always, always —  
an orphan into day.

3

Into the distant west  
night sneaks past us on all fours,  
loping

our swimmer's arms are tired

in a whispering wind  
  at first unheard

the dawn is speaking to us, love —

alone      rise up  
alone      rise up

a fist of air  
fingers of blinding light  
dig beneath closed lids

your arms enfold me, push  
me without thought to  
shield your body as  
I grab back in panic,  
and resist

this stranger to me newly made  
when we drown into the world.

4

Alone,  
rise up.

We run towards the window  
on a floor that for the first time ever  
cuts our feet

and look, too late, outwards . . .

glass-stricken houses  
drip their gutters: a  
rubber plant reft from its soil  
grips a broken drainpipe  
with tenacious leaves and branches  
and roots dangling

as it tries  
to keep itself from falling.

Those, there, on the street, suddenly,  
stand naked with their tears

people escaped  
from homes like ruffled nannies  
shocked at the scorch smeared  
with a black hand  
on their concrete walls, on the pavement  
trickling now  
with the smell of blood

as the red eye of an ambulance  
winks, obscene, insistent.

5

In the morning after the bomb: you.  
You with your face twisted into laughter from weeping: yes.  
Yes is a word which can no longer  
pass our lips.

*Kelwyn Sole*

**Daar is Cold War**

Ke sethathwa die hele plek . . .  
 Dit is die geveg van refrigerator products mchana.  
 I tell you Mzala you are not observant  
 I tell you Bhadi dit is chandis . . .  
 Jy Phakathela nie die sqamtho nie  
 Ziya duma mfowethu!  
 Ke honda ya Tanzania . . .  
 Ke rhwayrhway fela.  
 Daar is 'n fierce cold war mchana.  
 Jy dlhamela die ayas nog ne mtswala . . .

Russia is daar met communist China  
 China's chocolate brown fangs spit iphoyizini . . .  
 China wil my strip sani  
 China wil my balloon tyres deflate . . .  
 Mense is loco deesdae  
 Dit is die corrobriek se impact . . .  
 Maar ek sê vir jou Ntate modimo o teng . . .

Charcoal Russia is roving mad  
 Hy wil my Ghobani hê vir nocturnal timetable  
 Mchana bondabazabantu is agog met  
 Die juxtaposing of ammunition . . .  
 Ek sê vir jou Jack  
 Kort Russia and China is net een ding  
 Communism is communism . . .  
 Daar is 'n span om my te blizzard sani  
 Modimo wa Jakobo Thusa  
 Joko ena I heavy brother  
 Die bo vodkatini's fans word gecircinate nou . . .

Die shot van ys is hard my broer!  
 U za uzwa u ngathi u ya cha!  
 Ek sal die chakachaka bel . . .  
 Daar sal 'n ontploffing by die kraal wees . . .  
 Daar is klaar 'n tension daar  
 Jy ken moes 'n darkie is 'n darkie . . .  
 Hulle wil my ditch mfowethu . . .  
 Hulle vat my soos 'n naar nine . . .  
 'n Voëltjie het vir my gefluister en sê  
 Hulle sê ek is 'n papilon . . .  
 Aha jy ken moes . . .  
 Die tough mekokotlo wat wil gepluister . . .

Maar it has been droog in die Kalahari baba . . .  
Die bo ellisbrown creamer het hulle naar gemaak.

Dit is die colourful infrastructure wat my victimize  
Die satellites is hard om te appreciate.  
Maar die satellites is braas vir scandals . . .  
Daar is geen praterie want Russia en China shield them  
Ntate die lewe is hard . . .  
As jy van Amerika kom die satellites scorn jou . . .  
Maar abuti utlwa ke go jwetse  
Christopher Columbus o tlisitse diphetego.  
Hulle sê mipipi kamoka ya na  
Maar hier my broer is worse  
Ek sê vir jou die naboom toll gate is rife . . .  
Die tribute vir infrastructure is rusty . . .  
Hulle is soos 'n nasie wat dogs praise en decorate . . .  
Maar abuti I have been a midwife to a lioness giving birth . . .

Deesdae hulle het die landmyne gestel  
Motswala ek accolade en akgola ons vader wat great is . . .  
Ek sou lankal 'n enkel kaartjie gekoop.  
Jy weet moes ek het gedraaisa daar in Vietnam . . .  
Hulle het gesê die is die land van maswi le dinosi  
Maar ek sê vir jou dit is tough . . .  
Jy ken die abacadabra dit span hier . . .  
Dit khathaza motswala . . .  
Hei ek sê vir jou  
My voete was Hiroshima en Nagasaki  
My kop was Mt Vesuvius . . .  
My gedagte was net bhopal moes . . .  
My stomach was net 'n dormant volkaan . . .  
Dit was net 'n Tsunami . . .

Kom laat ek vir jou ghadla  
Kom vir tete-a-tete . . .  
Die celebrations is nie vir die Americans nie . . .  
Nou moet ek emigrate na 'n koel plek  
My insulation resistance is low key sister . . .

Dark or blue ek sal emigrate . . .  
Die duiwels hulle het my amper gefraza . . .  
Die majuta van progress obstruct my!  
Ons lewe soos diekorokoro moes . . .  
Maar motswala ek gaan die sluise oopmaak  
Ba tla utlwa o ka re hulle is op 'n  
Warm blue easigas bafo . . .  
Emang ka matlapa a power tu . . .

**Martin Mashele**

## Canto Twelve

### *Power*

Power is not what we see on television,  
the leaders shaking hands or pronouncing  
another state of emergency: power is invisible.  
It is a parasite in our mind, making us  
submit to their violence, in the hope to survive.  
Power is the invisible thread in our language  
and imperceptibly giving in, we,  
who want to eat tomorrow.  
Power is the opiate which puts us asleep,  
while the powerful remove our brain,  
the drowsiness of a television comedy,  
while they increase the prices.

Power is the ordinary guy in pinstriped suit,  
who looks like our neighbour: a nice fellow,  
quite human, because we don't see his power  
to make us unemployed, to send the police  
to throw us out of our house and to shoot us.  
It is only mimicry: he knows that power is dangerous,  
and hides in his Sunday suit normality.

Those who love power are the weaklings,  
the fearful, the ones who shit themselves,  
the wind-bags and gossips.  
The weak play the comic opera of the strong:  
wide open their mouth, hypocrites, they  
advocate heroism and love of the fatherland,  
as long as nobody threatens them.  
They hide behind buffels and casspirs and ratels  
driven by others, who risk their life  
in a fight against opponents who risk their lives.  
But the powerful stand well back:  
The generals who direct the generals  
are not on the battlefield, but  
secure in the gardens of their villas,  
in their impregnable boardrooms,  
and their bombshelters.

The space in which they live is sacred,  
protected by religion, awe, and the president's guard.  
The taboo which guards their palaces is in your head,  
the line which you do not cross, etched into your body.



So we shouldered the stinking buckets,  
and carried them through the streets,  
and put them before their offices  
so that they could feel the smell.

The police didn't like us to carry  
the stinking buckets through town,  
so they shot a little thirteen year old,  
who didn't like the smell.

As we prepared his funeral,  
the unpleasant smell of the boere  
invaded our houses to arrest our leaders,  
and we didn't like that smell either.

So we decided to stay away from work  
on the day of the funeral.  
They arrested some more of us,  
and we still didn't like their smell.

So Civil War broke out in Duduza  
when Santo Thobela died,  
and six thousand in our procession  
made a smell that the police didn't like.

We dug trenches for the sewerage system  
and to stop the police getting through  
we drove out the police and the councillors,  
because they had a smell which we didn't like.

But the war of the smell is not over:  
the puppets are striking back,

they come after us with police protection,  
and less than ever we like their smell.

They can burn our houses and murder,  
they can hire their killers and dress  
them up as policemen and vigilantes,  
we still don't like their traitorous smell.

*Peter Horn*

**Landscape**

A cow-herd walks along a path.  
He coaxes his pipe, conjuring a stale vapour  
that filters snugly through the breeze,  
which stirs the green grass  
and the white birds on the cattle's backs.

Whip slaps stone.  
The closeness of welt and hide  
causes a frantic scurrying  
as animals are herded to kraals.

Behind the wide-gabled facades  
of the main house,  
delicious breakfast is served  
to bodies in soft robes.  
From a triple-storeyed balcony  
greedy eyes survey the fertile valley.

Further up the burnt hill  
life quivers into daybreak.  
Pots and stomachs are warmed  
with sparsely gathered meat and grain.  
The smell of a deadened candle remains  
and fumigates the shack of a muscadel stench.

In the presence of restless leaves  
around strong and wild roots  
three people huddle and examine  
the ploughing and the reaping of the land.

*Mark Espin*

### **Hard Land**

The child returns from school; confronted there  
By soldiers in the classroom, returning to an overcrowded  
House; returning to a future without possibilities;  
Returning to friends and allies exactly placed as himself.  
It is a hard land, nobody is innocent.

It is a hard land, shackled by history,  
Trapped by geography. Rainfall figures and drought.  
Human weakness and foolishness; nothing is innocent.

Casspirs patrol the streets by day and night.  
My neighbours feel it's a comforting sight.  
I lock my doors and shut the windows tight.

The boy dressed in soldier's clothes, mounted  
On a hippo, confronts his comrades.  
It is a hard land, nobody is innocent.

### ***Michael King***

### **Samuel Josephs**

Samuel Josephs, unemployed, of no address,  
A man walking in dry places  
Who asks me for money or food,  
Stops only for conversation  
Trying to hold on to a staggering world  
Before lurching into his dawning darkness.  
Those sluts he chases, stumbling behind him,  
Their faces puffy, stuffed with their hunger  
Their bodies drooping, laden with uneasy burdens  
Suffer the shouted railings and curses  
He treats them with. They do not know  
Pity is a foreign currency,  
A luxury of the mind,  
Denied those who only live,  
Aching in the restraints of flesh.

### ***Michael King***

**Rotten**

Here is a dog  
whose like tore  
its entrails out.

Here is a man  
whose like tore  
his soul out.

They both stink.

*Lesego La Rampolokeng*

**From: 'Campus Reflections'**

Namatela thought he had fallen in love  
but then the woman drifted off  
he thought he was a genius  
but then his essays were sad  
he thought he was learned  
but all he learnt was how to idolize others  
he thought he was dangerous  
but someone laughed in his face  
he thought he was a scourge  
but his victims never crumbled  
he thought he was an anarchist  
but no policeman seemed to notice him  
Until he contrived to inform  
then his life style changed  
my, my!

*Abner Nyamende*

**To Sit**

to sit,  
and hear the sea  
shift  
and sift the shells.  
Shift  
and sift,

*Louise Knowles*

**This Moment's Despair**

The dogs go barking in forensic light.  
smell of doom, just:  
just for now.  
the neighbours leave them open,  
free their callings across  
Sunday suburban streets.  
they succumb to the death mood  
that moves in blinding cloud.

The once shiny garden breaks into bleakness.  
stench of deceit, only:  
only for now.  
my mother positions her flowers  
over staunch ground  
keeping clear of the terrible calamity  
perceived in the moments I lay  
corpse-like, facing the wall  
(knowing freedom is somewhere  
but not here)

*Stephen Yelverton*

**dreaming**

dreaming

i was in uniform

'boetie' on the 'border' (guguletu)

looking from a casspir top

i see thomas

he sees me

his eyes are softnose bullets

splitting me apart:

no words needed

for betrayal

my stomach mangled

heart pounds out tattoo of protest

mind rebels with intellectual fury

(theyretryingtogetusalltodefendtheindefensiblethebastards!)

thoughts racing

awaken in an icy sweat

flick on the bedside lamp

in its shadow lies

'in accordance with the defence act . . .'

the nightmare on my desk

switch off the light

pray for endless deferments

for changes in the rules (oh yeah)

for a speedy, bloodless revolution

i cry myself to sleep

*Anthony Egan*

### **Veld Fire**

The flames are loud with  
appetite. They gnaw like rats,  
their halitosis hot with feverish light.  
From cones of ash

escape grey threads of smoke,  
like valves that link  
the blackened earth with hidden hells beneath.  
For in this country

there are other fires.  
We see a flickering  
shadow on the wall and in the sky  
the glow of some red dawn.

Man makes the fire but  
fire unmakes the man.  
It lights an altar where the hearth is cold.  
A scapegoat burns

to sooth the angry gods,  
a necklace bright like blood  
around his throat, and in his eyes  
the anguish of us all.

*George Candy*

### **The Aftermath**

They  
the lorries, the guns  
belched smoke  
and went home

We  
the receptacles  
of lead and fumes  
went home too

*Lesego La Rampolokeng*

**Old Guy**

you could be thinking  
this is not for all, not for the boys  
playing in the soil's earthiness  
not for the child, the virgin-girl  
nor for the women (cold and crooked)  
this could remain thus, feeling alone

the dustiness of the street pulling  
your boots, you could be  
thinking, lying on the wet grass  
seeing the swallows pass  
a kite in a misty sky

you could wish, feeling so odd  
trapped in a drifting dream  
feeling the earth and its keepers  
the birds in the trees, heavy hearted  
and still this woody plan  
all this bizarre and dying kingdom

you could moan and groan inside  
poor like a slave, knowing of the heart  
knowing of the greasy dismay  
the shoddiness of the day and an all  
rehearsed episode

and I hear your sigh  
I sense your anxiety, following  
a forgotten path interspersed with stones,  
our minds filled with archaic words;  
and you could stare and stare  
across this age,  
you could rest a happy man

*M.M. Nyezwa*

### **Home Truths by Basil du Toit**

Published by The Carrefour Press 1988

Price R11,95 excluding tax.

### **The Unspoken by Douglas Reid Skinner**

Published by The Carrefour Press 1988

Price R11,95 excluding tax.

The two volumes of poetry considered here are both published by The Carrefour Press, a new publishing venture based in Cape Town. *Home Truths* is Basil du Toit's first volume of poetry and was joint winner of the 1988 Sanlam Literary Award. *The Unspoken* is Douglas Reid Skinner's third volume of poetry, the first two being *Reassembling World* (1981) and *The House in Pella District* (1985). That the Carrefour Press has chosen to launch itself with the work of white poets who stand outside the mainstream of contemporary socio-political poetry suggests that the publisher is attempting to reclaim a space for modernist poetry, a poetry of interiority and complex technical proficiency. It remains to be seen whether The Carrefour Press will endeavour in future to live up to its designation as a crossroads or meeting place of different poetic styles.

*Home Truths* is described on its cover as 'an educated, intelligent volume of poetry'. It would be more accurate, though, to describe the volume as academic and intellectual. Its author, Basil du Toit, is an expatriate university don whose erudition is coupled with an irrepressible love of subtle allusion and slippery word-play.

The poetry exhibits an encyclopedic frame of reference, ranging from the empirical philosopher George Berkeley to the structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, from primeval 'brontosauri' to pious 'prie-dieus'. It frequently employs abstruse diction, complex syntax, and a shifting, ironic, indeterminate tone. The result is a poetry that is oblique, elusive and intractable, a poetry in which words forfeit their conventional sense to become unstable indices of signification. The home truths of the title are hardly, therefore, homely truths.

The title poem, 'Home Truths in Harsh Surroundings', is a case in point. The persona finds himself in an unfamiliar and ironically dangerous context, a domestic kitchen where 'fingers work inches away/ from tiny, fresh, lacerating teeth torn from tin'. That he is more at home in a study than in a kitchen is evident in his rueful acceptance that in the present context 'numbing banalities hone the mind/ more effectively than philosophical texts'. The woman who presides over this 'republic of the fluffy sweet' is preparing food for citizens who have 'glittering pre-revolutionary eyes' and

gather for 'the vegetable taste of each other'. Despite its domesticity the kitchen is a predatory environment and the persona, too, is in pursuit of culinary delights:

It is tempting to open her for illegal joys, for example  
 the smell of vegetable ink, encre, on a written field.  
 Sniffing deeply,  
 I bend forward into her printed thighs.

The intellectual playfulness of this description of sexual pursuit is doubly seductive in that clever word-play and teasing irony may serve to divert one's attention from the chauvinism of the persona's attitude. Clearly sex is stripped of its interpersonal dimension in this encounter. The woman (an anonymous housewife) does not open herself but is opened, like a book. She is wholly passive. Her body is treated as a text which the persona is free to peruse for his exclusive pleasure. She is, in other words, a mere object of sexual/textual gratification.

This chauvinist attitude is characteristic of many of the passages that describe sexual encounter. In 'The Nature of the Far Country' the persona reveals, however, a self-deprecatory awareness that such an attitude is fantastical and also demeaning towards the woman. As an expatriate ruminating on the home country, he describes the way in which memory tends to falsify reality:

The women, though in constant agitation to and fro  
 like crumb-bearing ants, are systematically unemployed.  
 Their human ties are negligible,  
 their men notoriously inadequate and lacking an interior life.  
 The ease with which you can interrupt their shopping  
 and guide them by the elbow into acts  
 for which they will always remember you increases with distance.

For once the intellectual pose is dropped as the persona examines his attitude with rare honesty and perceptiveness. The verse itself signals a change by assuming a prosaic directness of statement. The persona is no longer the successful expatriate come home to patronize his benighted countrymen with dazzling truths and seduce the woman with priapic virility, but a pitiable misfit stranded on his arrival in the home country 'with nothing but hotel bumpf and the Gideon Bible to read'.

Judging by this volume of poetry and other writings that have appeared in recent years, South African readers are going to be subjected for some time to the ambivalent sentiments of white exiles who have fled the country but cannot break with it. Writing

about the home country becomes a way of exorcising its haunting memory. When, however, the expatriot sets himself up as pronouncing 'home truths' from afar, one must object on grounds that this is unacceptably arrogant, particularly when, as in the case of Du Toit's poetry, there is little evidence of compassion for some of the human subjects of the home country. The persona in 'Anglers at Cape Point', for example, is unremittingly contemptuous of the life of the fishermen:

Their conversation is off, like bad bait.  
 Repeated waking to a dark, pre-peopled time  
 has begun the process of genetic decline  
 in their descendants, sadly, and will leave  
 a legacy of coarse brain-stuff.

The word 'sadly' rings hollow. There is no evidence that the persona feels anything but distaste for these fishermen who 'wear not clothes but dirty laundry' and whose 'women are paralysed by the poison of their blows'. The persona's attitude centres on the observation that the fishermen are victims of genetic degeneration, which is manifested as 'coarse brain-stuff'. This view is curiously anachronistic in an age that is struggling to free itself from mechanistic notions of genetic determinism. In the past, theories of class superiority and racial superiority have been constructed on precisely such notions. The persona's view is disdainfully aristocratic. It manifests a supercilious pride in some putative superior (or refined) intellect for which, one assumes, he can thank his lucky genes.

The phrase 'Repeated waking to a dark, pre-peopled time' signifies that the lives of the fishermen are seen as primeval. Degeneration is portrayed as a reversal of the evolutionary process. There is much in this volume that suggests, in fact, an adherence to Darwinism. Frequently this takes the form of a determined eschewal of sentimentality with regard to human affairs. Du Toit appears to be saying that despite the complexity of their mental apparatuses and social institutions, humans are simply animals on an evolutionary scale, and often not very prepossessing animals. In 'Anglers at Cape Point' the austere vision of the Darwinist seems, from the point of view of current humanist concerns, to be callous. In a poem such as 'Mkele Mbembe', however, the Darwinian gaze embraces a view of history that serves, possibly, as a corrective to excessive anthropocentrism. Mkele Mbembe is a brontosaurus that has survived the ice-age which wiped out the dinosaurs:

It's agriculture, not ice, that threatens him now –

it's we he must survive. But the human story will not hang  
 together for a million years. He knows he can outlast us  
 by lying low – ever since that wasted interlude,  
 when nature dabbled with provisional men,  
 he has practised his days of modest repetition and concealment.  
 While Linnaeus was deriding the last fraudulent dragon  
 of Europe, Mkele hid himself among us like a heartbeat,  
 at night rolling his among the droppings of the elephant.

Several features of this extract are characteristic of the poems as a whole: the mocking voice, the cynical tone, the novel perception, the shock recognition, the felicitous turn of phrase. What appears remote is brought unexpectedly close, is made surprisingly intimate, in the observation 'Mkele hid himself among us like a heartbeat'. Appropriate and unexpected word choice, as in the choice of 'heartbeat', is one of Du Toit's great strengths. Moreover, while the brontosaurus is brought closer, the elephant, a familiar enough creature, is transformed into something remote, an associate of the primeval creatures that once roamed the earth. Again the choice of 'droppings' to bring about the association is unexpected.

Although his attitude towards mankind is sneering ('the human story will not hang/ together'), the persona's concern and compassion for non-human life is keenly expressed. This concern is echoed in other poems that deal with nature. In 'Animal Room, Royal Museum of Scotland', for example, the stuffed animals elicit a strong sense of loss and regret:

When the last, demoralised mating pairs have died,  
 these mementoes will be more precious than cartoons  
 kept in dark rooms like migraine sufferers. Until then  
 their faith in the obscure purpose of their generations  
 is like a vessel of water passed from hand to hand  
 across deserts, mountains and plains, for a fire  
 which has not yet begun.

If non-domestic animals are under threat of extinction so, one can argue, are pre-industrial human societies. Yet the concern felt for threatened species of animals does not seem to be extended to threatened forms of human organization. In 'Social Anthropology (1908-) (on what there must continue to be)', social anthropology, as father of 'those great soft inventions, the tribal cultures', is treated with scorn. It is true, of course, that social anthropology came into existence at precisely the time that Western imperialism was systematically eradicating tribal cultures, and as such can be seen, particularly in its early stages, as acting in complicity with

the imperialist enterprise. But this is not the point the persona makes in the poem. Rather, he seems to take exception to the method and findings of social anthropology, seeing in it an attempt at exalting tribal cultures ('we credit the imagination with far too much') when, in his opinion, which is unashamedly reductive, 'the stomach and genitals govern all ritual'. Yet in the same way that the museum preserves 'mementoes' of animal existence, so, surely, at the very least, social anthropology preserves a record and an understanding (however imperfect) of early forms of human organization.

Considered on a purely technical level, Du Toit is undoubtedly a highly accomplished poet. Nevertheless I do not think it is desirable to consider poetic technique, however virtuosic it might appear to be, in isolation from the subject matter of the poem, from the values it propounds and the perceptions it embodies. I incline towards the view that the formal elements of the literary work serve both to disclose and to repress its content. This view is linked with the recognition that literature does not begin and end on the page, but is inscribed in a social formation where meaning is created through processes of exclusion rather than given in an act of revelation, where values and perceptions are contested and are used to justify relations of power and domination. In my opinion, the literary work cannot be considered in this larger context unless textual processes are examined in relation to both formal elements and content, and unless the interplay between formal elements and content is sufficiently problematized to take into account the ambiguities of disclosure and repression.

If there is one distinguishing feature of South African poetry since the 1970s it is a concern with humanity, with what it means to be human, and with the rights and material conditions that are appropriate to humankind. Given the dehumanization to which all in the country have been subjected under apartheid rule, this preoccupation is both appropriate and necessary. It is inevitable that South Africans currently feel the need to redefine who and what they are in relation to one another. In this regard Du Toit's poetry is uncharacteristic of South African poetry of recent years. It does not give the impression of having been written from within the South African context but suggests a deliberate emotional disengagement. The choice of *Home Truths* as joint winner of the 1988 Sanlam Literary Award, which presumably has as its object the encouragement of a specifically local poetic tradition, is therefore surprising.

The same reservation cannot be applied to Douglas Reid Skinner's volume of poetry, *The Unspoken*. Although Skinner's poetry also subscribes to a modernist idiom in its interiority and

its use of complex poetic techniques, it evinces, above all, a full human response to a recognizable South African experience, a response rooted in feeling as much as in intellect. The volume demonstrates that the poet need not respond with overt political statements in showing his commitment to the humanizing of South Africa. Sensitivity, sincerity, humility and compassion are adequate. If to these qualities are added keen perception, compelling rhythm and striking expression, the result is fine poetry.

*The Unspoken* is the most personal of the three volumes of poetry that Skinner has produced to date, and is also, in my opinion, the most accomplished. It is more lucid on the whole and more consistently skilful than the previous volumes, exhibiting a quiet confidence and strength that avoids both ostentation and banality.

The volume is divided into three sections. The first section, entitled 'Empirical Life', contains poems that record the poet's engagement with the external world of love and politics, the geographies of city, land and sea, and the cycles of heat and cold, growth and decay, creation and stasis. The underlying recognition of this section is of the enigma and paradox of the empirical world. The experience conveyed by the senses is ambiguous, is often confounded with dream images, and prompts questions to which there appear to be no answers. The poet seeks revelation in the world of experience but discovers, more frequently than not, his own evasiveness, even, as in 'A Glance Sideways', during the intimacy of sex:

the moment before her arms snaked round  
and pressed him impossibly near to her breast,  
he glanced sideways at the glass on the table,  
half-filled with water and alive with flames.

Possibly the most significant and moving of the poems in this section, because of the way in which it seeks to merge the personal and the socio-political, is 'The Body is a Country of Joy and Pain'. The poem comprises four parts, each dealing with a separate 'political' incident. In each case Skinner's concern is with the impact of brutality on the person. The second part is subtitled 'One Sunday in November':

They removed all of his days and left him with  
hours. Then they removed all of his hours  
and left him with minutes. Then they removed  
all of his minutes and left him with a silence  
that had no line or horizon, and time vanished

into the walls around him. After two years  
 they gave him one day of faces and voices,  
 words and the touching of hands and of lips.  
 And then once more they left him with the hard  
 pebble that his fingers had worn smooth.  
 And when no one was left who remembered him,  
 they left him alone to blink through his tears  
 at the searing brightness of sunlight as he  
 stepped into an empty street filled with people.

The persona recognizes that to deprive a person of his sociality is to restrict his humanity. Rather than denounce political imprisonment in general and strident terms, he takes the case of an individual and conveys, through understatement and suggestion, the poignancy of a life for which there is no past and no future, a life reduced to the dimensions of one, smoothly worn, hard little pebble. The image signifies both loss and resilience, the power to endure no matter how oppressive circumstances may be. What is more difficult to accept, though, is the fact of having been forgotten. This is the greater loss, the ultimate emptiness, and transforms release from confinement into a cruel mockery.

The second section of the volume, entitled 'The Intimate Art', explores the world of memory. It contains remembrances of childhood and of friends who are dead. Memories are revived by a photograph, a visit to an abandoned and derelict homestead, or by snatches of a past conversation with one who has departed. Although in the first section already the poet reveals a preoccupation with time as separating the then from the now, a preoccupation with what remains and what is lost, with life and death, this preoccupation assumes a greater urgency in the second section.

In 'The Telling' the persona is a child describing the day he was informed by his father that his mother had abandoned the family for another man and other children. The persona describes his entry to the house from outside, through the kitchen, past the basin and cupboards, and into the passage, where he pauses before entering the room where the father waits to divulge the painful news:

coming in and pausing briefly in the passage  
 beside the old, silent Busch radio to listen  
 for the cistern's trickle and the roof's creaking,

a dog barking in the distance and the footfalls  
 of a man pacing in the room about to be entered  
 with held breath and ears buzzing, coming in

and standing still in the hush and waiting  
for the man to turn from the window and say  
that she (you) was not coming home again,

for the man who would turn and look and say  
that you (she) had gone away (over the seam  
to another town and another man, to another  
house and other children), coming in and seeing  
him turn and talk and turn and walk from  
the room, not wanting to hear, standing alone

in the square of light falling from the window,  
a dog barking and the roof creaking, unable to  
breathe, ears loudly buzzing, coming in and  
covering eyes and ears with arms as he turned  
and walked from the room . . .

The simplicity of this description belies the skill with which the effect of irrevocable loss and inner collapse is achieved. The rhythmical repetition of the phrase 'coming in' suggests the compulsive recurrence in memory of this agonizing event, while the attention to detail (the cistern's trickle, the roof's creaking) reveals a mind wholly absorbed by, or even overpowered by, the experience, and drawing all contiguous impressions into its vortex. Moreover the combination of present tense and past tense denotes a dislocation between the experience and the remembrance, between the imperative to relive the experience and so ensure a cure, a release, and the impulse to evade, to bracket in the past what continues to cause pain in the present.

The third and final section of the volume, entitled 'The Unspoken', comprises a fairly long poem describing the father's experience of fighting in World War 2. The title of the section derives from the father never having spoken about the experience before:

and the request to talk about  
what it was like there, then –  
enthralled on a diet of boredom and death –  
brings out in a rush all the fragments hidden  
from hearing for nearly forty years . . .  
the unspoken – the questions never asked  
and answers never given,  
all the hell and sweat and fear of dying  
that is warfare, what warfare really is,  
what is felt by those who were there . . .

In choosing to give this title to the volume as a whole, Skinner draws attention to the fact that many of the poems deal, in one way or another, with experiences that are painfully intimate, and that remain, probably, for the greater part, unspoken. For what is disclosed is never adequate to the experience, the articulation of which is inevitably distorted in the telling, disfigured by omissions, evasions and displacements. One might, in fact, at this point begin to work backwards and trace the fissure of the unspoken as it manifests itself in all of the poems, giving the lie to their appearance as finished, self-sufficient constructions.

Thus one could start by asking whether withdrawal into an inner world, which transforms the external world into images of its own personal concerns, is not, perhaps, symptomatic of an autistic response to the trauma of socio-political upheaval. This question could, in turn lead to the further question of whether such a response is not a peculiarly liberal affliction, a response that gives evidence of concern but also of an inability to make a more decisive contribution to the creation of a democratic culture in South Africa.

*Dirk Klopper*

Dear Editor

I wish to respond to the letter from Marianne de Jong in *Staffrider* Vol 8. No. 1 and try to look at some of the political issues surrounding the cultural boycott.

I hope Ms de Jong will not take any remarks in this letter as being directed against her, since my aim is to address some issues of the struggle for liberation in this country, not to heighten any personal tensions that might already exist. If I refer to incidents that have happened at UNISA, where she lectures, it is merely in the form of examples to clarify my position and not in some kind of godlike judgement of these incidents and institutions.

The first question that needs to be looked at, is what is the purpose of the cultural boycott? For years now, there has been a blanket cultural and academic boycott, intended to isolate and oppose the apartheid system. This has recently been amended to a selective boycott, but still with the intention of isolating and undermining those sectors of South African society which support apartheid while assisting those sectors that are trying to work towards a free, non-racial, non-sexist, united and democratic South Africa.

Ms de Jong talks of having invited Jameson to this country to 'support a bid against the system.' One must raise the question, what does a bid against the system really entail? An Australian academic recently visited the UNISA Literary Theory Department to give a series of lectures — does this entail a bid against the system, or should we be talking about something much larger than this?

One of the major problems of this country is the absence of free distribution of information. Apart from the state of emergency which has made it almost impossible to impart information about important events in S.A., we have for decades been faced with the kind of education system where only limited education is supplied to anyone, and where 'education' of the worst order has been offered to black people. Certainly there are an increasing number of blacks who make it to universities, to private schools, etc. but the majority of people in this country remain deprived of information and education.

My point is if the people who are inviting foreign academics to this country are truly committed to the revolutionary process, to the radical restructuring of society, to a 'bid against the system', then they should be attempting to make that information available to as many people as possible. Where were the discussions arranged with progressive writers, with trade union cultural workers, with informal students of literature, to mention just a few?

Perhaps I can outline a few questions that I feel could be addressed by people wishing to invite foreign academics or cultural workers to this country, questions that people should address for themselves even before they begin the process of consultation with the mass democratic movement:

- who is going to be exposed to, and therefore benefit from, the person's presence here?
- how can as many people as possible be invited/informed about his/her presence, and be enabled to share in his/her knowledge and how can this knowledge be made available in such a fashion as to work against the limitations of access to knowledge currently at work in S.A.?
- how will the struggle against racism and exploitation be furthered both practically and theoretically by this person's presence here?
- which way does the scale tip when the value of the person's presence here is weighed against possible benefits and kudos from her/his presence that might be accrued by the state. One must bear in mind here that the South African government is continually looking for ammunition in the propaganda war that they are waging both internally and internationally.

Following on from addressing these questions, one comes to the question of consultation. Ms de Jong raises the question of who to consult. With the number of mass-based organizations that have been banned and restricted, from the 1950s through to now, this is not as easy as it might have been, but there are nonetheless structures to approach. Ms de Jong is a member of COSAW: I would have expected that her first response would have been to contact someone within that organization to ask for advice. She could then have been informed that COSAW is the correct organization to consult in relation to writers, and that EDUSA (the Union of Democratic Staff Associations) should be approached in relation to academics.

As I understand it, EDUSA do not as yet have a formal position on the cultural boycott, but they are due to have a conference in the near future, at which this issue will be addressed.

I have no wish to pretend that the issue of the selective cultural boycott is an easy one to deal with, but I do believe that approached in the right spirit it can be implemented with minimum pain and confusion. But it is essential that there is a willingness to see the cultural boycott, and all cultural and academic work within the framework of a national struggle for liberation that is happening at many levels.

The liberation of South Africa involves millions of people in a continuous process of struggle and debate — mistakes have been made, and mistakes will be made, but it is essential that people who truly wish to bring about change in this country root themselves firmly and actively within organizational structures. It is through being involved in the organizational activities and debates of progressive structures that individuals can begin to understand and appreciate the strategies and tactics of the battle that we are waging for national liberation.

It is my opinion that clarity on and understanding of issues such as the cultural boycott are created through the process of work and debate within progressive structures, and that this work is essential for people to perceive the struggle as a massive whole, and not as a fragmented piece that concerns their microcosm only. To achieve liberation the process of free and open debate, the raising and answering of questions is crucial, but it is also necessary that the questions are tied to a practical base of organizational work committed to bringing about change.

**Barbie Schreiner**

Dear Editor

In her open letter to Achmat Dangor in your last issue, Marianne de Jong asks about voicing genuine questions concerning the Cultural Boycott. She asks about showing an attitude to it which might not be the most popular one. 'Surely, these are rhetorical questions,' she states, and wonders why they are being 'discredited'.

Of course one can raise questions, seek answers, and stand to be corrected. The point she misses, however, is that there is more to it than mere debate and posturing.

'I have been *boycotted!*' she exclaims, 'and I thought my intentions were *good!*' Her intentions were to 'invite someone to support a bid against the system' and by preventing him from coming, 'the boycott seems to undermine its own purpose'. The problem, however, is not with these intentions — they are noble intentions that anyone who is against Apartheid would support but with the practice involved.

For anyone can have noble intentions and say they are against Apartheid — Pik Botha does it all the time. It is also too easy to say so from the comfort of academia where getting around the boycott tends to be a more immediate concern than the far off realities of the struggle. One needs to understand the practical

difficulties of simply leaving the matter up to the intentions of the people involved.

And then there is the matter of the real effect of any exception to the Cultural Boycott. How does one know that what is well intended will in fact serve the struggle rather than lend lustre and credibility to components of the system? These are difficult questions that cannot be answered outside the framework of a generally agreed upon strategy. After all, one person's well intended 'bid against the system' might work against what others are trying to achieve.

The answer to these problems lies in a co-ordinated approach – something for which consultation is essential. Good intentions are simply not good enough.

This brings me to a second question raised by Ms de Jong: who does one consult? Being well acquainted with members of COSAW and the JODAC Cultural Forum, including executive members of both organizations, I find it hard to believe that she would have had any difficulty finding out if she had only tried. There is however another aspect of this question that I would like to address, namely that consultation doesn't mean going to someone to get a rubber stamp. The Interim Cultural Desk, or the Mass Democratic Movement for that matter, is not a policing body with the task of telling people what to do and how to 'correct' their attitudes. Guidelines and policy should come from below and be worked out democratically with the active participation of all involved, including people like Ms de Jong.

If consultation is taken seriously, it also needs to happen timeously, so that those consulted aren't confronted with a fait accompli. What's the point of consulting if the process cannot influence the course of events?

This is common sense to anyone actively involved in the struggle and acquainted with its processes. On matters such as these the younger comrades from the townships who were at the workshop would not have been as 'confused' and 'ignorant' as Ms de Jong assumes they were. It appears to be rather a matter of her being unfamiliar with the way things are done, coming from a position of relative isolation.

There is however no reason for anyone with good intentions to remain in isolation or on the outside as an unknowing victim of circumstance. If Ms de Jong's intentions are good and she wishes to support the purpose of the Cultural Boycott, as she says, then the responsibility is also hers to get involved in a way which would help ensure that it serves the cause it is intended to. The responsibility is also hers to participate in organizations and forums where the approach of the people is evolved.

Marianne de Jong is well known in the Afrikaans literary world

for her post-structuralist critiques of the Apartheid establishment. Eloquent as she is in weaving intricate texts out of intellectual concepts, she appears to be embarrassingly clumsy when it comes to simple procedures of political practice. If she did more than criticize and wonder from the sidelines, the type of misunderstandings one finds in her letter would not arise.

*Wilhelm Liebenberg*

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Staffrider Magazine would like to announce that the annual photographic exhibition organized by Afrapix will be extended to include painting, graphic art and sculpture.

Paintings, graphics and sculptures not larger than 120 x 150 cm and not previously exhibited should be submitted. Work exceeding these dimensions must be submitted in the form of slides or transparencies.

Single photographs and photo-essays consisting of a maximum of 25 prints, not previously exhibited or published should be submitted. All prints must be 8 x 10 cm in size.

The exhibition is open to all South African artists and photographers living at home and abroad who have not as yet held solo or one person exhibitions.

The closing date for entries is 30 August 1989. All entries must be submitted to The Gallery Manager, Market Galleries, Cnr Bree and Wolhuter Street, Box 8646, Johannesburg 2000. Details of the awards will be released shortly.

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