

Mafika Pascal Gwala
Collected Poems

Edited by Mandla Langa and Ari Sitas
South African History Online

Mafika Pascal Gwala Collected Poems Published in 2016
South African History Online,
349 Albert Road, Woodstock, 7925, Cape Town

Jol'iinkomo published by Ad. Donker Publishers (PTY) LTD.
First published 1977

No More Lullabies published by Ravan Press (PTY) LTD.
First published 1982

Exiles Within: 7 South African Poets published by Writer's Forum.
First Impression 1986

© Mafika Gwala Family

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored on or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the written permission of the above mentioned publisher.

ISBN 978-0-620-72780-5

www.sahistory.org.za

© South African History Online

cover photograph of Mafika Gwala by Omar Badsha

Design and layout: Ian Africa and Omar Badsha

Printed and bound in South Africa by Bidvest Data, a division of Bidvest Paperplus. All rights reserved.

This publication was made possible by the support of the National Institute For The Humanities And Social Sciences (NIHSS).



Photograph of Mafika Pascal Gwala
By Omar Badsha

CONTENTS

The Arts of Resistance - Mafika Gwala and South African Poetry 8

JOL'IINKOMO (1977)

On being human	19
Perspectives	20
When it's all double-you	22
Paper curtains	24
Before the coming	26
'Things'	27
Election pincers	28
The shebeen queen	29
Sunset	30
One small boy longs for summer	32
No mirth for bantus	34
Winter	35
We move on . . .	37
Kwela ride	38
Gumba, gumba, gumba	39
An attempt at communication	42
Black status seekers	43
We lie under tall gum-trees	45
Since yesterday	46
Letter to a friend in exile	47
From the outside	50
The bangalala	51
Beyond fences	52
Night party	54
The jive	55
The children of Nonti	56
Soul afternoon	59
Biting in lumps	63
Words are also born	64

Grey Street	67
Getting off the ride	70
Just to say . . .	79
Jol'iinkomo	80

NO MORE LULLABIES (1982)

There Is . . .	85
Bonk' abajahile	87
Tap-Tapping	91
In Memoriam	92
In Defence of Poetry	94
Under the Mulberry Tree	95
Words to a Mother	97
A Poem	101
Xmas Blues	103
A Poem	104
Mother Courage on the Train Carriage	105
In a Textile Factory	106
into the dark: 1975	107
To the Race-Problem Solver	108
Courage	109
Exit Alexandra - 23:5:74	110
Black Schizophrenia	112
Bluesing In	115
September 1971	118
Ukubuza Kukamkhulu Unxele: 20 June 1976	119
A Poem	120
Beyond Scream	121
My House Is Bugged	122
My Sister and the Walking Wardrobe	123
Road to Challenge . . . 26th September 1976	125
Afrika at a Piece	127
The Covenant, Whose Covenant?	130

Circles with Eyes	132
To Those Black Brothers Feeding Off Their Fellow Brothers	133
Let's Take Heed	134
For Bhoyi	135
The Shadows Fall Back	137
To My Daughter on Her 16th Birthday	138
A Stalwart - August 1977	141
A Reminder	143
Looking at Saul	144
My Grandmother	145
Story of the Tractor	146
Lobotomies of a Party - May 1978	147
The Chewing of Her Time	149
Time of the Hero	151
Purgatory Blues	152
Uphondo	153
The ABC Jig	155
So It Be Said	157
Versions of Progress	158
Back to Mama	161
Vo Nguyen Giap	162
At End of Kruger Park	169
No More Lullabies	171

OTHER SELECTED POEMS

Taken from *Exiles Within: 7 South African Poets*

The New Dawn	175
Into The Midnight Hour	179
On One's Stomach In The Veld	181
A Poem	183
A Stiff Midnight's Dying	184
"Cacophony-In-What?" Jazz	187

THE ARTS OF RESISTANCE — MAFIKA GWALA AND SOUTH AFRICAN POETRY

Mandla Langa and Ari Sitas

Remembering Mafika Pascal Gwala brought with it a haunting sensation. It was about the landscape that threaded together Umlazi, KwaMashu, Inanda, Mpumalanga, Edendale, Dambuza, Sobantu and Mpophomeni. It was a common landscape of black experience, hope and fire. It was where, the poet found the Children of Nonti Nzimande and found them . . . resilient.

There is song, there is truth, there is oneness, there is laughter and struggle in the Children of Nonti. There is a meta-narrative and an intricate narrative of liberation. There is art and there is resistance.

Despite the ugliness, despite the violence and civil war that gutted Hammarsdale and Mpumalanga, despite the closing of one textile mill and clothing factory after another, despite the enduring hardships, we want to believe that there is laughter and song, but is there resilience in the children of Nonti?

I

Mafika Pascal Gwala was born in 1946 in Verulam. His father worked on the railway and his mother was a domestic worker. Growing up in the dormitory township of Mpumalanga, he saw education as a way out — as he put it — of the ghetto. At the same time he had a great mistrust for the education that was being crammed down the throats of black people.

To compensate for what he saw as a state administering the poison of self-hate among the oppressed, he read voraciously

and eclectically, immersing himself in subjects such as philosophy and political science, keeping, at the same time, a vigilant eye on the events taking place outside the borders of South Africa. For instance, he might have been the first poet outside Eastern Europe, who lamented the series of massacres committed by the Nazi Einsatzgruppe during World War II at Babi Yar, a ravine located within the present-day Ukrainian capital of Kiev.

He emerged at the time of the budding black consciousness and had much to do with the movement's self-definition. He was anthologised early, yet he was too self-destructive to enjoy sustained liberal patronage.

His two books met with muted applause, *Joliinkomo* (1977) and *No More Lullabies* (1982) were there by the late 70s and early 80s. By then the allure of black writing was in decline. The struggle got ugly, the words uglier, Gwala entered the fray of the ongoing conflict by working alongside many trying to modify the rising authoritarian populism of Zulu-ness, his and Liz Gunner's *Musho!* (1991) made the case for an imbongi "from below" tradition – he now found himself squarely in the Communist trends of the Congress Movement, writing the izibongo of Harry Gwala and Govan Mbeki.

The discomfort with writing like Gwala's had been there for some time — as he said often in the 1980s, black poetry was always an act of contrition for "you whites": it always warranted inclusion in South African collections edited by whites but it was a poetry that needed qualification and a footnote by white editors. The dominant view was that its "artlessness" was explicable and marked by the harshness of Apartheid. The suburbs were not quite comfortable with much of its tendentiousness. It had, nevertheless, something poetic about it.

Since Albie Sachs' *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom*, with his

plea to move away from the ugliness of resistance art, its monochromatic binaries; the suburbs, in his words, fought hard to wrest the Academy back from the township. The breathing space opened had emboldened many want-to-be gatekeepers of culture, of the arts and of good taste, to be unashamedly white and ethnocentric.

In refusing to be patronised by whites, the best of the black intelligentsia pinned their hopes outside the existing cultural networks and institutions. They were left in the lurch when the ANC, despite bold noises since the early 1980s about the arts, culture and creativity (remember Gabarone, remember CASA?) handed the cultural apparatus of the country to its arts and cultural ministry, to a minister from the Zulu Nationalist Inkatha party and its creativity to the market.

The aesthetic gatekeepers in turn, guardians of the complex and the uncontaminated, had been sophisticated enough not to appear as avant-garde, a bloc, a dinner-party set or a movement. Rather, they achieved psychic and material integrity through the control of symbolic events and institutions that valorise “goodness” – the media, publishers, galleries and the Academy.

II

Mafika Pascal Gwala was a political poet: he was 9 years old when the Freedom Charter was adopted and 14 when Sharpeville scuttled hope for a while. His erstwhile influences growing up in Apartheid South Africa ranged from rapport with the Unity Movement, where he learnt the language of class, and in everyday life from Grey Street to Verulam, where he learnt the camaraderie of blackness as Indians and Africans were beginning to defy Apartheid in subtle and creative ways. By the end of the 1960s, he was an outspoken member of the emerging Black Consciousness Movement, he wrote position papers and, as he gained confidence, poems and

collective work proliferated. His influence in the formation of Art Associations under the banner of Black Consciousness was swiftly felt, with the Mpumalanga Arts Association/ Ensemble rivalling their equivalents in Pietermaritzburg and Durban.

By 1973, he followed Omar Badsha into the trade union movement and had some influence in the formation of co-ops and self-help associations under the banner of Black Community Programmes (BCP). Gradually, his allegiance shifted towards the Congress Movement and the ANC. As he told Lesego Rampolokeng, “we didn’t take Black Consciousness as a kind of Bible, it was just a trend . . . a necessary one . . . as I said in 1971: Black Consciousness (was) not an end in itself. It’s a means towards an end. We needed Black Consciousness to correct the many errors that had been committed by our leadership... So we had definite goals within Black Consciousness. But then we started losing them one by one, dropping them off, dropping them off. The more dashikis we had, the more bourgeois we got.”

His assessment of Biko was rather harsh: “there is no Biko without bourgeois background. He aspired to bourgeois rights. That’s why we didn’t agree with him. As a writer, as a poet, categorically, I agreed with him, I admired him, we got along very well. But when it came to politics he would readily say, ‘the trouble with you is that you are a Stalinist’. He would call me a Stalinist. We were friends, we used to drink together. He enjoyed beer, I enjoyed beer (laughs). So he would say, ‘you know, the trouble with you is that you’re a Stalinist’. But there was nothing Stalinist about it. It was just that he was not seeing the revolutionary path.”

In the late 1980s, he often advised many in COSAW and the Natal Culture Congress to take what was best in Black Consciousness: the idea of getting the younger black generation into collective ensembles for all the creative

fields. By then he was beginning to work seriously in isiZulu and to look for ways of getting his studies back on track.

III

Mafika Gwala exists within a continuum of poetry in Natal — a continuum that he ruptures: there are the primordial moments of Benedict Wallet Vilakazi writing in Zulu and establishing a defiant sense of nationhood which contrasts sharply with HIE Dhlomo's English take on nationhood and class. A close reading of their respective poems on the Valley of a Thousand Hills would be a starting point. Both mark the shift from Native to African. Then, there is the poetry of Mazisi Kunene, which takes Africanism, Zulu-ness and resistance to a new level. The irony was that Mazisi Kunene wrote in isiZulu and had to translate his work into English due to his exile years. And then there is Mafika Gwala.

Gwala from *Jol'inkomo* through to *No more Lullabies* finally to the few but remarkable poems to have appeared in *Exiles Within*, has exhausted the creative limits of the scripted word here: beyond his poetry lay an unknown, an untested terrain, for every subsequent poet in KwaZulu-Natal has been consciously or unconsciously writing in his shadow. From the gutsy exuberance of the first work, to the tortured lines of the second, finally to the authority of line, rhythm and sound of the third, we are faced with a complex inheritance. Part of its complexity has to do with the fact that most Black Consciousness poetry in the years of its origin in the late 1960s and early 1970s to its late-1970s decline was performed poetry — initially among small groups of black militants, moving in larger and larger concentric circles outwards to reach the black working class. Save in a few instances though — and Gwala's is one of them — it did not reach that far. And although it developed a rhythmic vibrancy and an orating quality of its own style, it got imprisoned before it came to be challenged by the people. So what was written

for performance retreated back onto the page, reaffirming orality.

Jol'inkomo is “polluted” by the shackworlds of Mpumalanga and the grit of Durban and it is transcribed from Zulu back into English. But Gwala’s is a different English, it is consciously “donnered” (as he insisted) by people’s everyday speech-genres, machine rhythms and localisms. With him the universe shrinks: it is hardly a “cosmos” — it is a space of urban grime. The moon hangs palefaced from the jet-infested sky where “skylabs bid for power”. His lines do not walk on the “red beachsands” commanding crabs to follow (as they do in Kunene’s) — they step over pebbles from eroded valleys, gashed rocks and chipped hillsides. There is no festival – but rather all-night gigs, drunken stokvels and lovemaking under gum-trees with one’s backside pierced by mosquitos amassing from the nearby pulp factory’s industrial waste swamp. There is no ecstasy or abandon — just being “jazzhappy”. We are faced with a world where “Blackness blacktalents/Blackness echoes the real blues/Blackness chucks out the death and fear in our streets”.

But within this oppressive cosmos, there is a resilience, there is struggle, there is “blikksam vim” in the children of Nonti. Gwala takes one through the everyday struggles of poverty in *Gumba, Gumba, Gumba*. He engages with the hassled lives of communities like Clermont, and argues despairingly with the soul of urban streets like Grey Street, Durban. And it is this constricted cosmos of tin, of clocks and machines, of black struggle but also of class struggle that haunts any reader — where middle class “non-whites” have become a “fuckburden” to blacks. Within this world, Gwala assumes the role of an urban imbongi of scripted letters.

If *Jol'inkomo* teems with gutsy exuberance, *No more Lullabies*, his second collection, was a disturbing mixture of poems: angry, human and transitional, it feels like a work of

anticipation rather than arrival. The poems continue being the sounds of the townships that service Apartheid's factories. They are marked by the wastelands of Hammarsdale and Mpumalanga and they grind on with their "spindle now/ . . . machineblues" as the black working class is pummeled with the deceiving comforts of Castle Beer, Wimpy Bars and Kentucky Chicken in this age of "plastic" and "robot man". Gwala writes from the "visceral monotony of the surroundings", pounded by Natal's sun, "its glowing heat gnawing like/wild dogs at us" and haunted by the sounds of so many fathers who "wobble through the night/. . . piss drunk, who do not even know their names". He writes from the danger-zone, the "moment of Rise or Crawl/where this place becomes Mpumalanga".

But there is also an unresolved restlessness in the poems, which strikes out at targets with different moods, or with the same ones striking over and over again. It is ironic, angry, humane and prophetic. His jabbing at the black middle class intensifies as we see it emerging "from behind stockpiles/of books/now clad in Afo-style", wearing dashikis manufactured in Hong Kong. His frankness also intensifies as he asks aggressively, "what's poetic/about shooting defenceless kids/in a Soweto street?" Anger is mixed with analysis and references to the political figures of Lumumba, Fanon and Cabral, tempered slightly with the "jazzhappy" horn of a Charlie Parker solo. But not enough to stop him from ranting against class leeches and oppressors. Gwala is caught between a deep affinity with the sounds of the street but also with the defiant growth of the mulberry tree in the backyard of his ghetto. And further, there is warmth and compassion when he whispers that "there is with all the odds against/a will to watch a child grow". Knowing at the same time that the dockers in Durban's harbour are "waiting for a tornado/or something to snap". Then, "history will be written/on the factory gates/at the unemployment offices/in the scorched queues of dying mouths" . . . There

is compassion, but no more lullabies, for the children of Africa after the Soweto insurrection have lost all tears. In this work Gwala can still self-deprecate his art by calling himself a “sharpwitted writer/far better on essays than on poems”, but by 1985 the poetic essays he develops in *Exiles Within* are of a breathtaking intensity.

In a poem like *New Dawn*, Gwala creates a remarkable sense of rhythm within his “donnered” English, so that each line comes with a tremendous authority to deliver what is in essence a castigation and a diatribe against the real trends of black middle-classism – its spurious consumerism, its new “academic crawl” in a *New Dawn*, where the “Fuhrer wears a black mask”. Gwala is caught in the night, fighting against such a dispensation, but it is a night of also crawling as he waits, “my belly to the grass” and from this darkness he dreams of another dawn, as the Casspirs haunt the township. Listen to the night:

“Tonight, this echoless night
Like a dried cistern,
A night so quiet;
It’s the dry quiet of a pod
Shed of its seeds by the wintry winds
But I have seen carnations of Truth before,
Sniffed the red roses of hope
As my country bends
With the grey dawn wind.
I hear hisses of the mamba
As the browning leaves rattle
Like a kettle on the boil.
The Afrika wind smiles at me
and kisses the willow tree

so full of red bloom promises:
By the summer the red blossom
will cast my ears to whispers
of a future wrested.”

The landscape we are left with is still harsh and many of our poets are experiencing a new “exile within”, as the black-white discourse gains prominence and the dashiki that Gwala laughed at with such guttural joy has been replaced by the penguin suit. Many too are still waiting for the “tornado or for something to snap”. We have to revisit the meanings of liberation and their meta-narratives and the craft they implied, because there is a future to be wrested away from greed and need. It has always been the poet who has allowed us to dream of the festival, Gwala, often jazzhappy, often black and furious, needs to be remembered for such a social service in the arts of resistance.

Jol'iinkomo

JOL'IINKOMO

Up from the river near Lusikisiki
the Mpondo maidens would sing
this song: Jol'iinkomo!
Down the Umtamvuna River
children waiting anxiously
for sunset: Jol'iinkomo!

Jol'iinkomo means bringing
the cattle home to the safety
of the kraal and the village elders.
Jol'iinkomo is also to say
I should bring some lines home
to the kraal of my Black experience.

For my wife, Thoko and my parents

ON BEING HUMAN

Thoughts jet north and south
like migratory birds trailing season:
stopover here,
stopover there;
The trips go on
in shuttle system

B

U

T

one thought never leaves:
That one is human
with feelings of love and hate
with pangs of desertion and embrace
with inner urge to destroy and create.

PERSPECTIVES

I

dompas workpermit nightpass
 ties sundaysuits
hairstretches complexionlotions deodorants
 toothpaste aerosols toiletpaper
jaguar mercedes gee-tees
hi-fi taperecorders classics
 whisky and soda cocktails champagne
 sunday's beach saccharine tranquilizers
foxtrot quickstep tango
drive-in circus tradefair
superman tarzan
 wait disney durban July
xmascards birthdaygifts
 art galleries church services

II

gandhi nat nakasa luther king
 lumumba malcolm x can themba
castrobeard guevarasmile trotskygoatie
 little richard floyd patterson sammy davis
muhammad ali huey newton elridge cleaver
 jomo kenyatta banda lebua jonathan

III

auschwitz and baby yar
 hiroshima and nagasaki
sharpeville
 my lai
pollution and thalidomide
 pornography
 immorality act
tv satellites revolving restaurants
 dracula vampirebat werewolf

bankaccounts instalments chemistbills
junk and the gutter
prison and death
masturbation and suicide
better-than-thou
psycho-analysis
hawks eagles and doves
sheep goats and lambs
lurking in the darkness:
boss
and
cia
until
black magic hands
rise
in
the
darkness.

WHEN IT'S ALL DOUBLE-YOU

The subject
 wangled
withered
 wilted.

You never wind a talk;
It just stops.
Still plying a talk-channel
she came to the alphabet.
What for instance
is an alpha?
And an omega?

The 'W'?
I hate it, I said.
All it means is
'M' for man . . . inverted.

Her intoed curiosity
splashes water into my face
as the plying look buttons up
the barefoot-toe sensitiveness:
woman's natural weapon.
'How do you mean?
Can a man wear his pants upside-down?'
Nags. I get a pain on my temple.
I crawl to the backbender:

Who:
Who made you?
Who is your father?
Who taught that?
Who gave it to you?

Where:

Where were you born?

'Waar is jou pas jong?'

That woman you stay with,

Where was she on the day of the murder?

Where do you get this kind of wrist-watch?

What:

What is your name?

(April is not a Bantu surname!)

What standard you passed?

(Can't you see that 'Whites Only' sign?)

What school is that?

(Bloody mission schools!)

What do you have - tea or coffee?

(Let's make it tea/I'm not patronizing you)

What did you say?

(Oh, you mean . . . ?)

So now you know when I say

I can't wear my pants upside-down.

We embrace in silence - gesturelove-wise.

I KNOW she has understood.

PAPER CURTAINS

If you say
Black, White and Yellow
can make or break the walls that surround them
then you shall not shame yourself
by clothing them
Black, White and Yellow
in tattered rags
picked up from the gutters
of the Stock Exchange.

If you say
Limehill is a cancer symptom
then you shall not deplore
the incision of a surgeon's knife
that will encircle the tumour and
cut it out
bringing new life to the body cells.

And if you cry change
you shall not shrink
at the slightest shaking
of the speedneedle
as it races across the meter of our lives
to register the pace of the motor
that drives home freedom. Sacrifice.

For if you shout:
You're going too far!
YOU'RE severing peaceful relations!
If you cry: You're overhasty!
You're running too fast!
Then my friend you are a hypocrite
Then you're a stuntist fraud in a dead
and mighty fall.

You won't pull your curtains
if they are made of paper
(I warn you Don't)
You won't look at life outside
You won't keep sunlight in your room
Paper curtains, my friend, are not flexible enough.

BEFORE THE COMING

I decide on being more Black
When I've come to it
That gadgets make me less Black
But they don't make me more human;
Talking about braaing meat
 on a pressure stove;
No free wood
 in these townships.
Yet there's a time when
A man's got to go to the woods;
Or nothing gets cooked.

And thinking about when
My sweet, sweet woman will come;
No joy in this long wait
There's an evening when
A man's irrational thoughts
On his chained condition
 may get griped;
By the fear he may act rational
And dance to the fuck-up tune
 of 'yes baas'.

And when my sweet, sweet woman comes
We'll play Humpty Dumpty
And watch his great, great
Fall.

'THINGS'

Things beautiful
 things obscene.

Things beat, hip
 things square.

Things brimful
 things empty.

These 'things'!
— What are 'things'?

Whatever 'things' are
They are there for you
to perceive
and give an answer to them.

There does life begin, brother.

ELECTION PINCERS

The paper before him.

Badly weighing its paperless weight — and with peasant caginess he dived into the pool of questions:

‘You say the present policy has been good?’

‘No, I did not say that. I merely asked you to choose,’ said the interpreter; shoulders levelled and his twitching nose savouring a bored, tight understanding. He borrowed effort to explain: ‘For the ruling party you can always be sure of a job; your child is assured a better education; and you, you CAN retire to an old-age home in the greencountry atmosphere of the Transkei.’

The old man balanced the points-cross and tick.

Then brushing his patched trousers: ‘Does it mean FREE SCHOOLING for my son? Will my wife not write letters for clinic fees? And my cattle, won’t they be culled?’

‘Khehla, we don’t own the day.’

‘Son if I didn’t know, I wouldn’t have come so early.’ -
Rounds of ammunition. Ready, fire!

‘I have explained everything you have to know about the whole thing. Now, are you not prepared to cast your vote?’
Rabid impatience — the white officer adjusts his Sunday tie, a one-inch, thin stripes. Red and Black. Scorching glances.

‘The other candidate — does he offer: higher wages, reduced taxes, and more grazing land?’

Rugged silence. Pincerd doubt.

The old man crossed beside favoured candidate. Then with fingers provoking made another cross beside the opposing candidate. He pushed the paper at the interpreter with gauged expectancy. The interpreter frowned. Piggishly.

‘Spoilt Vote.’

THE SHEBEEN QUEEN

She stood at the factory gate
as she watched
her last debtor approach,
vooping his oversized overalls.
Her last Friday's collection
at this firm. Fifteen of them all
'Come boetie shine up.'
The man pulled out the bank notes
— with a quivering smile.
'Gosh, more than half his wages;
I didn't force it
 on him.'

She zipped her fat purse and
they walked across the crowded street
into a butchery.
When they whisked out
he had, tucked under his arm,
a plastic bag: fowl heads and feet.
And she — exposed out
of her tight shopper: a broiler.

SUNSET

Like icing on a cake,
Circles of silvery clouds
frill the setting sun;
Inviting a cool evening air,
to soothe the valley
Below the Insikeni hills.
A freight train
rumbles down the slope
In geometric fashion;
Into the Malenge Valley.
Willowy women
In German Colonial dresses,
Joke it up from the water hole;
With adbright five-gallon drums
on their black doeks.
Clusters of rondavels
Like the brown poisonous mushrooms
that the people do not feed on,
Gargling ghetto commotions,
Spreading them in torrential drops;
Not across; the hopscotch rhythm of
these crowded huts can be the
Right thing too.
Mbothwe's Ford tractor
hollers for breath;
Under a pressing load of wood
The driver armed with a balaclava
Against the wind.
A baasboy perches on a cross-pole
Counts the stock of horses
arrested for stray grazing.
A primitive sledge

Drawn by cows and oxen,
Grades out stones
On the tawny road.
A meat hawker
begs us to the last two pieces
of meat he wants to part with, fast;
'Just to empty my basket'.
As we claw up the path
Above the valley
Rays of the sun
Hustle to filter into the clouds;
Descending the eastern horizon,
Fragments of cloudlets break
Into light rain.

ONE SMALL BOY LONGS FOR SUMMER

(for Bill Naughton)

The kettle hisses
Mother moves about the kitchen
sliding from corner to corner.
The fire from the stove
pierces into the marrow.
And mother pushing towards the stove
warns of the steam.
My young brother, Thamu, jerks my arm
violently: Stop leaning on me, your elbow
has sunk into my thigh.

Apology
I wasn't aware.

The kettle sings
Some distant far-away song?
Mother picks it up
with an almost tender care.
Sets me thinking of a war-picture
The actor carefully setting the charge
and smiling all the time
I'll also be a soldier
when I'm old - why, Uncle Shoba was one.
Father drops the paper on the table
He comes to join us
— staring coldly round.
It's no frown really,
But he's grinding his jaws.
Maybe it's the July
Handicap.
The kettle purrs now

Steam is escaping; it kisses the ceiling
and vanishes. Mother is pouring the violent waters
into the coffee-jug. Coffee.
Yes, I need some coffee — a mug of hot coffee.
Very rousing.
We can't play outside — I must not go, I know
 How we danced in the rain. We are so tired
of the winter: It's so dingy outside.
We can't play inside — I'm so tied up.
It's so boring, I feel like bursting into
a cracking laughter; but father,
he'll go mad.
It's so steamy inside
I feel I could bite the walls down.
If only it makes the winter pass.

NO MIRTH FOR BANTUS

middle class bantu blacks
roll into black wedding parties
with a clumsy gait
of (a) dice on a ghetto pave
little realizing
not a single face
will moon through
their sweaty foreheads
for a checkup on the
temperature of their
boozed-up entry
they come in bagged
with empty class
they'll slip stares
of assurances
about invitation cards
right across and all over
just in case
the ever so casual
common blacks
should get their noses mugged
and pull off
their gadgeteering masks
of white brow etiquette.

WINTER

Weatherbeaten
as keen as a tinsoldier
the barrierman stands.

In: a black cap
 a black coat
 black trousers
 black shoes.

His hands going clip-clip into the workers' tickets.

They say Mussolini loved black shirts.
He set the trains going on time
but Rome wept all the same;
Tears dropping on the hillsides of Ethiopia.

The workers flood down the steps
from the bridge. Jostling shoulders
crampy biceps.
Through the narrow gate
they push into the train.
Their smiles, their frowns
unearthing new problems of the day.

They say problems don't melt like soap
but itch under the skin like a ringworm.
They say many things. People.
Somehow I come across this sublime truth.

Mount a tie and be a fool
their stories are saying
to the young man next to me.
He seems to feel the pricks
For he clutches his James Hadley Chase novel

with his girlish fingers —
as if it were the very life.
The daily sheepshanks of a twisted reality:
The FM. The newspapers. The schools.
— They laugh it off
— I laugh it off
— WE laugh it off.
 On the surface.

WE MOVE ON . . .

Black as frostbitten leaves
we shaft cold fear . . .
into the hearts of the sunbaked
we puff dry powder . . .
into the faces of the orangefed
Black as the shiny spine
of a powder-keg . . .
we fuse black truth
into the tunnels of the night
We are the Blackmasked ones
We are the Warrior profiles
We are the Black passions
long made to wait on tradebooks
and white ghost stories
We are the big gong
make a dong-gong-dong
suspended on the 'Blackmove on'
dream that spans the desert
and the lifegreen jungle
We are the black violators
of the machine rhythm
in plastic cities . . .
and plastic gardens . . .
. . . vitriolic trash
. . . in refuse bins
We are the rhythm of the jungle
long banked up by the ages
across the sands
of the Nile the Congo the Zambezi
We bring the tom-tom drums
Back to the 'daka' huts
and the box houses.
We move on!

KWELA-RIDE

Dompas!
I looked back
Dompas!
I went through my pockets
Not there.

They bit into my flesh (handcuffs).

Came the kwela-kwela
We crawled in.
The young men sang.
In that dark moment

It all became familiar.

GUMBA, GUMBA, GUMBA

Been watching this jive
For too long.
That's struggle.
West Street ain't the place
To hang around any more;
Pavid's Building is gone.
Gone is Osmond's Bottle Store.
And West Street is like dry;
The dry of patent leather
When the guests have left.
And the cats have to roll like
Dice into the passageways . . .
Seeking a fix
While they keep off the jinx.
That's struggle.

Miasmatic haze at 12 noon
Stretching into the wilderness
Of uniformed gables . . .
Vast and penetrating
As the Devil's eye.
At night you see another dream
White and monstrous;
Dropping from earth's heaven,
Whitewashing your own Black dream.
That's struggle.
Get up to listen
To Black screams outside;
With deep cries, bitter cries.
That's struggle.

Struggle is when
You have to lower your eyes
And steer time

With your bent voice.
When you drag along —
Mechanically.
Your shoulders refusing;
Refusing like a young bull
Not wanting to dive
Into the dipping tank
Struggle is keying your tune
To harmonize with your inside.

Witness a dachshund bitch shitting
A beautiful Black woman's figure too close by,
Her hand holding the strap;
In a whitelonly suburb.
Tramp the city
Even if you're sleepweary;
'Cos your Black arse
Can't rest on a 'Whites Only' seat.
Jerk your talk
Frown in your laughs
Smile when you ain't happy.
That's struggle.
Struggle is being offered choices that fink your smiles.
Choices that dampen your frown.
Struggle is knowing
What's lacking in your desires
'Cos even your desires are made
To be too hard for you to grab.

Seeing how far
You are from the abyss
Far the way your people are.
Searching your way out
Searching to find it;
Ain't nobody to cry for you.
When you know what's bugging your mama

Your mama coming from the white madam's.
When all the buses
Don't pick you up
In the morning, on your way to work.
'Cos there ain't even room to stand.
Maybe you squeezed all of Soweto,
Umlazi, Kwa-Mashu
Into one stretch of a dream;
Maybe Chatsworth, maybe Bonteheuwel.
Then you chased it & went after it;
It, the IT and ITS.
Perhaps you broke free.
If you have seen:
Seen queues at the off-course tote;
Seen a man's guts — the man walking still
Seen a man blue-eye his wife;
Seen a woman being kicked by a cop.

You seen struggle.
If you have heard:
Heard a man bugger a woman, old as his mother;
Heard a child giggle at obscene jokes
Heard a mother weep over a dead son;
Heard a foreman say 'boy' to a labouring oupa
Heard a bellowing, drunken voice in an alley.
You heard struggle.
Knowing words don't kill
But a gun does.
That's struggle.
For no more jive
Evening's eight
Ain't never late.
Black is struggle.

AN ATTEMPT AT COMMUNICATION

Speak easy, brother

There's a lively chick
with a dainty smile.
There's auntie's cool mama-look
lest we start some shindig.
The spark tells me
I'm not all screwed, yes
I'm booze-feeding, just.

Hot it cool, right

We have the music-blues
to bury the dead blue
in us.
Give yourself a forwardpush
Africa rhythm -
Start off and go.
Then you're jazzhappy.

Cool it hot, yes

That mbaqanga
stirs you too?
I can do my own
Rock, Twist, and Jive.
For I also have
my muscles to loosen
and to cringe.

When it befits me.

Non-whites!
Non-whites you've become
a fuckburden to Blacks.
Non-whites you're hardboiled eggs;
Your golden intentions are a threat
to the nation's health.
You don dashikis
then go off on super-super talks
in praise of the London/New York
that you've never come to know:
'When I was in London . . .' you'll say,
just to seek oneupmanship;
eelslipping the argument.
You avoid ghetto truths
in your neighbourhood,
Yet you'll go around
bragging of the 'real rough' place
that's whirling the blackman
for a drown.
Brother, how can you be a wolf
with a cat's face?
Non-whites, how can you??
What kind of hooch is this you're in?
You run here
You run there.
These mass removals, do they prop you
up to stinkwood and kiaat furniture?
You steal the tetekela's clean swoop
into the river. Cheaters you!
Bullshit!!

WE LIE UNDER TALL GUM-TREES

We lie under tall gum-trees
hidden from the moonlight,
the stars and the silvery summer clouds.
In the thick shadows of tall gum-trees.

Mosquitoes hover round
and above us.
Swarming from the black swamps
of a pulp factory nearby
— like jetbombers blackening the Vietnam skies.
And as we spiralled
towards awareness
they bit us.
First you.
Then me.

Now, no more a virgin
You have tasted
the painful joy of love.

SINCE YESTERDAY

Mist shadows
cloaking the rich bushy hills
and waterfresh mountains;
Rivers flooding their wiry course
through growthcovered forests
and age-old villages
And stately
like the overgrown croc
they bite into the darkness
of distance;
Spilling the vicarious dreariness
of colonialist history
into the oceans.
Black living has dugged
the past
out of the mounds of Benin
has reaped the hardiness
on the Ethiopian Heights . . .
has dredged the glory
out of the womb of the Nile
has revamped the style
of the jive.
But who ever lied
and said, in Africa . . .
even the ivory tusks were savage?
(Just to show good faith . . . ?)
Yet all the lies fall apart
like a gossamer against the wind;
That all Africa's children
shall oneday come to know today's Africa
as the black giant
that always had been
even yesterday.

LETTER TO A FRIEND IN EXILE

(for Iyavar Chetty)

It all seems a long way, doesn't it?
Well brother, everything goes a long way;
Guess it was you who said
The devil is deep down in Sulphuric fires of Hell
And yet it's chilling distance to the Poles
Verulam has undergone unheard of metamorphosis
With the Group Areas Act having ploughed our lives
Leaving no other seed except boredom and germinating
thoughts

Remember mixed and united Verulam?
All that is a dream circling round people's minds
In rotation of the barrel setting of a pepperbox.

Many a thing has changed now
Many a tree has stopped bearing fruit
Many a face has wrinkled
Many a smile has died;
Beauty we still have in plenty though,
Except that we no more look
at the beauty of flowers.
Brother, the flowers are killing us!
They are trying to flowerkill us from across divided
streets, I'd say from within insulation
- like that rock on arrival from the moon
But as the old wise have said:
It's damned hard to sort out bad days,
Especially with some of us clinging
to a world that is passing by.
Shadows chasing shadows
guns dropping guns
bullets in the extortioner's pocket

fat cheques tearing at small cheques
fund floats bumping off street collections
community projects playing welfare state in abject
misery
pigs acting saints
saints looking sissy
swankies waiting on Unemployment Insurance
frauds playing leaders
time trying to kill Time.
During week-ends you'll find some brothers
threading arse on drunken bouts
Friday night to Sunday night;
the tsotsis are busy making hassles with knives
or getting themselves kitted in the undertaker's hearse;
A sad truth brother,
For our intellectuals have taken to gallivanting nonde-
script phrases
sought out of censored reading.
Meanwhile our culture is being bitched by tourist
faggots
who decide to stay in sunny South Africa
Hoping on Master Citizenship after five years
So much that we have to cross paths sometimes
with the silhouettes of proficient genocide.

At national level I can say we're busy.
We're busy trimming;
The national budget came and went,
But we can trim, you know.
We will damned well go on trimming
To a point where we'll hot up on the trim
successfully.
We seek and hide,
Driving to a hide and seek
with the naturalness of motion.
Since we are observing the world being programmed

for universal objectives
From the so many Treblinkas
With badges of human honour.

I still go into Clermont Central,
Proceed to Ndunduma.
Wind down and up Fannin to Umngeni
Circle via Mvuzane,
There hasn't been much change:
Except in the jumpy looks from
newly come factory workers,
Those looks you will remember
from Booth Road during the Cato Manor days
Where tin shacks propped up
to boom the won't-work landlord;
Here at Clermont too the roofs leak so terribly.
Some nights I'm almost convinced it's the old Clermont.
When finding myself away from the lights
The dim lights seem to flicker at five minute intervals,
Some shadows conceived in light
Within light mothered in the shadows.
Until towards the lamp-pole past Ntombela's
it dawns on me that this is changing Clermont;
But still the lights won't glow
And often the night is thick
and the drizzle won't go
and the dongas greet me hello.

FROM THE OUTSIDE

We buried Madaza
on a Sunday;
big crowd:
hangarounds, churchgoers,
drunks and goofs;
even the fuzz
was there
as the priest
hurried
the burial sermon -
and we filled the grave
with red soil,
the mourning song
pitched fistedly high;
- what got my brow itching though
is that none
of the cops present
dared to stand out
and say
Madaza was a 'Wanted'.

THE BANGALALA

Calm was all he wanted
(So he told his wife,
And the people who questioned him).
Shifty-shafty he trudged
The township night
To curb the rising tsotsi crime
With his beer-swelled stomach that bulged.

It continued
Until a sixteen-year-old girl
Came and abandoned a small baby
On the sofa in his house
Telling the shocked wife:
'A parcel for your husband!'
And she walked out.
That evening he came home staggering drunk.

BEYOND FENCES

A number in the boxhouse registry
They don't have to know you
They'll search for you in the dark
Should you look grey in that dark
They'll smear red paint over you
Should you remain black and red
They will call before dawn
- hoping to find you napping
Should they strike a miss
They'll pin you to the 'Wanted' list
Should they not find you next day
They'll be quick to say:
The communists have gone underground.

The amaPhephetha of Ophisweni
and the sons and nephews of Mazhiya
will sure bear me out
For all the tears from the mothers
of young braves at Isandlwana
Let me drink from the khamba of the elders
Let me blow my nose into kraalmis
Let me seek through Life
 the sons and daughters of yesterday
The waters of the Inyalazi
have crocodiled me to Umthunzini
Where men received the drilled patience
of a root doctor
When shall I inhale once more the gardenia fragrance
of the Umngeni Valley in mid-Spring?
Let me take the lithe of the tiger
Let me steal the speed of the cheetah
Let me track the paths

of my hunting forefathers
Let me cut the riverpool
with the sharp circle of the fish
Let me clutch with the wet grip
of an eel
Let me cheat the wind
with the hiss of the black mamba
Let me go the way of the elephant -
and trumpet the past into the future
Let me wander in open veld
Let me wander amongst the trees
Let me wander in the bushes
Let me wander in the river valleys
Where the wind sings
Where the bird chirps melody
Where the flower smiles
Where the leaf in rustle blushes
Where the river guffaws
Where the rock browses.

NIGHT PARTY

Saturday evening
Berea Road Station
the 1044's long been gone.
By the time
I touch Mpumalanga
at Zero-One-Thirty Hour
got to zwakala
into this wholenight gig;
Win-wood & Capaldi
create Traffic on cellophane
in a world
already bored
with riches and hobos:
the same vile wealth
that drugged Jimi Hendrix
out of Life,
the same nourished want
that starved the sax bit
of Charlie 'Bird' Parker
to his grave.
By break of Sunday's dawn
with scanted
 crooked
chimney smokes
straightening me home
the eagles have already
flown in.

THE JIVE

Mahlathini blues
plus Bra Thekwane's Movers
on a Tau Special
we jive through our problems
all that is left
of the black miseries jive
Mandela off'd to Robben Island
Boy Faraday off'd to Heaven or Hell
i don't know where
i'm only dead certain
of six feet underground
the ja-baas jive scares cowards
with Frankenstein monstereyes
and the jive continues
but we blacks got the wizard in us
we have the best soccer rocker in
Pele our mojo does us wonders
since we rock our church services
 we rock the Ninth Symphony too
 we rock our boxing
 we rock our maidens
just as sure
 we rock the whiteboat too
so's there'll be new Black folks coming
stepping it right on
for the end of the jive
we home in on Havanna rock
we home in on Miriam Makeba blues
and when the blues is gone
it will be long gone over
with the jive

THE CHILDREN OF NONTI

Nonti Nzimande died long, long ago
Yet his children still live.
Generation after generation, they live on;
Death comes to the children of Nonti
And the children of Nonti cry but won't panic
And there is survival in the children of Nonti.

Poverty swoops its deathly wings. But tough,
strong and witty are the children of Nonti.
The wet rains fall. The roads become like
the marshed rice paddies of the Far East;
And on these desolate roads there is song
Song in the Black voices of the children of Nonti.

Someone marries
The bride does not hide her face under the veil;
The maidens dance near the kraal
Dance before the 'make it be merry' eyes
of the elders. The elders joshing it
on their young days.
There is still free laughter
in the children of Nonti.

An ox drops to the earth, then another;
Knives run into the meat. Making the feast
to be bloodfilled with Life.
The old, the dead, are brought into the Present
of continuous nature in the children of Nonti
Got to be a respecting with the children of Nonti.

When a daughter has brought shame
The women show anger; not wrath.
And the illegitimate born is one of
the family.

When a son is charged by the white law
The children of Nonti bring their heads together
In a bid to free one of the children of Nonti.

There are no sixes and nines be one
with the children of Nonti. Truth is truth
and lies are lies amongst the children of Nonti.
For when summer takes its place after the winter
The children of Nonti rejoice
and call it proof of Truth
Truth reigns amongst the children of Nonti.

Sometimes a son rises above the others
of the children of Nonti. He explains the workings
and the trappings of white thinking.
The elders debate;
And add to their abounding knowledge
of black experience.
The son is still one of the black children of Nonti
For there is oneness in the children of Nonti.

And later, later when the sun
is like forever down;
Later when the dark rules
above the light of Truth
The black children of Nonti will rise and speak.
They will speak of the time
when Nonti lived in peace with his children;
Of the times when age did not count
above experience. The children of Nonti will stand
their grounds in the way that Nonti speared his foes
to free his black brothers from death and woes;
They shall fight with the tightened grip
of a cornered pard. For they shall be knowing that
Nothing is more vital than standing up
For the Truths that Nonti lived for.

Then there shall be Freedom in that stand
by the children of Nonti.
Truthful tales shall be told
Of how the children of Nonti pushed their will;
And continued to live by the peace
The peace that Nonti once taught to them.

To man
the sea is no hindrance.
The whale and man suckle
from the same source of motherly
survival in their new-born stage.

III

On this same beach
the earthly chat
delves
into hard soil
beneath the moist of the strand:
into why
man creates pigsty truths
about fellow man.
Witness the moon
trekking by
every month,
To return
and face
a new reality
for our black brothers
in prison cells
in madhouses
in casualty wards.

IV

On this day
the moon is already up
in its jet congested sky
where sky-labs bid for power.
And the moon,
palefaced
before it can be the dusk,

strains my brains
 to tomorrow's truths;
Whereas
 tomorrow's truths may
to some
 today sound strange
fiendish lies.
But lighting the candle
of our today
 our ideas are as vast
as the sea;
 And are so unconfined
they can't be pumped dry
. . . just as the salts of the sea
cannot be exhausted.

V

Here we rest
 facing the sea
as children of Blackness;
Bringing together Black Mother Africa
 onto the shore,
To find our Blackness
 which has been mysticated
 by drear distortions
 in dull books
bound in the essence of breaking
our proud ancestry.
We count the virtues wherein:
Blackness cuts no tongues
Blackness spills no foreign blood
 — no blood for gold
 — blood for paper money
Blackness mixes no tequila

for foreign investment
— no tequila for investors
Blackness pegs no claim
for expropriation of property
— no claim for people's property
Blackness blacktalents
Blackness echoes the real Blues
Blackness chucks out the death and fear in our streets
Blackness gets bully talk cracked in the face
Blackness silences Morgan-the Pirate's grave.

WORDS ARE ALSO BORN

Since this word's been sown
people are catching VD
faster than common flu
Since this word's been sown
abortion has gone on the rampage
despite the Prevention Pill
Since this word's been sown
women are being seeded by lab tubes
the storing of the semen has brought
the real Frankenstein
Since this word's been sown
traffic fines are official
fund raising
Since this word's been sown
fast engines and superhighways
are designed for speed
Since this word's been sown
the Japanese Red Army is on the move
More Stock Exchanges are in panic
Since this word's been sown
more peasant bodies have been mutilated
in the name of 'smoking out terrorists'
Since this word's been sown
special concessions allow blacks
into 5-Star hotels
Since this word's been sown
urban blacks are foreign investors
in Bantustans
Since this word's been sown
Middleburg is not anybody's constituency
Since this word's been sown
jetsetting has gone colour blind

Hi-jacks mean God may be holidaying
on planet Mars
Since this word's been sown
some of our blacks have become
guineapiggers
- they whiteguineapig fellow blacks
Since this word's been sown
Liberals print 'liberation' instead of
outdated 'freedom'
Since this word's been sown
Pietersburg is besieged
by the Great Black Dream of Sekhukhune
Belt Bridge is back on the map of
Rhodes's dreams
Since this word's been sown
kosher Afrikaners do not shun Parys
Kragdadigheid has reached Muizenberg
Since this word's been sown
safari suits are bastions of the laager
Since this word's been sown
Afrikaans does not dodge Harlem
- afterall blacks need their own Paris
Since this word's been sown
ghetto Blacks dig Wopko Jensma
Since this word's been sown
honky tonk has refused
to remain in America.
And words are also born.
Words are born the way
mothers beget children;
Words are born the way
nations come out of servitude.
Words are born to survive
the test of their Time.

Since this word's been born
blacks can't stand to see
fellow blacks hanging in so many numbers,
and so fast, at Pretoria Central -
as if they were biltongs.
Since this word's been born
there's national appetite
for mieliepap
Since this word's been born
blacks hate to say CHEESE
Since this word's been born
Since this word's been born.

GREY STREET

Grey Street, your coughs spell T.B.
the same as Tea Bee
are your hums as good as the bee's?

Grey Street, samoosas are no different
in Gandhinagar

Grey Street, some of your sons
scratch their balls in public

Grey Street, your hell drivers
aren't paid to be watched
rudeness is the language of your
corners

Grey Street, you're growing tall and lanky
you fear broad shoulders

Grey Street, I've heard you scream
3 o'clock in the morning

Grey Street, your 'Mountains' lack climbers

Grey Street, your smiles hide
the bank interests falling
off the poorman's pocket

Grey Street, only your rich go on Haj to Mecca

Grey Street, all this nkunzi
grows with your arcades

Grey Street, are you happy with those touts
on Leocross?

Grey Street, Msizini Station has a will of steel

Grey Street, Tripe Breyani isn't on your menu, why?
Madumbes make a meal

Grey Street, is the Sardine Rush a money sport
or food gathering?

Grey Street, I found no jazz at the Bon Chance

Grey Street, Lionel Pillay is a Jazz cat
Blacks cat Jazz in the Ajmeri Arcade

Grey Street, traditional herbal medicine
was not meant for shops
Grey Street, fah-fee does false sparring
with the poor
Grey Street, aren't Tin Town and Reservoir Hills
under the same sun?
Grey Street, you are trying to fight against
the Mahatma's manly spirit
Grey Street, roti and kabaab is also food
in Kwa-Mashu
Grey Street, have you listened to Dashiki drums?
Grey Street, Power fists are clenched
in Chatsworth too
Grey Street, ganja's no more the sage's smoke
Grey Street, Bell Bottoms fake your style
Grey Street, *Mila 18* isn't just legend
Warsaw had its own Grey Street!
Grey Street, is Black drowning a fashion
on the Umngeni Blue Lagoon?
Grey Street, inflation has reached the ritual goats
Grey Street, Wilkie's Circus is white
Grey Street, Greyville's white racecourse railings
are mocking
Grey Street, horsegrooms are the real riders
grooms get kicked to death
by horses at Ntshongweni
Grey Street, have you ever really won the July?
Grey Street, you have surrendered your tombs
to superhighways
Grey Street, your children pick potatoes
out of refuse bins
Grey Street, you are being given character
Grey Street, you are not free
you don't look your true self

Grey Street, you once were the life of town
Grey Street, your mortgage bonds are blowing

Grey Street, what went wrong with you?
Grey Street, your shadows prolong the winter
when will it be summer?

Grey Street, have you lost the summer?
I won't ask next time.

GETTING OFF THE RIDE

I

I get off the bus ride
after long standing
listening to black voices
that oblivate the traffic noises;
A billboard overwhelms me,
Like an ugly plastic monster with fierce eyes
it tells me what canned drink
will be good enough to quench my thirst;
I eye-mock the plastic arrogance
'Cos I know, shit, I know
I'm being taken for a ride.

II

Past this Patel's shop
The hustling efforts of these youngsters
almost urge me into seriously viewing
their imitation wrist watches,
When I know they are wanting to drain me
of the few Rands I'm still left with -
So's their brothers can get to the top drop;
And me to go on entering shops
- throwing my last Rands each time;
Ya, I know I'm being taken for a ride.

III

At the cinema house
the big poster poses a bigcrowd drawer,
I slide into the darkness;
The still blackness
is nothing but inverted blackness
cast upon imposed darkness;

I throw my eyes on the screen . . .
. . . then the long watch.
I walk out worse off,
Worse than when I mooched in;
Movies can be made to fast sell the mind
(an old warning in the family quips) like
the inflation coin at the tourist bazaar.
Again I know I've been taken for a ride.

IV

My boots jar me
as I take the corner off Grey Street
Into Victoria's busy, buzzy Victoria
Beesy Victoria's market area.
Some black mamas kneeling
their hands on the sidewalk
their second-hand clothes before them,
They kneel as if in prayer.
A white hippie bums towards them
with what shapes into a pair of
fawn corduroy jeans:
'They are fishbottomed', the aunt tilts
the deal. The seller hooks a feigned smile
with his cagey chin,
Looks like both have no choice
So the limp deal is sealed.
With unease the hippie moves off
You'd swear he's left a bomb to detonate,
I radar his moves
whilst yarning my eyes onto the mama,
the mama still on that solemn kneel
that's accompanied by sombre looks
from close range.
Where's that hippish fixer?

Into the market lanes for a blow-up;
And the black mama to scrounge a sale
after a wash of these sweaty pants
that can only be bought by some black brother
whose boss won't give him enough to afford
a pair of decent trousers.
And again I know I'm being taken for a ride.

V

I know this ride bloody well.
I'm from those squatted mothers
Those squatted mothers in the draughty air;
Those mothers selling handouts,
Those mothers selling fruits,
Those mothers selling vegetables,
Those mothers selling till dusk
in the dusty streets of Clermont, Thembisa,
Alex, Galeshewe, Dimbaza, Pietersburg.
Those mothers in dusty and tearful streets
that are found in Stanger, Mandeni, Empangeni
Hammarisdale, Mabopane, Machibisa, Soweto.
I'm one of the sons of those black mamas,
Was brought up in those dust streets;
I'm the black mama's son who vomits
on the doorstep of his shack home, pissed with
concoction. Because his world and the world
in town are as separate as the mountain ranges
and the deep sea.
I'm the naked boy
running down a muddy road,
the rain pouring bleatingly
in Verulam's Mission Station;
With the removal trucks brawling for starts
Starts leading to some stifling redbricked

ghetto of four-roomed houses at Ntuzuma.
I'm the pipeskyf pulling cat
standing in the passage behind Ndlovu's barbershop
Making dreams and dreams
Dreaming makes and makes;
Dreaming, making and making, dreaming
with poetry and drama scripts
rotting under mats
or being eaten by the rats.
I'm the staggering cat on Saturday morning's
West Street. The cat whose shattered hopes
were bottled up in beers, cane, vodka;
Hopes shattered by a system that once offered
liquor to 'Exempted Natives' only.
I'm the bitter son leaning against the lamp post
Not wishing to go to school
where his elder brother spent years, wasted years
at school wanting to be white; only to end as
messenger boy.
I'm the skolly who's thrown himself
out of a fast moving train
Just to avoid blows, kicks and the hole.
I'm one of the surviving children of Sharpeville
Whose black mothers spelled it out in blood.
I'm the skhotheni who confronts deviled cops
down Durban's May Street . . .
Since he's got no way to go out.
I'm the young tsotsi found murdered in a donga
in the unlit streets of Edendale, Mdantsane.

VI

I'm the puzzled student
burning to make head and tail of Aristotle
because he hasn't heard of the buried

Kingdom of Benin or the Zimbabwe Empire,
The student who is swotting himself to madness
striving for universal truths made untrue.

I'm the black South African exile who has come
across a coughing drunk nursing his tuberculosis
on a New York pavement and remembered
he's not free.

I'm the black newspaper vendor
standing on the street corner 2 o'clock
in the morning of Sunday,
Distributing news to those night life crazy
nice-timers who will oneday come into knocks
with the real news.

I'm the youthful Black with hopes of life
standing on file queue for a job
at the local chief's kraal,
This chief who has let himself and his people
into some confused Bantustan kaak
Where there's bare soil, rocks and cracking cakes
of rondavel mudbricks.

I'm the lonely poet
who trudges the township's ghetto passages
pursuing the light,
The light that can only come through a totality
of change:

Change in minds, change
Change in social standings, change
Change in means of living, change
Change in dreams and hopes, change
 Dreams and hopes that are Black
 Dreams and hopes where games end
 Dreams where there's end to man's
creation of gas chambers and concentration camps.

I'm the Africa Kwela instrumentalist whose notes

profess change.

VII

They say the Black Ghost is weak
That it is feeble
and cannot go the distance
I say that's their wishful thinking;
The Black Ghost outmanoeuvres the wiles of Raleigh
on treacherous seas,
The ghost that steamed South Pacific trains
to Florida after Tres Castillos was not black;
Which ghost spurned the wiles of Rhodes,
Rhodes treating Black hospitality as scraps
of paper?
No, I know the Black Ghost.
It has led to many victories
In the pitch darkness of dispossession;
I can sit back and watch the screen
of Black Thoughts
In which Black success is focused.
I may not have seen Spartacus, Attila
or the Maccabee brothers for that score;
I also did not see Shaka, the Kofikarikari
or Mshweshwe, Bhambatha, for another score;
And down to those Black youths with guns
in the streets of Watts, Harlem, Oakland.
The people of Guinea-Bissau shed their tears
for Cabral with the muzzles of their guns.
Sharpeville's Black Ghost haunts all racists,
Urges the Black people forward.
I live with this Ghost.
I've come to love this Ghost.
I live with the Black Ghost
When I'm dumped in soulless structures

From Windhoek to Pretoria to Pietersburg
From Gugulethu to Makhutha to Ngwelezana;
Where I'm denied understanding
between me and my black brothers
according to statutes of ethnic rule;
My brothers who are caged in prisons
My brothers waiting in the dark street corners
My brothers sent to mental asylums
My brothers forced into exile
My brothers who bullshit me for a Rand
My brothers who dream of a Ford Mustang
 when they've gone to bed on empty stomachs
My brothers who'll sell their fellow brothers
 when they've lost the key to survival
My brothers who'll roll their fathers on
 Friday night.
Yes, I'm made to feel motherless, fatherless, shitless
Me with enough shit in my guts to blackshit
 any officiated shit,
Me wishing for a gun
When I know some pig will wish to collar me
for the 3-Star knife I've bought at the shop
down the street.

VIII

I hate this ride.
When I know Dudu Pukwana's horn
is blowing winter out of London's black crowds;
I hate this ride.
When I dance to Miriam Makeba
Miriam Makeba's 'Jol'iinkomo' that brings back
the proud and angry past of my ancestors
by whom tribe did not be taken for nation;
I hate this ride.

When I learn no Latin from faked classics
When 2x2 economics shows me it's part of the
trick - teaching me how to starve
When Coca Cola, Pepsi Cola ads, all the sweet things
are giving me wind in the belly;
I ask again, what is Black?
Black is when you get off the ride.
Black is point of self realization
Black is point of new reason
Black is point of: NO NATIONAL DECEPTION !
Black is point of determined stand
Black is point of TO BE OR NOT TO BE for blacks
Black is point of RIGHT ON!
Black is energetic release from the shackles of Kaffir,
Bantu, non-white.

Sometimes there's a fall
when a brother gets off the ride,
And the fall hurts;
A fall is a hurt to every black brother.
Then I smell the jungle
I get the natural smell of the untamed jungle;
I'm with the mamba
I learn to understand the mamba
I become a khunga-khunga man
I'm with the Black Ghost of the skom jungle
I get the smell of phuthu in a ghetto kitchen
The ghetto, a jungle I'm learning to know
I hear the sound of African drums beating
to freedom songs;
And the sounds of the Voice come:
 Khunga, Khunga!
 Untshu, Untshu!
 Funtu, Funtu!

Shundu, Shundu!!

Sinki, Sinki!

Mojo, Mojo!

O-m! O--o---m! O----hhhhhhhhmmmm!!!

The Voice Speaks:

'I'm the Voice that moves with the Black Thunder

I'm the Wrath of the Moment

I strike swift and sure

I shout in the West and come from the East

I fight running battles with enemy gods

in the black clouds

I'm the watersnake amongst watersnakes

and fish amongst fish

I throw missiles that outpace the SAM

I leave in stealth

and return in Black anger.

O---m! Ohhhh---mmmm! O----hhhhhhmmmmmmmm!!!'

JUST TO SAY . . .

There'll always be those
who'll want me to act
after their accepted fashions;
those who'll expect me to pull a smile
just to please their vanities;
those who'll wish I should agree
with their clawed existence;
those who'll say I'm not polite
jes because their grabby ways
ain't gonna be my stays,
and their swags don't fool me.

After a time, when we meet
our situations confronting
our reactions damning,
they will be shocked to find
the real people not there:
the walking public that jams
the street after 4.30 p.m.;
the mass that musters
the soccer stadium on Sunday;
the audience that is not given right
to listen to its own inner say.

The people will not be there —
Gone.
So gone there won't be
anywhere for the swags to go.
And I'll swerve at the nearest
corner of the street and get into my first
genuine, private, laugh -
that will unfold itself. Into the people
For by then I'll be gone too
Real gone.

JOL'IINKOMO

(for the Children of Namibia)

While to the north Mother Africa
bongos freedom drums
without mellowing to the wraths
of her jungle gods,
white legislation pilots
South Africa's Black children
to ethnic schools.

Until the WHEN:

When in the finer hours of dawn
Black faces fare past
after a mapping out of Black destiny;

When in the ghetto
soccer fans can come to
appreciate their own Pele;

When Muhammad Ali is more
and far greater than just
the people's champion,
but carrier of the Great Black Hope
in world athletic achievement;

When in class pupils
get the itch to give proud khuzas
to braves Jacob Morenga

Hendrik Witbooi

Samuel Maherero;

When other Resistance heroes
Mkwati and Makana
are seen as true sons of the black gods;

When every Black brother
knows he's got to show up
for the nation's count.

Promise you brother,
The cattle shall have herded home
to our ancestral kraal.
Jol'iinkomo!
Africa shall be one in her past.
Jol'iinkomo!
Africa shall have one Soul.
Jol'iinkomo!

No More Lullabies

For
all those
children denied the right to live
all those
who have thumbed 'mayibuye'
and
all those
who dared raise their fists

*and
to
the memory
of
Tongogara*

*'As cultures die, they are stricken
with the mute implacable rage of
that humanity strangled within them'*

Norman Mailer

*'The raging waves of freedom
Slap-slap against the maddened Beast'*

David Mandessi Diop

THERE IS . . .

(after Victor Caíasus)

Undeniably there is.

There is a truth
with rings wider than a poet's eye

There is a battling nature
Now threatened by pollution
and sprawling cities

There is, continually
nature's freedom
despite the moon landings
despite the heart transplants

There is, with all the odds against
a will to watch a child grow
Even if it is in a littered street
Or in a shack where rain pours
as water through a sieve

There is laughter
brimful with the turbulence of man

There is a hope
fanned by endless zeal
decisive against the spectre of Sharpeville
hardened by the tears of Soweto

There is a thunder path
that stretches into jungle heights
where wolves whine and howl
where camouflage is nature's flak guns

where the dream of Pierre Mulele
has revived

There is cause to stand
and utter words hurtful
to those who skulk
in the wilderness of lies
and bias

For there to be
For there to be facts 'other than'
is our human asset.

BONK'ABAJAHILE

And you once asked why
blacks

live so fast
love so fast
drink so fast
die so fast

It doesn't start with eMalangeni;
It doesn't.

It starts with the number
you found smeared on the door
of your home

— and you from school
— or from work.

one and two
three and four
bonk'abajahile

The cement smile
of the teller at the bank
adopted as symbol of courtesy:

'work and save
wear smart
get yourself a hi-fi/tv
buy yourself a car!

one and two
three and four
bonk'abajahile

At Webber's I saw him
running like mad
on a futile marathon

after he'd grabbed a bag
from that farmer
who pronounced 'Mophela'
like 'Amaphela'

I saw her pulling up her pantihose
fixing her semi-afrowig
With a blue eye and spitting blood
after a fight with another
of Playboy Joe's girls;
Playboy Joe was already at Umgababa
pulling dagga zol with other majitas,
And at Umgababa Alice's Juba
wasn't sour this afternoon.

one and two
three and four
bonk'abajahile

I saw him wave an Okapi
under the Umnqadodo Bridge
to settle scores born of a factory life;
Umgababa's guava tree broke
The guava fruit projectiled
onto Duma's car:

Hammersdale 1972.

The knife wound gave the telling of his death.
They covered his body with a Spinlon dustcoat
Waiting for someone to ring Inchanga 41.

one and two
three and four
bonk'abajahile

Langashona's hand against his face
A face long dead to wind the story;
A flower plucked off in bud

Down UNIT ONE SOUTH.
Msingi's expressionless face
A face not squealing.
Bongi Ndlovu
She tried to run, to flee, to plead;
Whick! Whack!
Into flesh came the bushknife
On the sand dunes she collapsed
Waiting for fate to say it's over;
How she let her soul go
is a mystery to bemoan;
Can we blame her kind of life?
Can we blame the rage that held him
in spell?
If we are not saints
They'll try to make us devils;
If we refuse to be devils
They'll want to turn us into robots.
When criminal investigators
are becoming salesmen
When saints are ceasing to be saints
When devils are running back to Hell
It's the Moment of Rise or Crawl
When this place becomes Mpumalanga
With the sun refusing to rise
When we fear our blackness
When we shun our anger
When we hate our virtues
When we don't trust our smiles

one and two
three and four
bonk'abajahile

Sing, how can we sing
with chainblocks baring us
the Malombo Sound?

Play, how can we play
with games turning into nightmares?

Talk, should we not talk with deep
open voices?

Wait, should we wait till cows
come home?

TAP-TAPPING

Rough, wet winds
parch my agonized face
as if salting the wounds of
 Bullhoek
 Sharpeville
 Soweto,
unbandage strip by strip
the dressings of Hope;
I wade my senses
through the mist;
I am still surviving
the traumas of my raped soil
alive and aware;
truths jump like a cat leaps for fish
at my mind;
I plod along
 into the vortex
of a clear-borne dawn.

IN MEMORIAM

How much
does one do
to be with your people
in heart and soul?
Mthuli, you clenched
your black fist
and did it
amongst the people
They were with you
They still are
You did not confound them
with ready-known truths
— unlike those
only yesterday non-white,
today
from behind stackpiles
of books
now
clad in Afro-style
aloof from the people,
want to teach them
how to be Black
Teaching black to those who
through years of agonies
and betrayals —
have been as black as
the oracle
that has said:
Oneday Blacks shall be free
— free and liberated.
No, you're with the people
They live with you.

Live Black Hero
In our minds and deeds
We watch and hear you say:
Live, Blackman Live!

IN DEFENCE OF POETRY

What's poetic
about Defence Bonds and Armscor?
What's poetic
about long-term sentences and
deaths in detention
for those who 'threaten state security'?
Tell me,
What's poetic
about shooting defenceless kids
in a Soweto street?
Can there be poetry
in fostering Plural Relations?
Can there be poetry
in the Immorality Act?
What's poetic
about deciding other people's lives?
Tell me brother,
What's poetic
about defending herrenvolkish rights?

As long as
this land, my country
is unpoetic in its doings
it'll be poetic to disagree.

UNDER THE MULBERRY TREE

one branch
outgrowing the others
spirals through the labyrinths
of my heart
as it scratches and swashes
against the wall of the house

someone said no trees grew in the ghetto
you said let there be trees in the ghetto
even if they be peach trees
then maybe we shall be able
to see butterflies and listen
to the cricket's clickety-click

remember we played housegames
with the kids from next-door
built that 'house' on the mulberry tree
shouted 'wee willy winky we'

now sitting here
under this mulberry tree
so close to the backdoor
watching the visceral monotony
of the surroundings
and lubricating the cavities
of my mind
i wade through awkward sprays of
resonate sounds up and down the street
and through the bent will
to weather the odds set against us as we wish for
the darkness of dawn
to greet a new day

here life is no gamble
no matter how far the mind ambles
and you, you tossed the coin
to fall your way
a fall whose two sides lie
between fear and courage

this summer day
my eyes not glued to the magicbox
of nightmarish illusions
my heart tracks tomorrow
i find my heart is still at one
with the sounds in the streets
and the defiant growth
of the mulberry tree

WORDS TO A MOTHER

I

I am still learning to say Mother
Yet I wish to share your dreams;
How much should I know of you
That I should know more of me?
Mother, whether people containerize theories
or containerize goods, they will end up with moods
a shade darker than blue.
Mother, I need your guiding star
'Cos Mother, before I touched down on planet Earth
I was a cosmic ray in your wombed dreams;
I lathed through the orbit of your dreams
Mother Afrika.

II

Today the neon fluorescence blinds me
as I spit out the wanton niceties
that are sweetening my teeth to rot;
I love your unadorned beauty, Mother
Mother, your stomach isn't drawn in
by Gossard's tights
The rage of your make-do's
braids your daughters to modesty in pride
Your buttoned-up anger tells me gaming is over
You want the sun should go down bright
until next morning to rise up bright
The way it was with the forefathers;
Not the way skyscrapers lengthen and shrink.
Your cities of today are gasketted
with autoroutes and airports,
Your cities of unequal rights
Your cities of violence and intrigue
Your cities of challenge.

III

Mother,

my listening to jazz isn't leisure
it's a soul operation

Mother,

crankish excitements at gumbas
don't warm our souls

Mother,

the feed-in of the blues has saved us;
Your Afrika blues blows truth
Your blues are not addicted
to lies and prejudice

Mother,

they lied to me about Jesus
about brotherly love and salvation
They lied to me about the biblical piece

Mother,

help rid us of blinkered attitudes;
or should we wait upon
the droppings of a peace dove?

Mother,

help rid us of those
who grade custom, class and property
as the world gets weaker, grows sicker

Mother,

I can feel your tight breathing

Mother,

You are a caged lioness.

IV

While Alexandra chokes
Your torrents freshen the buds
of wild flowers born of your nature, Mother
Across the veld at Dindela.
In the dusty evenings of Mabopane
they hail you, Mother;

Where many a son of yours
has been debalised by free world larceny
that chains you to the yesteryear
of slave cargoes and piracy;
Yet you once roamed free with your sons
to fountains of learning at Rabat
You sniffed the high walls of Baghdad
You threatened the Alps of Italy
You mothered the Lion of Judah.
Your beauty is nourished by the salts of the earth
In a world bedizened by plastic parks
crowded by plastic festivals
cheered by plastic wonderlands.

V

How can I say I'm one of your sons?
Your sons who sink themselves
into the comforts of lounge furniture
in posh shebeens
— and drown
Your sons smiting themselves with dagga
behind toilets in Warwick Avenue
Your sons who drift
Your sons who sleep across the colour line
and get up to grab dompas
Your sons who are boundless like the wind
Also,
Your sons who stick up for the correct path
to regain rights as men.

VI

Mother,
this Azania, your Azania
will oneday be a liberated Azania
will oneday be the people's Azania;
There'll be enough to share

There'll be plenty to build on;
We shall till and mine the land
(Not feed on fat profits)
We shall share our efforts
We shall honour the machines
We shall honour the sun
We shall honour the rain
To retrieve lost dreams.

Mother,

poets won't have to write of hate
Neither will there be tree and flower poems;
No, poets will add or delete
whatever is of a people's wish
in concert with the people's will.

Mother,

am I going too far?
Am I pushing too fast?

Mother,

do you hear me?

A POEM

(after James Matthews)

Think of it, sometime
repeat yourself as you mouth encouraging words
to your neighbour
who has lost one of his family
to ghetto violence or poverty disease;
Question yourself as you visit home or relatives
in barren eroded valleys
or sandtracked flats of impoverished reserves
euphemistically called homelands,
grandiloquently referred to as 'Maziphathe'
or 'uZibuse';
Lean on the pleasure of seeing
your kids moving out to school
whilst you drain your savings
knowing still you pay state taxes & GST
for unfree education
for unequal rights;
Collect yourself to truths that remind you:
you were not born to slave
for the boss who drops you Rand notes
so's you can play Judas on your fellow workers,
your people who scare you;
Remind yourself how many times
you've betrayed the future of your children
as you came out bloody number ten
by your playing second fiddle;
Upturn your thoughts
as you fugue away from yourself
to healthy moments when life was real;
Rechannel your inner soul's fears

as you wipe your salty eyes
with a beer mug dripping froth
pausing on the token of the 'Best Taste'
at the boozejoint next to your matchboxhouse;
Jump to the values of your ancestors
as you cling to sober traditions
worrying about those children with ribs
like steel rods
dying of kwashiokor and dehydration
in some remote bundu;
Brace yourself when the sun, hot as your tears
scans the gables of your neighbourhood,
with children laughing and chasing
dreams they may never grow to realize.

XMAS BLUES

Piggy-back
On Van Riebeeck's Christian best
it's a Butcher Season,
So many Okapis, tomahawks & bush knives
will flash into psycho-fabrication skulls;
It's a Buying Season again
turkeys furniture dress booze toys
– all the money itch;
Humble Child born in a manger
The child whose congregational followers
can be so worldly rich
they'll invest on the Stock Market.
It's a Season for Peace,
Peace of hunger
 shack dwellings
 mass removals
 bundu faction fights.
Peace for the little we share
with mice & roaches,
Peace for the class leeches
Uneasy peace
tight-roping on lost celestial dreams

A POEM

And someone will say
let's run over Heaven:
Grab those snow-white angels
scorch them black;
Grab them keys from St. Peter
if Blacks are hard to please.
What will happen?
I wish to catch a voice running
into my ear
Saying Heaven isn't hip,
It's warmer down there
in Hell;
With all the gadgetry
that makes Earth Heaven
to an awesome few.

In Hell I wouldn't fail;
Not with that Black fist
of Saint Malcolm X.
First search for Bessie Smith
to get where it all started;
Maybe bump into Mezz Mezzrow
and Champion Jack du Preez;
I'm sure to find Charlie Parker
Bird! high on marijuana
Coltrane blackening white notes
Satchmo catting black ghetto saints
to come marching in;
With Early Mabuza doing a khuza
on his drums.
Perhaps I could score myself
a Black saxhorn TCB.

MOTHER COURAGE ON THE TRAIN CARRIAGE

Big-bosomed
Pinafore-cushioned
On the hardbenched Third Class
Poloneck-jerseyed
Pushing i-Juba cartons
On the 1009
– the halfpast five Cato Ridge to Durban
Mother Courage rides on
With defiant grit
Towards her sorghum beer customers

‘Cato Manor had it all, my child:
Good Hope and Mount Carmel;
We only failed on the Calvary,
Until the forced trek to KwaMashu
Then a diaspora to all kinds of new slums
And to polyester safari suits
Down West Street’s furniture shops

‘We shall not say cheese
Just to put it all at ease
Photo memories we shall have
With dirty mistakes all shelved
We shall go with smoke
Like the frog that kitchened
And said ‘No!’ at the door.’

IN A TEXTILE FACTORY

. . . jigsaw man

tip

tumble

oops!

tadpole smogo

check the mojo

dick

gig

Jig

& m/c jit

spindle now . . .

machine blues . . .

into the dark: 1975

a ghetto sundown
south africa coughs dust
into the streets of alexandra
cough with a smell of blood
blood stained from whitepolicy
murders

at langa
 sharpeville
 nyanga
 carletonville
i wait for the dark
embrace the shadows
guerilla into the darkness of hope
confer with the nightfall
for the dark hastens positively,
 the dark
where the futile
but very big efforts
to keep the city white
 by night
have shown the city lights
to be very scared by night
i confer with this darkness
the shadowy tunnel
where no pet dogs enjoy a bark

TO THE RACE-PROBLEM SOLVER

At least if you really wished
 you really could
 if you really could
 you'd really have to
It's how the ball has pitched

COURAGE

If loyalty gives courage
Then belief goes beyond loyalty
Like believing in your people
 and in things natural,
is where the spirit of humanity lives on.

The earth and sky never meet
Since the sky is what lets us see
the world go round;
But the current of the sea
does meet the current of the sky
In storm and thunder,
Then the oceans flood.

In my journey through the bored
streets of Durban
I see many an acid-belly face
of the morning-after
Then there's a hangover.

What I wish to see still
is a hangover from the mass rallies
of the nineteen sixties;
The current that I wish to see flush,
flash, rush
is the current of change.

Change
Against the deceiving comfort
 of Castle beer
 Wimpy bars
 and Kentucky Chicken.

EXIT ALEXANDRA - 23:5:74

(For James and Joe)

Alexandra
how can I say goodbye
when I knew you
before my feet ever brushed
your dusty streets?
At Cato Manor I touched your wounds,
Down your 12th Avenue I found
Clermont Central winking
at your junkyards;
My eyes pounced on carcasses
of '45 Desotos and '38 Oldsmobiles.
Your patience permeates roadsides
along Halfway House to Kyalami;
Some of your children slip out of
your caring arms to scrounge cents
across Sandton,
for mothers to lift up bread;
The enriching monster that is GOLD
pierces electric eyes into you,
Threatens everything black
— Sandton seems to float upon a sea
of sand
In which is deeped the arena blood
of your sons.
By greedy landgrabbers you are made
to be a pair of scissors
to cut through the dirty cloth
of Group Areas inhibition
You remain chaste
though they curse your unwholesome

streets of naked stomachs
and panga draws;
You refuse 'Take Me Anywhere' deals.
When your dongas erode deeper
you bridge me to those who have
riled in agony through the years.
You rest my looking back on the thuds
that cracked the walls
of rubber-stamp goodwill.

BLACK SCHIZOPHRENIA

I hear voices
as I look up to the stars
searching for Lugweermag sounds
of whooshing interceptors
whose limited experience of war
bullies my people to anger

I hear voices
from a wailing waif
lost in the crowds of Clermont Road
Crowds that guffaw at graffiti scrawls
on Kentucky Fried Chicken and discos
nodding at: 'Botha! Release Mandela'
and: 'i-Afrika iyabuya'
Those crowds battling to keep
their suitcase minds closed
lest they reveal false bottoms

I hear voices
blowing out of fiery veins
Voices coming from the prison cell
against psychiatric blackmail

I hear voices
I hear brutally intense sounds
pregnant with birthexpecting excerpts
of hate lasering through snaking wings
sawcutting across sneaking smiles
sounds made frantic by fears
of winter cold on the cat-eyed road
of coal exports and rising bread prices
Sounds of mad rollicking

on segregated beaches stuck
with suntanned spatters of luxury vomit
desecrating the African soil
as oceanic waves roll therapeutic hopes
onto blacks on the factory floors

I hear voices
I hear resurgent voices
of 'not in my lifetime' assurances
from men, women and children
who came down South
on the Chicken Run

I hear voices
Angry noises of repressed adolescence
Voices of despair and death
as young blacks march away from
the rat race
Shouting back at the hypnotic noises
of black status seekers

I hear voices
Death chanting and swearing vows
Resolute voices crossing the border
with promises and all intentions of
a return to the fatherland one day
Eluding the pursuing Land Rovers

I hear voices
Spiritual-terrorist hallelujahs
of dominus vobiscum
et in terra pax omnibus
as seeds of pain and killings
flourish across news desks

with indolent phrases from civil servants
who meekly shout Family Planning slogans
before there's been Liberation

I hear voices
I hear ghetto grunts going oink-oink!
down the burst drainpipes of Newlands East
Calming laager vibes declaring:
'alles is rustig en vrydig
in sonnige Suid Afrika'

I hear voices
in a Silverton Volkskas bank
Voices cursing from daredevil youths
whose hopes were born
on the lips of Goch Street
whose force exploded myths
from Table Mountain to the Limpopo
whose quicksand passion came
to know about rooineks and rockspiders
kaffirs, hotnots and coolies
whose dropside thoughts drove
on to reckoning point
as they came to know more about
camouflage uniforms
and honky-tonk chats cruising on
the greed of Bantustan sellouts

I hear voices.

BLUESING IN

Blues, blues
Kumasi blues 1894
Prempeh and the Golden Stool
Robert Baden-Powell leads
a subduer flying column
against the Asantehene

Blues, blues
Namibia blues 1904
General von Trotha hounds down
Herero women and children
to genocide
for settler dreams to survive

Blues, blues
Relief Act blues 1914
Mohandas Gandhi winds off civic battles
for the discriminated Indian labour
The Indian tradeseeker is left disenchanted
Gandhi sails to purna swaraj

Blues, blues
Identity orientation blues 1924
Force lies in the £ note
Black workers organize
The herrenvolk shockabsorbs itself
by misdirecting the Native Question

Blues, blues
Reichstag blues 1934
Peace in our time at Munich
while Luftwaffe and Wermacht officers
grease their machines and guns
for blood and tears

Blues, blues
VE blues 1944
Normandy brings peace to Europe
In S.A. skokiaan and pass raids
beam glaring torches on
my mother's face at midnight

Blues, blues
Xmas blues 1954
We kick the sands of Umdlhoti Beach
in white nylon shirts
No 'Whites Only' signs
to impeach our black faces

Blues, blues
Cato Manor blues 1964
Uqungo grass has grown over Mkhumbane
But the birds have not yet returned
At KwaMashu's Dukemini
it's damned hard to see a fire-fly

Blues, blues
Liberation blues 1974
students mourn Tiro's parcelbomb murder
One can't shout Viva Frelimo
without thinking of S.B. cops
and police dogs

Blues, blues
Nineteen Eighty-Four blues
George Orwell's nightmare surfaces
on an animal farm
somewhere in the fortified hills
of Utah

Blues, blues
Azania blues 1994
We buried Humpty Dumpty
on a hill at Magaliesberg
A monument marking his grave reads:
'He didn't want change'.

UKUBUZA KUKAMKHULU UNXELE:

20 JUNE 1976

Bafana bami,
Badubula
izingane zethu
eSoweto;
Yine enye pho
esisayiphilela?

OLD MAN NXELE'S REMORSE:

20 JUNE 1976

*Sons,
They are gunning down
our children
in Soweto;
What more
are we still living for?*

BEYOND SCREAM

you're beyond scream
as logical sequence goes missing
in what is to be
 or not to be
as the vortex of saying nix
 to robot nature
means weirdness to those
who speechify stalling devices
against hunger & naked tummies
who tarry with the toil & moil
of cybernetics
dry-rotting issues
in preserved juicelessness
amidst swigs at private bars

MY HOUSE IS BUGGED

my house is bugged
since i was mc at a student's funeral
another june 16 victim
my house is bugged
since i told my senior economics students
not to shun karl marx for their assignment
references
my house is bugged
since i preached a sermon condemning
mass removals and job reservation
— i can still see that sellout eye
from a member of my congregation
my house is bugged
since i invited sherita maharaj
to our kwamashu youth braai
my house is bugged
since i've been organizing bursaries
& improved reading for black highschool kids
my house is bugged
since that security policeman
called my Hillbrow pad a den for kaffirs
and communists
my house is bugged
since customs officials withheld literature
sent by friends overseas and said the stuff was red
my house is bugged
since my daughter came out of 200 days' detention
to a banning order and house arrest

oh, my house is bugged.

MY SISTER AND THE WALKING WARDROBE

Every morning I've watched her
Clutching a huge bag slinging
from her shoulder
She alternates them
leather: patent or genuine
hopsack or
woollen weave: tapestry designed
African grass or
ilala palm
She has often bought them at the handcrafts shop
or at the African Art Centre

Occasionally
She has asked me to fetch out something
from her walking wardrobe
My fingers have run between a mixture
of the few things she owns and come out with
 some coverless paperback
 an Afro comb
 addresses
 painkilling tablets
 etc etc etc

Our mother has often taunted
they never carried whalebags
in her days

Once complaining about this wardrobe
I ventured to ask what was up with women these days
She stopped humming her favourite 'Amandla' song
'These bags saved many in Soweto 1976

You didn't know if you had to get home
on some evenings.'
Last week we were awakened by violent knocks
'Open it is the police!'
Two o'clock in the morning

They didn't find her
We've been opening for six nights
Yesterday she phoned to say
she was in Swaziland safe.

ROAD TO CHALLENGE . . . 26th SEPTEMBER 1976

Mapetla when he left
took with him the wait-and-see;
How badly we were mauled
as brain and brawn struggled
to overcome the hour of test

With the blackcentred star
on the ascendant in the east
To the north the dreamoppressing
moon was on the wane

The pale day dawned
(outmatched by the tenacity of
the night vigil)
emerging upon a parched deathridden sky
which had seen so many bullets
marked 'For Blacks Only' whizzing
from men who weren't bulletproof

The sun standing motionless
— its glowing heat gnawing like
wild dogs at us
— menaced our consciousness;
No amount of mourning songs
and pastoral speeches would stop
the moving avalanche that was black
as the night.
Young and old sang: 'We shall meet in the bush'
 They sang: 'We shall meet
in the city streets & in the ghettos'
We heard the hawking noises
from the police ministry as a small plane
zoomed above our heads and our minds,

Our history is being written
As the Bergies refuse to bend
to white civilization
below Devil's Peak

Our history is the freedom seed
being sown across the Karoos
with our Kaapenaar brothers
not willing to mix the milky way
But blocking blows right into
'die duiwel se skop'

Our present is the lavatory blues
we so love to sing
in our matchboxhouses
Our present is the Blue Light
flashing operations
high up at Groote Schuur
Our present is those heart operations
from slum deaths and deaths sometimes
called 'accidental'
stirring 'ready donors' and 'guinea pigs'
ideas in our hearts

Our history glosses the rail tracks
at Effingham and Langlaagte
Our history is black women marching
on Pretoria Building
shouting
'Amandla!'

Our history is being written
with indelible blood stains
with sweeping black souls
in the streets at John Vorster
where Timol 'dived' thru the window
at Fisher Street

where Mdluli 'made a somersault stunt'
at Sanlam Building
where Biko 'knocked his head against walls'
at the Kei Road copshop
where Mapetla 'thought hanging was fun'
At Caledon Square
where the Imam Haroon 'slipped off a bar
of soap'

We sing our present

We sing the dark-lit rooms
where the 'Free Mandela' chant is torchbearing truth
We sing the New Truth
The New Truth is
Those 1976 bullets were not sacramental bread
meant for the faithful
We've heard the Bullet Refrain vibrating walls
at Silverton

On the sidewalks of Goch Street
We shall sit down and sing
We shall sing songs Tiro would have loved to hear
Songs MaNgoyi would have sung
We shall sing songs Mthuli kaShezi
would have composed

Songs
Songs that lead us on
And when it's Time To Rise
The Isle of Makhanda will be flooded
by the swelling tide of Kwancha.

THE COVENANT, WHOSE COVENANT?

the nervosa starts
when the Day of the Covenant
has gone pregnant
with a new child
there's no black love to hide

it does occur that
in and out of our ordeals
we hate superb
we love superb
we ends-meet superb

with no peace in empty bellies
our patience has jelled
where mitigating factors
leave us out
where anorexic maidens
are stilled for wind
though food is food for stomachs
kosher or halaal

it so happens that
Dingane 'is lank gedood
deur Boerbeloftes stoot'
there won't be another Dinggaan

we survive where
peace is like the wind
it embraces everything in its way
it beats you in the face
it warns: 'Feind hört mit'
it becomes a silent accomplice to peacelovers

peace brings 'Welcome Home' closer
on December 16 every peaceloving black
is a freedom fighter
at the end of tribalist ketosis
there's nothing to celebrate
on December 16
no black is a terrorist

on this day
blacks stretch images of themselves
 on concrete sleepers
 of suburban railtracks
twistwrecking 'Die Stem'
in 'Nkos'ikelele' shebeens

we've lost the June month
to a oneday memory
regurgitating 'Unity is Strength'
with clenched fists

as i look forward
to a new covenant
i find you colour-hateful, December 16
 turn your back
 do not come back

CIRCLES WITH EYES

A circle with zombie eyes
flushing Rand notes
down shopping centres
in Africa-Adieu fashion.
A circle with quincy eyes
seeking kicks in record bars
not forgetting to seek funk
in the cartridge tape of Snow White.
A circle with lobster eyes
up Sydenham's Admiral Hotel
running off with the last bit
of Asoka's seasoned drunks.
A circle whose flashy raakuit
is now Bachelor of Tarts
and Master of Ceremonies
at that posh joint of Bra Three Dice.
Where are we going
with circles that have eyes
plucked out of empty skulls
by the Law of the Vulture?

TO THOSE BLACK BROTHERS FEEDING OFF THEIR FELLOW BROTHERS

wear an Afrikan dashiki
styled in hong kong
imagine yourself being king kong
ride a smile
against the black anger tide
play loose
when it's only time
to choose

brother
stop playing the goose
trapped in a denarian noose

LET'S TAKE HEED

Take heed, father
in your wobbles through the night
so piss drunk
you don't know your name

Take heed, son
the bag you just snatched
from the black mama
down in Cross Street
is all she had in this money-world
all she had to feed your own
black brothers & sisters
who narrowly missed
abortion, the seweragepipe
& the Pill

Take heed, mama
your sons don't dodge & hide
from the police
choosing to be criminals
they never wished
to die in casualty wards
netted with stab wounds
moaning: when will it dawn?

Take heed, sister
on your nightland beat
the men that buy your body
also buy your soul
as payment they loan you halitosis
offer you VD

Black people, let's take heed

FOR BHOYI

You raised your jazz banner
above Fredville
Where everything denied itself
 pains rejoiced
 no glee was pure

Vusizwe!
That's what your father named you
Hoping you'd re-awaken your people
As you lifted their music
But Death the thief
robbed us of you

You blew
You pianoed
You strummed
You drummed
And the Shange brothers
 Claude your teacher
 Boyce
 Sandile
— all the jazzing brothers
listened to your musicplay
As tyres from Mayville
painted Blackhurst with red mud

You raised your music banner
for Sipho Ngubane's bass notes
for Sis' Gabisile our Ella
 and the Black Sounds
for Zenzele, Tozi and Mpompi
 our Soul Brothers thru whose message
 flowed our Soweto tears to Mpumalanga

THE SHADOWS FALL BACK

(for Ncuncuza)

i came into the house
to find you'd gone
you bust your own pedestal
i picked up the pieces
one by one
made them museum relics
for the one to come in after you
maybe to fill the vacuum

you were the forerunner perhaps
for seizable moments still to come
at least you laid the grass
for the next hen to lay jumbo eggs

with your violent bent
for compassion
you almost caused sensation
as you shuttlecocked to a dead end

now my heart throbbing with song
now the night thickening up to dawn
now the weary owl hoots wooing day
now the moon on stampede towards the wane
i'm hoping you didn't take my heart
with you
'cos i see the shadows fall back
they keep falling back
and fall back

TO MY DAUGHTER ON HER 16TH BIRTHDAY

You are the song . . .

You are the song of close smiles
that unearthed sensual urges
in our youthful deeps
leading to your being born

You are the song
of wide dreams
steeped in innocent childhood eyes
as summer rains poured out the winter chills

You are the song
of tenuous touch
of minstrel quivers
of jade on black
getting blacks on track

You are the song
of cool shades under the fig tree
Reminding me my brother Vusizwe didn't die
catching funerals of statured men

You are the song
of stolen anger over a tennis ball
in the streets of boyhood days' Grangetown

You are the song
of petal freshness
as raindrops crawled
down the window-pane
on Redcliffe's autumn days

You are the song
of sad funeral processions
as we learned before Age Ten
of
 six feet graves
 pyre rituals
 isolated cremations

You are the song
of crumpled rolls of tears
The day Mandela was given life sentence
for standing up to be a true blackman

You are the song
of prehensile nods from ghetto kids
playing hopscotch in dirty streets
& boat races in flooded drains

You are the song
of prehensile nods from ghetto kids
playing hopscotch in dirty streets
& boat races in flooded drains

You are the song
of adventurous grins
as we sloped carts down Candella Road
Sometimes ending up
in bamboo groves
and rattan cane hedges

You are the song
of baptized doubt
spread on textbook pages
telling the history of Time

You are the song

of puzzled stares in STD VI
as we tried to make ABC
of the Old Testament
and the Queen of Sheba

You are the song
of gandaganda stories
told while burning tyres
peeling succulent 3/10 sugar cane
as Hassan told African tales
from Zanzibari's on the Bluff
on some cold winter evenings

You are the song
of black sculpture & paintings
not created to fill greedy pockets
at commercial art galleries

You are the song
perpetuated by African Savannah
brought home to Luanda, Maputo
rested and embraced in Rufaro

You are the song
I sing on rare South African Moments
reminding me Azania is not lost
the Isle of Makhanda shall be brought
You are the song
in my Problems Department
where querying laughs
& flippant curses pass the day
to retain my sanities

You are the song . . .

A STALWART — AUGUST 1977

(For 'Oldman' Docrat)

*'Not all destruction destroys
Not all construction creates'*

Norman Mailer

maybe
sometimes you have found
the streets arid
not conforming to those of Bombay
where you first tasted struggle
the plastic instant-build architecture
you witness daily
may have hollered at you
alone in your room
— like in a shapeless entrail
but unsaddened and non-bereaved
by the crawly pieces
signed by Pretoria
that brash visitants have kept
casting at you
— trying to silence your
undaunted voice enveloped in
the quest for bare facts
your mind has blown at your books
as you remembered someone who said
'every stone counts . . .'
so who the hell was left
to watch constant dropping
wearing out a stone?
you pointed out the paths
the shadows would follow

the sun rays and the rain clouds
you have lingered on
ever ready for a fruitful chat
as you pushed books
to the concerned student, to the lecturer
the doctor, the trader, the housewife
the welder, to the well-off lawyer
the poor and the idealist
each one a vital part of a whole
today Victoria Street was rainy
on Maydon Wharf the dockworkers
were soaking
they hurried past the freight agents
mingled with the cartage workers
waiting for a tornado
or something to snap
some did swallow the rain that fell
on their silent lips

LOOKING AT SAUL

he haunts
 people's lives
disrupts
 family peace
he'll say he has studied
 criminology
claims to know
the communist mind

he's mastered
the art of housebreaking
and revels in bugging devices
and transmitters
he's shot at innocent children
brought me the bible
in detention cell

he'll claim
he's carrying out instructions
forgetting
 'The Beast of Belsen'
ignoring
 Nuremburg

oneday he'll find a detonator
charge at the door
the house-owner gone
i'll be happy to read
in the news:
 how he had
discovered a red nest

28 August 1981

MY GRANDMOTHER

Better red than confused
Because when Zimbabwe
drew that flag
My grandmother rose and shouted
'What a rat-a-tat and boom-boom!'
Then she murmured:
'People are the same.'

STORY OF THE TRACTOR

We walk down
tractored streets
turn round
tractored corners
enter
tractored buildings
ride up
tractored stairs
into
tractored rooms
occupied by people
with tractored minds

LOBOTOMIES OF A PARTY - MAY 1978

went to a suburban party
the other day
introductions
were passed round like
snacks & chilli-bites
& the drinks were good

then they started
saying i was
 so nice
 so broad-minded
 even so bright
(when they thought i wasn't listening)

someone foregrounded:
well, i was a sharpwitted writer
far better on essays than on poems
with all-round potential
for the novel

finding myself
so heat-exhausted
on the sunbeaten track
of my other self
in the heart of the ghetto
I tried to play it along

with my wife already
a graceful zoo piece
& very co-operative
to the scene
the crunch came down

thru questions on the mpla,
the patriotic front & frelimo
it's when i decided
to jazz to my true self
etch on their unglimped calm
as I first bivouacked
& poured myself a stiff
then mounted the flak guns

'oh, you're just like
the rest of them, communists
turning yourself into such
a letdown
let me drive you home'

i said sure let's do that
'cos my mid was already
in the ghetto

THE CHEWING OF HER TIME

I

She smiles

She smiles into my tight face

(A face tightened, through too much searching
into packedtrain expressions).

She grazes

She grazes her own mastered grit

(A cool so serene and calling).

She laughs

She bitterlaughs — scoffs at the Pill and Abortion.

Points out white immigration and the 'Botha Baby'.

Adds: 'Contracepted sex would spoil my womanhood

Besides, to fall pregnant is to continue with Life.'

II

She dances

She dances to a live tune.

Jazz never was stamped 'Made in USA'.

Our Miriam Makeba is married to Harlem

And says if there were no kwela

She would have invented it:

'To make sugar time, honey.'

The curved tone of her voice tells me

This woman might not be wrong

— this time

— Daughter of the Black Thunder.

III

And me playing a cat and chick game with her
Both of us drinking it in;
The swing of the din.
While sniffing out the dirty thing
(That's coming through the window):
The shitsmell that's Hitler-fart.

TIME OF THE HERO

Time of the hero
is when blacks start
pissing on Mankunku's lament
refusing to bemoan their blackness
— is when music fans
drop out of pancake blues
and appletart classics
— is when Mannenberg's untoothed mamas
chew 'druwe by die tros'
— is when Ngoye students
blow Graffiti Blues on the System
— is when the ghetto goes
for imbuya herbs & butterbean chitterlings.

Time of the hero
is when leftovers give blacks constipation
— is when ghetto trains
spill out race cards thru the windows
with blacks refusing to bet on their poverty anymore.

Time of the hero
is when Durban's Golden Mile
stops being golden
— is when Jo'burg The Big Apple turns fluffy
with Soweto massing the City streets.

Time of the hero
is when the struggle weeds out
alcoholic glances & syphilitic frowns.
The moment of the times shall have come.

PURGATORY BLUES

TV Channels
2 & 3
are coming
down
with
grid voltage
charges of enthusiasm
to some
and
with
anecdote potentials
of hope
to others
Seems
we are up to
the purgatory games
of 'cleanse me first'
as
the plague advances
with virus NBP:
the Native
Bantu
Plurals
syndrome
When that jubilation day
Has reached us
there'll be no
tranquillizers
and no paracetamols
as even saccharin
shall have vanished
from
the Bantustan table

UPHONDO

Dlothovu, pho kungebe ngcono
ukubhula amaphupho ethu oxolo
Sibale imilambo esiyakuyiwela
kanye nezinkalo esiyakuzikhankasa?
Kuthi lapho izintombi
zigqiza qakala ezinkwazini zemifula
Izinsizwa zigaxe imijojantaba
Kumazibuko onkana;
Phoke, uphondo nxa seluchithekile
Kuseduze ilanga lishone
Kubekanye kugudwe umnyama
wosizi oludala ngangayizolo.
Okhokho bethu kade balubeletha lolusizi;
No Chakijane, noBhambatha kaMancinza
bayonanela.

THE HORN

*Dlothovu, so would it not be better
if we blew away our peace dreams
if we counted the rivers we still have to cross
and the grasslands we shall have to track across
in running battles?
So's when our maidens
stamp their feet and chant at the outlets of rivers
would it not be better
if the young men belted on their guns
at all the river crossings?
What more then, when the battlehorn's water
has spilled
when the sun is nearing sunset
darkness be waded through solemnly*

*— the darkness of yesterday's mind-aches;
our forefathers long ago won fortitude
against this misery;
Even Chakijane and Bhambatha son of Mancinza
will resonate bravo.*

THE ABC JIG

Anger comes in silence

Some of our brothers graduate
on Robben Island
in the Arts of Struggle;
Others graduate
on the plains of the African Savannah;
Others still,
in the malaria-infested bushes
of the Boerewors Curtain.

Yet anger grows in silence

When they took us in
Steve Biko had resurrected
Onkgopotse, Mdluli, Mapetla;
I had seen them
give breath unto the clay
of our liberated Black manchild.

Black is alive & keeping

The S.B.'s swarmed over us
leaving their stings of State fear
in our Black-Star shoulders;
You'd swear
it was the Gestapo squads
on Jew hunts.

The hunter shall be the hunted

They tortured our Black souls

little knowing:

By detaining us

They had sent us on a Black Holiday:

By insulting us

they were teaching us hate

to turn the other cheek.

We have no more tears to shed.

Ours is the long stride

SO IT BE SAID

So it be said
The voice is loud and clear
The sound is Black and near

Blacks need not revile
Neither should they reconcile
People who feast on untruths
Will realize they are being uncouth

In Namibia they sing
In Zimbabwe the voice rings
People are people
No storm is without a ripple
In pools that swirl
In clouds that in the skies dwell

Let the voice sounds grow
Let the Black words show
And our fatherland burst and blow

Azania, you glow!

VERSIONS OF PROGRESS

(For Kuntu 'Tame-a-mamba' Moalusi)

*'What matters for us is not
to collect facts and behaviour
but to find their meaning'
Frantz Fanon*

Man has been to the moon
spreading umbilical concepts
of electronics & space radiation
fast breeding robot men;
Computers have given man
a faded character
— all part of cancer identity;
In ugly mirth we rejoice
over every technological success
& call it progress
Thus welcoming
the Age of the Plastic Man

Yet
we still wonder about the Abominable
Snowman of the Himalayas
We learn of monies poured
into diving schemes to solve
the mystery of the Loch Ness monster
Americans also have their Dollar Quiz
over the Yeti
There's now talk of strange prehistoric
creatures in equatorial Afrika

But
when Zulus spoke with understanding
of the bloodsucking umdlebe tree

that bleats like a goat to lure
its victim
the sages were shocked.
Again when my people spoke of
the ivimbela, a flying snake
that only moved in a tornado cloud
dictionaries translated the flying reptile
to mean 'whirlwind'

No surprise then
that baffled colonials called
Langalibalele's rainmaking powers a fake;
Simply that the exemplars of enquiry
were losing step with evolution

Am I surprised
to find the world still without
enough food to feed its mouths?
Still without enough shelter
for its millions?
Worse, what when surplus food is dumped
or destroyed just to maintain gross profit?

My oldman once told me
(I was almost eleven then):
In order not to cheat examples
precedents need not be followed
or lawyers would not have to fight cases
Like other boys of my kinsgroup
I was licensed to eat to my wish
I enjoyed karawala which my mother
prepared with flavouring care
With my friends we ate
the cane rat — ivondwe
We chowed wurumbu
We trapped the chicken-snapping hawk

for meat

We fished the eel, the sea fish
and the freshwater fish

We chowed and swallowed imbazas raw

Nothing happened

Our boyhood appetites were breaking taboos

as different cultures converged

harmoniously

whilst we learned the ABC's of

instant remedy

and instant side-effects

In Afrika

when a snake sticks out its forked tongue

it is pleading for justice

It's not the tongue of the snake

that bites.

BACK TO MAMA

alexandra
your sons are exiled
to boxhouses
 of diepkloof
 meadowlands
 thembisa
but always
they return
to your guttered streets
to your squeezed yards
yes, brave sons
they come back
oh yes, black mama
i've seen them
move into your cuddles
into those motherly hugs
warmer than xmas wishes

VO NGUYEN GIAP

(a tribute to Vietnam: 5 May 1975)

Like the great old man, Ho
You never once dropped the hoe;
You kept weeding
Getting out the unwanted growth;
As a thousand brilliant flowers bloomed.
In the trenches of Dien Bien Phu,
You taught de Castries what it was
to resist the imperialist aggressor;
de Castries whose people made
a heroic stand in the F.R. Underground
against the Nazi Fuehrer
who shouted: 'Is Paris burning!?'
You defied polystyrene jelly
You defied generalized truth made eternal
You defied the B52's and the flame throwers
You made the Green Berets look like nothing more
than the hobo with a kitchen knife.
You avenged Ba Gia
You avenged My Lai
You avenged Nam Din
You avenged Tan An
Vo Nguyen, I think I heard you say,
with Fidel and Ché: 'Cuba si, Yanqui non!'
You led the people the Third World
through the trenches of Dien Bien Phu
You showed the paths
 leading to the Sierra Maestra
You hoisted the revolutionary heritage
 of The Long March
You reminded us, Chu Teh lives
You reminded us, Ché lives

Dream

Go home to face the nightmares of Attica and San
Quentin
 Go home to the hallucinations of your box-office
movies
 Go home to the stomach illusions of your pasty meals
 — that I find distasteful in my own country
 Go home to the boredomed U.S.
 — where Malcolm X is true prophet
 Go home to the All Mightiness U.S.
 — where the soul of George Jackson is yet to breed
 the new man
 Go home to the highbrowed U.S.A.
 — where the souls of Elridge Cleaver and Angela Davis
 were cast on ice
 Go home to tell the Pentagon Hawk
 not to overplay his G.I. hand
 Go home to face this truth:
 — when the last Marine has left Indochina,
 all ‘Godblessed institutions’ will be
 fascist cancer wards.
 Go home, you sons of brave fathers;
 Your fathers who once fought out mutilating smells
 of Dachau, Belsen, Terezin, Treblinka, Auschwitz.
 America needs you. Bellow buffalo, bellow!
 And Vo Nguyen Giap has carried the heroic dream
 of Nguyen Van Troi.
 Nguyen Van Troi whom we are yet to know
 better than Leon Botstein
 So Yankee, go home to pay your dues;
 We all have to pay our dues.
 Vo Nguyen Giap,
 We are watching you put the truth
 on its pedestal;
 You together with our fighting heroes of the NLF.
 Nguyen Hu Tho who played tiger

against the imperialist elephant
Nguyen Thi Dinh who gave the sting
against the Pentagon Hawk
Nguyen Van Hieu who took Prague by quiet storm
Tran Van Than who was at home in Peking,
and the workers listened;
— The workers of the Internationale.
Dock workers of Haiphong rejoice.
Let the Internationale play!
The Internationale that is sung at Highgate,
across the West Bank of Paris, along the Danube
and across the Rhine.
The world-wide song that America shall be forced
to respect.
Let the Internationale be sung!
Let it be sung by the sons and daughters of America.
These sons and daughters of America,
were the Rocky Mountains and Miami not enough for
them?
Or had they let go everything to the fat asses
who spill dollar bills all over the U.S.A.?
Cry America, Cry! Rage children, Rage!
You children of Berkeley who ganged up
and battalioned against the Ninth Symphony
You daughters of California who moved with the
Weathermen,
embittered and young
You sons of Cincinnati who got bored with TV
and go-go carts and snakedance bellies
You hippie children who were getting fixed on dope
while Watts and Newark burned
You sons of Harlem who went high on a fix
and got fixed on Black Power
— when you discovered the stars and stripes
were drenched in the blood of innocent children
You black sons from the other side town

Giap, you bolstered the world's Liberation Fronts.
You gave weak knees to Kennedy's Special Forces
You made the Yanks see ground
— and forget about the Moon Project and Houston.
You heard Muhammed Ali bout: 'I have no quarrel
with them Viet Cong.'
You made the Pope make appeals;
You made U Thant make appeals.
Appeals for peace in a world threatened with fire
— unless old scores were settled.
I choose to concede: I may be bound hand and foot
under the southern sun; but my spirit is liberated
— like the spirit of Saigon.
Those who taught me one and one makes three have
failed.

My one and one is two.

I know my Black heroes: Lumumba, Frantz Fanon,
Amilcar Cabral.

In the stillness of Sunday morning night
I heard the horn of Charlie Parker
being interrupted by the Sunday's paper news:
News says Haiphong harbour shelled,
News says the bombing of North Vietnam begins.
Then I remembered I am one of the wretched of the
earth;

That I am not dead, yet.

I recalled Dien Bien Phu.

I swore, I swore, swore never to say 'sir' or 'master'
because of skin colour.

What madness I still have in me

What energy that I have conserved

All for the wrath of the future which is NOW

The future is NOW.

Until there will be no more master and slave
in the four corners of the earth.

And you Vo Nguyen, you make me hope;

On hopes that are at times forgotten;
Where it is a dream to be free;
I must love and hate. Even in dreams.
This way I am able to shout: Victory!
Victory to the peoples of South East Asia
Victory to the comrades of Ho Chi Minh and Giap
The losers in battle have dripped and gone
the way of mud and slime.
For this I say, 'Long Live Vietnam!'
Long live the People's Revolution.

AT END OF KRUGER PARK

it's no more long way
from here to the border

on the right, to the east
the tarmac road straightens
boringly;
in the grass, a viper
& salamanders
don't wish to be disturbed
in the Lowveld brush
rockclimbing lizards
tonk-tonk against the stony
surface

the grass blades tremble
& scan the veld
thorned twists of barbed wire
wave concentration camp hands
where wolves hunt within

eagles come and perch on the fence
the smaller birds give way
to staggering flaps of hawks
preying on moles & mice
— spoils of burnt grass

the rootless vigilance
of the patrol
throws focus of the binoculars
towards the Zoutpansberge
in a crude circle
three faint columns of cigarette smoke

rise and impeach the quiet
which is syntaxed by cackles
of guineafowl
which is swathed by reddening chats

it's no more long way
from here to the border

NO MORE LULLABIES

A mirage over Greater Soweto
blinding with the shite-hawk shine
of Impala Jet fighters
from the Voortrekkerhoogte base

Intravenous strings of dull brick structures
across Diepkloof to Pimville
smelling fumes and braaivleis rage
from nearby hippofortressed Doornkop

The spectre of Soweto '76 haunts
The spectre haunts Umngeni Court
 it haunts Soekmekaar & Booyens
 it haunts Moroka Police Station
 it has vaulted itself to all
corners of the fatherland

Ganged-up thoughts of carry-me-home
remind me there are no 'non-whites' at No.4
No 'non-whites' are footcuffed and fisted
for being communists at John Vorster Square

New brick structures
honeycombed as light-grey tripe
mushroom all over Soweto
Those buildings
will they bring back to blacks
those strangled hopes of flowers in blossom?
Will they wipe off from the agonized minds
those atrocious crimes that crawled the flesh
in 1976?
Behold those stifled wishes
flushed out of the loins
of the Pretoria hangman

when Mahlangu went down a hero

Behold those demonic groggies
living on Cape wine
All those betterthanthedevil MPs
who must have thought jailing
and detentioncell murders
would pacify blacks

June 16 meant no more pushing around
It was the volcanic bursting of a hill
on whose vantage point stood a whiteman
astride a blackman's shoulders

On June 16 the wind blew low
The wind was harsh
The earth below would not go hush
No peace would come out of a bullet rush

I can still hear the ringing
of raging shouts from that Brigadier
commanding the maddened pupils to disperse
Until the Hitler will got up in him:
'A-tta-a-ak!', he bellowed furiously
like a water buffalo being pumped with bullets
from a chopper high above the rice paddies

Many a commemoration no tears could wipe
Till the black children of Afrika had lost all tears
As Regina Mundi swallowed teargas too
No free church services to honour our dead
Regina Mundi
qui solis peccata mundi
how did the Bible fail you?
You also tasted teargas kisses
of Christian goodwill and Puritan morality

Regina Mundi

harbour for your bulletstung children
Did you hear M.C. Botha tell the elders
to go fly a kite during their delegation talks
on the monstrous Bantu Education?
Sheltering mama, aren't some kites dirigible?

It is seedtime in Soweto
What went round has come around
This time the plants will grow
and bear fruit to raise up more seed
There'll be a refreshing persistence of the wits
Because this time
There'll be no more lullabies.

**Other
Selected
Poems**

THE NEW DAWN

(For Ngoye Students - Present and Past)

There's talk of a New Dawn for Blacks
As if hauling the monkey off their backs;
It's a New dawn
With a Tri-cameral Dispensation,
Pronouncing Blacks to utter damnation.

Our youth are burning themselves
Cane, Vodka, Espirit, Castello and
grind session for squeezer
It's open season for the gym Ceasar;
It's days of humble handshakes
Ganja with the Rastas on Jah blues,
Only a hand grenade to choose.

This New Dawn
When people are no longer people
By their smiles, jokes or laughters drawn
As if chasing on Summerveld's Polo steeple
We know people by the cars they drive
Their frustration scars to hide
We know people by the houses they've built
Perpetuating class madness to the hilt

It's a New Dawn
That gets you rusticated
For wanting to know East from West,
Days are not ours
As we lithe through the polkadot hours
With hippos roaming the ghetto streets
— waddling like prehistoric beasts;
In this New Dawn we slip our lives
— kicking the Muse in the backside.

They say in '36 some of our parents
nurtured dreams of Berlin jazz
 and Vienna orchestras
They too had sidles into the labyrinths
of a false dawn

In this New Dawn
Cynics are laughing themselves to jerry blush
Holding the dawn darkness to a seary hush;
During the evenings there's claim
to powerful vibrations at exclusive braais
The women gyrating to break dance
Breaking
 Curling
 Bending

Vibrators between their thighs;
The men priding themselves in BM's
And latest makes from Nippon;
Mitsubishi, Nissan and Toyota
never had it better on African soil.
Occasionally there'll be a push-push play
on the Black Power slogans of yesterday
Then the stones will start falling:
"Detentions brought us nothing
Some of us were playing heroes
Not wanting to settle on basic issues
Let us face reality
Get to know what's priority".
The get down quips go on and on
into the New Dawn.
In this New Dawn
Some of us will kill their old selves
Shunting here and there for discotheques
Shuffling on stage floors
with a tornado go on the tiles-gloss

Warped in pocketless, bottomless tight pants;
There'll be permed heads
For men graduating into women.

The other side watches on
with apple-care anxiety
engaging on constructively
for its own fun to jog on;
A new Dawn cowboy in a dollar printed shirt
rides along to
"The Rand is total!
Power has no fraction!

Let there be a black nouveau riche,
Bastions against the red menace from the East.
We Westerners shall never go down!
Not when our terrestrial dreams
are centred in astronautic geography
and a Star Wars program."
The cowboy swings his Ten Gallon hat
For the passing of Haley's Comet
Our hopes are being blessed with the Rand to Dollar jive
Giving our Black boys some bit of shine.

It's a New Dawn
As we claw
Like roaches up the academic crawl
Displaying an innate passion for words and scrawls
with the avid longing for a green-winged shitfly
our piggish fed and carrot-programmed computers
Exhibiting a ringworm itch for swinishness.
This New Dawn
Giving us pep and bliksem vim
To peck through all those webbed streets
with the shrivelled disconcert of a city park pigeon
Shopping Game and gaming clicks

with the pollen scoop of a bee
blended with the ferocious chew of the piranha.

It's a New Dawn
where public urinals and shrubs
are like butter and cheese
in ghetto townships
— stretching on the wound's rub
for Heil Hitler cries
rotten-egg engagements sighs

This New Dawn
the Führrer wears a black mask

22-07-85

INTO THE MIDNIGHT HOUR

It's been said
The eagle will shed tear
for its injured young.
It will in fury circle its nest
and fly into the sun;
In the sad moment of the hour
What more atrocious truths to harbour?

In 1976 a black eagle was born
It flew with battle hopes
into the African sun

Now this very minute
Down this embittered street
Mechanical eagles are flying
Our children are dying
Our women are crying.

Into this midnight hour
Howling solicitations of a south-easter shock
embrace the wolfing cold rain

These machine-mind eagles we do not want
These are eagles of the Hippo, the Buffel
Eagles that were spelled out for Tobruk
Where strange minds played up to the Mein Kampf book.

There's a dream
That somewhere the people's wishes shall be
There's a hope
That sometime the people's truth shall reign prime;
We shall ride this whirlwind at its worst twist

We shall climb the boab tree with deepened glee
We shall bend dry and flower like the willow
It is the people's will for the morrow.
We shall.....
Let us.....

ON ONE'S STOMACH IN THE VELD

Hit!

Retreat!

Throw and run!

Hit!

Retreat!

Throw and run!

The red dust gnawing at your senses

— like clouds of paper ashes

In the dust-clouded street

Is it the fury of the dust storm

Or the wanton spread of chasing police cars

on the bumpy road?

Is it clouds of teargas smoke

jetting fog-like across the school plane?

Hit!

Retreat!

We shall walk there heroic streets

so full of vim

We shall ride the sardine trains

We shall catch the rattling buses

We shall.....

Yesses.....

In this grassy veld

My running patience so much held

A pink salamander

with its sunspecked veil

on its geometric neck

in hazy-daisy slow motion

Swerves its head

with colourful taints;

Nearby

Colony insects urge on a column jerk
Breaking their silence of caution

I wait on
My belly to the grassy ground,
Waiting on
Until those tall beanstick lights
That bright-lime on before the sun is down
Can reflect upon their riotous control
 Their curfew patrol.

A POEM

There are times
When the idea of exile
Has meandered through the gopura
 of my dreams
Challenging the Gibbs Surround
 of my dwelling mind
Piercing my conscious
Where votives
 and sanctuary lamps
Scan the silhouette of my childhood days;
My distended dreams have fallen fowl
Where a bee-hive
Of hypermarket craze and bulk-buy freezers
Is often shelter for an angered mamba.

In this mother country
With black souls in bounty
There also remains those
Whose drilling-tone
Is a shade of perfection
Cooling the Caspir's heat and ghetto affliction;
They voice out their cry
Dig out their blackened fervour
With the puffed strike of a trampled adder
At the soul bidding of their red hearts
Onto the pained mass
Loudly uttering: "We aren't a black mistake
Driven to the tip of a scorched-earth hill
As if into a strange white kill
All our miseries deep into our graves to take".
There are times.....

A STIFF MIDNIGHT'S DYING

(In Memoriam: Thami Mnyele and the others)

Our hearts exiled so far
Away from buzzy highways
 busy booze joints
 dizzy heights;
Yet — not far from the fatherland
Dismantling all those blank
Cape-to-Cairo dreams,
Drowning those
“All roads lead to Tangier” days
It's no long way to Deepararee.

Once more there's been
A stiff midnight's dying

Spattering icicle drops
on this chilly morning
 — winter rain has fallen;
 — fresh winter drops remind:
AmaJoni still breathe the fragrant-dew air
out of the red earth
out of the black sod.

But once more there's been
A stiff midnight's dying

Yesterday Matola, Maseru
Today Cabinda, Gaborone
The rope is woven with thorned steel.
Someone had to listen
On 21st. March 1960
Someone had to listen
On 16th June 1976

Someone had to lend learned ear
it was children that were crying;
By 1984 someone had to catch up
on George Orwell. With Koeberg
and Sasol 2 behind our backs.
Until the Caspirs and R1 rifles
became the order of the agonizing day;
With Uitenhage turned into
a Fort on the Eastern Frontier
— manned by men whose hands
were full of sores from shooting actitis,
Their heads closed tighter than a drum.
Yet someone refused to note that
The waterducks had taken wings
to meet the sun from the spirited east
Amongst the snow-white flowered water-lillies
The global Gaborone sun
so yellow-rounded and shiny
in the misty morn,
Where our eyes were fixed,
Directed its rays to where our palms and fingers
were kept.

Oh! Father Sun
I know you have loved with Mother Nature
The freedom that we longed.
The resin viscosity of our Afrika dreams
has thickened our shadows of dawn
as water reflux:
We who suffer the persisting viciousness
of the bullet bite
We who know the true nature of the newstide bark,
As it pricks at our soring wounds.
Where slaves have garlanded the master
Man has little more reason to live
We sing death to those with a bent to kill

so callous,
Their deserved fate so predictable
as rain under a heavy-clouded sky.

Once more there's been
A stiff midnight's dying
Tonight, this echoless night
Like a dried cistern,
A night so quiet;
It's the dry quiet of a pod
shod of its seeds by the wintry winds
But I have seen carnations of Truth before,
Sniffed the red roses of hope
As my country bends
With the grey dawn wind.
I hear hisses of the mamba
As the browning leaves rattle
like a kettle on the boil.
The Afrika wind smiles at me
and kisses the willow tree
so full of red bloom promises:
By the summer the red blossom
will cast my ears to whispers
of a future wrested.

19-07-85

“CACOPHONY-IN-WHAT?” JAZZ

Can't be proud of the super highway
Can't think straight on the driverless train
Can sing no praise to heart transplant
Can spell no jive on freeway asphalt

I won't go into cacophonous sound
over this
I won't play myself proud
over empty bliss

The idiophonic time line
of my marimba blues
Sticks me with jazz glue
to the polyphonic vocals
of my Afrika ancestral locals
So why I should hue and cry
if the iambic metre fails me?

Yes
I won't go into cacophonous sound
over this

ENDNOTES

For the contrast between the Africanity of the Valley of a Thousand Hills, see Benedict W Vilakazi's (1962) *Zulu Horizons*, Cape Town and H.I.E Dhlomo's (1986) *Collected Works* (eds) Couzens and Visser. For Mazisi Kunene, *Zulu Poems*, London, 1969; *Emperor Shaka the Great*, London, 1979; *Anthem of the Decades*, London, 1982.

Mafika P Gwala's work: *Jol'inkomo*, Johannesburg, 1977; *No More Lullabies*, Johannesburg, 1982. *Writers Forum: Exiles Within*, Cape Town, 1986. The introduction draws heavily on these and the analysis of Poetry traditions in Natal, drafted by Ari Sitas for COSAW's *Writer's Notebook* in 1989. Mafika Gwala's Interview with Lesego Rampolokeng was published in *Chimurenga* in 2014. The remarkable collection *Musho! Zulu Popular Praises* by Liz Gunner and Mafika Gwala was published by Michigan University Press in 1991.