

# ALONG THE LINE

*The final canto of a South African Fantasy.*

by

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## I

“Its the Communists!” vociferated Brandman,  
“They’ve blown us through the roof, the sky . . .”  
“But I distinctly had a sinking feeling!”  
Sidonia interjected.

Brandman thundered,

“I tell you we are sitting on the moon,  
This dead grey plain and dead grey mountain rising  
Here like an old and sky-high baobab—  
There’s nowhere like it to be found on earth,  
Sahara, Kalahari or Karroo,  
Nor Gobi, nor the sands of Mexico—”

## II

“My friend,” Colijn said, smiling at his fury,  
“No doubt you wish to push your prestige higher,  
And not admit that you have sunk the country. . . .”  
“Up! Up!” yelled all the Neths. “They’ve blown us up!”  
And all the Opposition bawled out, “Down!”

## III

But suddenly, all craniums blow their tops,  
And gusher out their smoke of djinns and dreams  
Ballooning figments of their imitation  
By which most hide their own poor show as men,  
Great puffed-up claims to equal Boers or Trekkers  
Or swollen parodies of Old Cape lawyers,  
And from the wrathful Brandman’s gauge goes up  
A totem pole of stiff ancestral faces,  
While from its top the long May-ribbons whirl  
Of tape-worms from the brains of Neth backbenchers;  
See flapping high on Frank Sidonia’s knoll  
A million-pound reserve-bank note is hung  
With happy golliwogs like banner-tassels. . . .

## IV

Then swiftly each wide-open skull sucks in  
 Its phantasy, and all the hanging lids  
 Clap to. And bowing by the Speaker's chair  
 A tall distinguished figure stands as if  
 Great wings were folding that had placed him there.  
 He looks like some lean-faced ambassador,  
 A nose, high bridged and slightly hooked,  
 A thinker's face, criss-crossed with good intentions,  
 With glowing dark-blue oceans in his eyes.

## V

The members' minds unclench their fists and open  
 Accepting the improbable. A current  
 Of soft words flows around and through their thoughts.

## VI

"Forgive me this intrusion," said the words,  
 "But extraordinary measures are required  
 As your arrival wasn't on the schedule—  
 They hold three tinkering amateurs to blame.  
 You must forgive my ignorance about . . .  
 Your major powers keep me all so busy,  
 I hardly know the smaller ones by name  
 But I look forward now to making friends. . . ."  
 "And who may you be?" asked a wondering voice.  
 "Harriman's my name, Doctor Harriman,  
 Chief Psychiatrist, you know, head of the —  
 Rehabilitation Centre, I suppose  
 You'd call it. I must warn you that the place  
 Has been misrepresented to the world.  
 Biased reports by poets, politicians,  
 Sensation-mongers and tendentious priests. . . ."  
 "By Gar!" cried Vlenter, "We are nowhere else  
 But back in our own country!"

## VII

"Oh, it is!"

Cried Harriman. "It is indeed your country,  
 For all men own it and all men are free

To enter it by my back-door to Liberty.  
 All that's required is to sign the form  
 Requesting to be voluntary patients.  
 A few weeks in my Gateway Institute—  
 It's round the corner of the Tree of Life,  
 The Gate goes up a mile, arched by a rainbow,  
 A sign to combat previous propaganda—  
 Will set you up as citizens of Hell. . . .”  
 “Hell!” quivered in a whisper round the chamber.  
 “Hell,” smiled Harriman, “roots the Tree of Heaven.  
 When men come broken by their strange distractions  
 With good and bad sides manacled together,  
 And their rich spectrum of refracted light  
 Drowned in bleak opposites of black and white,  
 This stark dichotomy's replaced with living light,  
 Colours that make whole and therefore free,  
 The shadings of celestial integration. . . .”  
 “Integration!”

“There, it's out!”

Cries and bellows,  
 Like waves, rocked, flicked and flung among the Neths.  
 The Opposition rose to cheer, then sank  
 Confused at this embarrassing supporter.

### VIII

Out of the chaos sprang Beleerd accusing,  
 “Now we know that this is hell! And He's  
 The Great Arch-Fiend! The Integrator!  
 The Prince Mau Mau of all Miscegenation  
 Who'll marry off our daughters to the Natives. . . .”  
 A hum of horror rose among the Neths,  
 Black buzzing, starting from Beleerd, then all;  
 Thin-rooted in their mouths a long black tongue  
 Swarmed out across the chamber, swung  
 Round Harriman, swirled in a dark dust-devil  
 Clustering bees of dirt into a monstrous figure,  
 Until he stood a huge black hobo dripping  
 Jet flies like a colossus of molasses.  
 And in the triumph of their fury all  
 The Neths glowed with a phosphorescent whiteness.

## IX

The fly-bushed figure turned its crawling face,  
Bowed to Colijn:

“Sir, a single gesture  
From yourself could slough this filthy pupa.  
Take man-to-man this foetid hand in yours . . .”  
“The Devil knows his friends!” cried Staak, and laughed,  
“Hoo! Hoo!” The Neptune from the sewers kept  
Its oceanic eyes upon the Opposition,  
Appealing and appalling hand outstretched.

## X

The Opposition stared at it, their disc-like  
Pupils closed on risk-revolving minds.  
A liberal half rose. Then Colijn spoke:  
“I much deplore this denigration of you,  
But please don't misinterpret what we mean  
By Integration—as we understand it,  
It means full unity in separation,  
Whites form the top and blacks the bottom of the nation  
With mutual benefits in different places . . .”  
A scream, cut by a billion fly-wings, jetted  
Harriman like a geyser through the roof.

## XI

Sighing down upon the silent members fell  
A drizzle of dead flies. A paper sidled  
Demurely from the ceiling to the Clerk.  
“This message from the Chief Psychiatrist  
Apologizes for his sudden going  
But says he'll come again at our convenience.”  
The members pondered this a while.  
“I move,”  
Said Bobels, “that this House do now adjourn.”

## XII

The press rushed out to tell their startling story  
Over a ticker fed into the void.  
The row of ministerial wives brushed off

The flies and went to drink their morning tea.  
 The members dwindled from the chamber, wandered  
 Out to the bar or tea-room or to track  
 Embarrassing statistics from the past.  
 And one or two considered

Emptiness

That vacant waste of grey, so vague, so vast,  
 A blur of distance, a profound myopia,  
 That dull grey plateau planing from their gates,  
 The great curved wall, tall as a storm behind,  
 A trunk of rock that shored a speckled sky  
 And held the universe inside. . . .

Inside?

XIII

“Inside we’re lost! They’ll brainwash the back-bench!”  
 “And out here?” Edged about the conference table  
 The cabinet made nooses of deliberation  
 To hang or trip the Devil.

“And out here?”

“Well, at least our majority’s certain.”  
 “Play for time. We’re free—so he says. Consult  
 To go in on a basis of staying outside. Put  
 The onus on him of refusal.” “Yes, logic  
 Was always our strongest appeal.” “But here,  
 What do we make logic about?” “White’s white,  
 Black’s black, that lies at the base of all logic.”  
 “But there’s only one black down here with us—  
 That’s Ambrose, the boiler-attendant.” “Man,  
 That doesn’t alter the principle. See?”

XIV

“We shall never go inside!” said the Baas.  
 “But that needs a plan,” said Beleerd, “a plan.”  
 “And supplies?” Tommy Vlenter enquired.  
 The catering manager brought good news:  
 “Whether liquid or solid they never get less.  
 I’m not religious, but here its like having  
 The loaves and the fishes and liquor besides.”  
 “Its a sign!” said the pious Jan Bobels.  
 And Brandman rose in an ecstatic fury,  
 “Providence put us down here for a mission!”

## XV

And in the caucus all the Neths stood up  
And blazed into the anthem of Ethnasia:

*Here, still together, Lord, we stand  
To cause division in the land,  
And with the years' increasing skill  
Carry out Thy Great Principle.*

*Thank Thee again, O Separator,  
Who cleaved the world with an equator  
And then went further and imbued  
The globe with lat. and longitude,  
And on it placed in separate areas  
The Britain, Burmas and Bulgarias,*

*And man in all his tribes and nations,  
Classes and colours and relations,  
And stopping not at man and woman,  
Gave separate limbs to every human.*

*Lord, now we come to think of it,  
Even the atom can be split!  
So what's more modern than our mission  
In this, the age of nuclear fission?*

## XVI

"A mission!" groaned Beleerd. "A plan!" he sighed  
And cogitating paced the corridors,  
Attended in his intellectual labour  
By under-ministers and P.R.O.s.  
Poor Dimmermans, wan as a fading dream,  
Collided with him saying sadly, "Franz,  
That was a question we could never answer;  
Did our ethnosis operate in heaven?"  
"Why, you're a genius!" cried Beleerd. "That's it!"  
And all his midwives saw his time was come.

## XVII

In the House assembled by the urgent bells  
Brandman spoke in a voice like anger,  
"We declare our sovereign independence,  
And that of this House, our national home."

"This House," explained Jan Bobels to the members,  
 "Still stands upon our native soil, of which  
 Great quantities are stuck to the foundations,  
 Thus de jure, and de facto, and de spirituo sancto . . ."  
 "Anyone," said Staak, "who henceforth refuses  
 In any way to think like a white man  
 And consults, consorts, confers or concurs  
 With the Devil in future or the past  
 Shall be flogged, deported or gagged and bound  
 To preserve law, order and the White Race."  
 Beleerd rode up on thundering hooves of cheers:  
 "Here," he cried, "at the very gate of Hell  
 We will unroll the New Ethnasia.  
 We'll lay its latitudes and longitudes,  
 A cunning net to catch creation in,  
 And in the hollow of our mind's hand hold  
 A nest to nourish a new heaven."  
 Then armed with all these bills and resolutions  
 Three ministers went off to see the Devil.

## XVIII

"So—you want Lebensraum?" said Harriman.  
 Brandman, Beleerd and Vlenter stared into  
 The complicated candour of his face  
 Like three mongooses watching for a snake.  
 "You say that we are free?" enquired the Baas.  
 "Yes, you are free, as all men are, to make  
 The sort of hell that you prefer. Yet why . . ."  
 "But how can we be free if there's no land  
 Where we can exercise our liberty?"  
 "Oh, take it then, if that will make you happy."  
 "What, all of it, that land that lies out front?"  
 "Well, not the mineral rights. Mr. Sidonia  
 Took out an option soon after you came. . . ."

## XIX

"There!" cried Beleerd from the House's roof-top,  
 "There lies our hinterland!" The plane was dotted  
 With excited forms of Neths who'd got a wind  
 Of this new deal and rushed to peg out claims

Of real estate and lands. Even their wide  
 Diaspora across the promised land  
 Left it unlivened. The cabinet stared  
 Into that vacant grey mind of a world.  
 They remembered drought burning a blue flame  
 On the wide wick of a withered Karroo  
 And it was beautiful in afterthought.  
 All loveliness that drowsed upon the great plateau  
 Lulled in the long arm of the Drakensberg;  
 From where the bushveld gives the fauna shelter  
 To gatherings of mountains in the Cape  
 White clouds forked lightning through the memory;  
 Laconic birds that comment on the vlaktes  
 About the sun-down's empty ceremony  
 Sang out as loud as glades of nightingales,  
 Recalled beside this single note of colour,  
 This monotone immensity that lay  
 Desolate beneath a sky of spider-webs.

## XX

Beleerd alone drew pleasure from the sight.  
 His colleagues watched him levitate with longing,  
 High-viewing, visionary as a vulture,  
 Blue-printing blankness with the future's bones.  
 They fidgeted for something living: "Franz,  
 Are people not a part of every plan?"  
 "No," said Beleerd, "No, not initially.  
 First, pure on the perspective comes the plan  
 Between brain and the farthest boundary,  
 Heart to horizon, undefiled the whole  
 And not a man to mar its measurements."  
 "And then, when its there?" they asked, a thread  
 Of debate on the dumb edge of desolation.  
 "Faith, have faith in the frightful future!"  
 Cried Beleerd, kindling vision in his colleagues,  
 "When the wild-eyed one-worlders wake  
 And know the nightmare's whinny of their notion  
 Made real around them in the red of ruin,  
 When the West Indians rule once-white Westminster,  
 When coloured presidents carp from the Capitol,  
 When dark waves wash down all the Western dykes,



Then from a cracking cosmos see our countrymen  
 Crawl ant-like to our cantons of content,  
 Each hue with hallelujahs hymns its separate home—  
 Then, then revolt will run through Integration,  
 Commingling hell give way to God's group areas,  
 And our mysterious ministry to mend  
 The flaw in fate will be at last fulfilled."

## XXI

So the Great Ideal was born  
 Once again,  
 The blast is blown on the great ox-horn  
 Once again.  
 The Neth back-benchers stand to station  
 Each with a vote and an oration,  
 Once again.  
 The high white hope holds fast behind  
 The laager of a tight-shut mind.  
 A pamphlet gives the final suture  
 And asks, "Has Heaven got a Future?"

## XXII

And once again  
 The Opposition  
 Calls the press.  
 "We are agreed  
 Now's not the time  
 To stick our necks  
 Out. Wait and see.  
 Festina lente.  
 Softee walkee  
 Catchee monkey.  
 Now's not the time.  
 Later, perhaps.  
 Yes, later, later.  
 Chances are always  
 Greater  
 Later.

## XXIII

“To start out from  
Nothing at all,”  
Said Franz Beleerd,  
“We’ll build  
A wall.”

## XXIV

“A Great Wall of Ethnosis?” said Sidonia,  
“Beleerd’s last bulwark against common sense?  
A Drakensburg of diamondiferous sand?  
A curved spine studded with good stones  
That might have been exported?  
A glittering cripple of our resources  
To scare the sensitive foreign investor?  
A monument to economic schizophrenia?  
And who’ll build the wall? Will Ambrose Gondhlovu  
Immure himself in the desert—while we  
Go downstairs and stoke up the boiler?” Beleerd  
Smiled like a crack in paper.

## XXV

Sometime later the Special Commission  
On Possible Ethnical Great Walls released  
Its remarkable report:

“So as not  
To disturb exportable raw materials  
Yet make the project truly of our own,  
The Wall shall be built of legislative  
Materials created by the House,  
Bills, reports, white and order papers,  
Memoranda, estimates, blue books, hansards,  
To a height of twenty feet, one million  
Words to a brick of a cubic foot,  
Broad enough for five ministers abreast  
To survey the divisions they’ve created.  
The Wall is to run in an Ox-hoof shape—  
(See the report of the Traditional  
Modifications Commission correcting

The Tomlinson discovery which made  
 A horse-shoe shape the bounds of White South Africa)  
 The Wall is to run in an outward curve  
 Until sufficient soil seems likely to be closed  
 Off for the preservation of all possible Whites.  
 This will be their harbour of security,  
 The first spoor of our trek into eternity.  
 Certain sacrifices will be called for. . . ."

## XXVI

Joe Coetzee, Minister of Labour, announced  
 "The first thing we must sacrifice, alas,  
 Is the luxury of a large Opposition.  
 We'll cling to the ledge of our democracy  
 By keeping the Opposition front bench.  
 The rest of the members on the other side  
 Cast in a constructive role at last  
 Will build the Wall. . . ."  
 "My friends," Colijn said,  
 "This Act may mean the death of Liberty!"  
 Neths yelled, "Away with them! Away with them!"

## XXVII

"Colijn," said Jack, "don't shout too loud!  
 If they take the boys at the back,  
 We'll be rid of the liberal crowd  
 And more concerted in attack. . . ."

## XXVIII

When the wall-gang marched off to the front,  
 Brandman, he was always courteous, presented  
 Them with a Disselboom-and-Ox-horns, saying  
 It showed they served their House and country still.  
 Colijn cried out, "Don't let it get you down!"  
 The liberals shambled off in a sad column  
 Except three ladies with a sense of style  
 And Frank Sidonia walking upright to  
 Conceal the bulge that was his Geiger-counter.  
 And Jolly Staak went with as overseer,  
 Tapping a merry time upon his sten-gun drum.

## XXIX

Even as the gang passed into the Lobby,  
 The ravings of race and republic were rising  
 And bawlings of betrayal, sabotage,  
 Countered the shrieks of Liberty's demise.  
 Doors closed while Beleerd was shouting the odds,  
 "Four-to-one! Four-to-one! Look at the risk!  
 Blacks by the billion and whites by the million . . ."  
 The House shook like a great combustion engine  
 Or concrete-mixer of ethnic creation  
 To pour the mortar of the Neths' new heaven—  
 As paper plants pump forth the toilet packs  
 Or humming presses flip the Daily Mirrors out.

## XXX

Twenty feet from the sand Beleerd's Bulwark  
 Rose up, a cubist monster of paper,  
 Went shambling, report by report, and hansard  
 By hansard, on big feet of blue books, to nowhere.  
 Its builders worked in muttered commiseration  
 And the Wall, reeling drunkenly onward,  
 Unrolled like a wandering Tower of Pisa  
 And broken backed as Don Quixote's horse.  
 High on the neck of this long Rosinante  
 Sidonia glued amendments into place.  
 Below, Ambrose brought barrow-loads of bills  
 From the conveyor-belts and brewed them tea.  
 He also moved the Disselboom from time to time,  
 Set it up at a further observation point  
 For Staak to lean against in the old tradition.  
 There Staak would nurse his sten-gun, tell it stories  
 Or strum sometimes upon its bullet-drum,  
 Crooning and crowing with a curious laughter:

*Hush-a-bye baby,  
 On a tree-top  
 Look-outs there may be  
 That work doesn't stop.*

*Life, law and order  
 Are based on a cell,  
 And God, the Great Warder,  
 Has lock-ups as well.*

## XXXI

Further, more faint and fitful now behind  
 Faded the House— to a full-stop on a blank page.  
 Only a crazy margin-line went back  
 Growing feebler with the grumble of conveyor-belt  
 That brought the day's enactments etcetera  
 To the forward grumble of liberals and others.  
 And often Beleerd came on the flow,  
 A buzz in that vast ear of emptiness,  
 Growing louder, crying "Faster! Much faster!"  
 Then dwindling back on "Bills! More Bills!"  
 And jungles of nothing grew up from the seed of sound  
 While Staak, a fever-bird, beneath a tree  
 With ox-horn branches, crooned his song:  
*"For warders have orders  
 And babies as well."*

## XXXII

Often when Beleerd was waxing, the Liberals  
 Baited him, "When does the enclosure start . . . ?"  
 "Not yet!" his cry came back at first, "Not yet!  
 So many counters, so many answers, six million  
 Whites, blacks twenty million, converted to billions . . ."  
 But later he would stop and smooth the sand,  
 And say, "Abacus, computer, all have failed.  
 The answer's in the ancient ethnic wisdom. . . ."  
 From a bag hung round his neck he'd tumble  
 Some wishing-bones, a rabbit's femur, poker dice,  
 Lucky beans and withered testicles of goats.  
 Over these strange counters he would murmur:  
*"Abra  
 Capravda  
 Black spots and malaras,  
 Races  
 Have places  
 And groups have their areas."*

But still he would rush away shouting, "Bills! More bills!"

## XXXIII

In the press gallery one pale reporter  
 Gave up at last and wrote a homesick ballade,  
 A letter from an exile to his country  
 And whatever head of state it might possess:

Sir, though our souls conspire at odds  
 And in their own dark places grow  
 Furious or fearful for their gods,  
 Yet in our youth once, long ago,  
 We walked in the same homespun flesh  
 Under the single sun we know  
 And every summer brought afresh  
 The small red apples from Grabouw.

And though our souls can never mix  
 These may unite our bodies yet,  
 The lithe brown girls of District Six  
 And golden grapes of Graaff-Reinet,  
 And every colour's equal still  
 In love of meats and fruits we grow,  
 The excellent goat of Jansenville  
 And small red apples from Grabouw.

If I were back I'd ease our soul's  
 Division and our mutual scorn  
 Over a calabash and bowl  
 Of sour milk and kaffir-corn,  
 Or drown our spiritual snarl  
 In Windhoek beer or wines that grow  
 Upon the sandy slopes of Paarl—  
 Or suck sweet apples from Grabouw.

Envoi:  
 Chief, Premier or President  
 Please rest your soul before you go  
 And keep our mutual flesh content  
 With small red apples from Grabouw.

## XXXIV

Even when the token Opposition sat  
 Both gagged and bound—to stop their gestures—

Production went no faster, and the House  
 Continued in perpetual commotion.  
 The Neths now spoke against the silence:  
 For when a speaker paused to draw a breath  
 Silence made its irritating interjection.  
 They roared on end to drown its questions.  
 And at the row of dummies opposite  
 They catapulted cat-calls and derision  
 And sometimes eased themselves of outrage  
 By smashing in those deprecating faces  
 And shouted, "Parrots-pappagaie!" after  
 Wooden birds knocked down on folk occasions.

## XXXV

Another thing was that the Opposition faces,  
 Despite continual black eyes and bloody noses,  
 Stayed possible to recognize apart.  
 Among the Neths distinction faded daily,  
 Perceptibly they grew upon each other,  
 Establishing a facial common front  
 With long hairs hanging curtains from their brows.  
 And soon they gave up looking at themselves  
 Appraisingly in lavatory mirrors.  
 Sitting with his fellows in the House  
 Each Neth felt shut up in a hall of mirrors  
 Where every face reflected back his own,  
 And talking to his friends was talking to himself.  
 Though boasting of his individualism  
 Often a Neth grew terrified to feel  
 His self outside his self, or elsewhere.  
 Dissimilar faces seemed a mockery, an insult  
 Deserving to be battered out of countenance,  
 Yet giving contact through the knuckles  
 With a separate existence to his own.

## XXXVI

Time came—if time ever does or goes  
 Down there—when their last hope went out,  
 And their last reason for display was lost.  
 The wives, their feathers leaning right and left,

Who sat a patient pantheon of Aphrodites,  
Above the brawling heroes on the floor,  
Suddenly rose up, marched down the Lobby  
And out in crocodile formation into space.  
A pressman hurried after for a statement.  
"We've seen some several million bills,  
To bring about the perfect separation.  
We women, too, can follow an ideal,  
Or take a hint. . . ." They left him,  
Marching proudly, hats held high,  
Eyes fixed on prospects of immensity.  
Successive curtains of the high, grey void  
Closed on this tiny harem of the Great Ideal

## XXXVII

The ministers in uxorious consternation  
Rode out on donkeys, a distraught commando  
(Harriman couldn't do better in the time).  
They straggled in a fractured column,  
Some rode, some pushed, some dragged their charters  
Out to the dim rim of the eye's reach.  
They stood there calling, then halooing,  
The donkeys, sensing their distress  
Hee-hawed their fellow-feeling to the wilderness.  
The braying and the calling slipped like ghosts  
Into that tomb of waste and space. Morosely  
They returned, and the sensitive beasts they rode  
Kept kicking one another in the stomach.

## XXXVIII

Time was only ticked by change now, in itself  
Simply a continued emphasis of sameness.  
Landman stiffened slowly to a totem-pole,  
His face set permanently in angry oration,  
Was leaned in the corner near the senior officials,  
And when a draught caught in his open mouth  
A hollow murmur came resembling "Baas!"  
Beleerd grew very fat, with a belly  
Bigger than Dingaan's or Lobengula's,  
And sat on a raft made of memoranda



Under a potted palm in the courtyard,  
 Three under-ministers attended him, and Ambrose,  
 Promoted to be his Mbongo, sang praises  
 In suitable rhodomontade. He received  
 A laureate's tot of brandy in the traditional  
 Tin mug. "One way," said Beleerd, "of promoting  
 Indigenous culture." Often Beleerd threw the bones  
 And sat beetling his thoughts among  
 The knuckles, dice, lucky beans and bits of skin.  
 At his feet the wondering back-benchers sat  
 Watching the long division take its shape.  
 And sometimes they could not help asking,  
 "Dokter, when will our people be coming?"  
 (They had put up some signs on the highway,  
 Not even a trickle came through the sluices.)  
 But Beleerd said, "The races are there. Have  
 You not seen the hoardings announcing  
 Here are the Bantu, and Here Afrikaners.  
 Why do you bother about individuals?"  
 And the stemvee returned to the Lobby,  
 And their thinning liquor,  
 And ever more fibrous meat  
 And bread apparently compounded of boll-weevils.  
 Sometimes they smoked, from sheer habit,  
 A tobacco of Brown Books, chopped up.  
 Like puzzled Orang-utang, they stared at each other  
 Through the veils of compulsory faces,  
 Pondered humanity's reluctance to be saved  
 And contemplated shoddiness in everything.

## XXXIX

A whisper scurried through the House  
 "One's come!" "A coloured!" "A Hotnot!"  
 "How?" "Fell out of the sky—so they say!"  
 Dropping bills, hopping benches, regardless they  
 Left the nine gagged muses of maybe-tomorrow  
 And the wind of their going stirred from a corner  
 A faint, hollow and querulous "Baas!"

## XL

He stood at the gates with a Spanish guitar,  
 Long sports-coat, that sagged with a bottle,

Lank olive face, where licence and caution  
 And humour lived rough-house together,  
 Under a prim black hat, one size too small.  
 And in each eye a cautious sentinel  
 Remembered all the freaks he'd fallen through  
 And stood there watching for the horrors still to come.

## XLI

They rushed upon him, crying out,  
 "Where have you come from, you villain!  
 You bloody old bastard, Blikskottel, Hotnot!"  
 They clouted and thumped their emotions,  
 Surrounded, sobbed, shouted and swore.  
 He answered while ducking and dodging  
 "Nay, such a fine welcome from Masters!  
 It's good to see Masters, my Masters,  
 It goes to the heart of Gatipie!"  
 "Gatipie!" they cried, hoarse, and caressing  
 The name, and touching the hem of the past.  
 Gatipie's eyes darted among their emotions:  
 "The Masters wouldn't have a small something . . ."  
 They brought him wine in an old cracked tea-cup.  
 "Masters," he cried, "those sky-high horries  
 Could swim like fruit-flies in this fine Vaaljapie  
 My tonsils would bow down to everyone  
 Like two head-waiters in the Cafe Royal."  
 He drank the doppie with a desert's ecstasy.

## XLII

Ambrose came from where the lone Beleerd  
 Sat by his bones beneath the potted palm  
 And marched Gatipie off like a policeman  
 Followed by a street-crowd of the Neth back benchers.  
 Gatipie muttered, "Don't they scare you, hey?"  
 And Ambrose mumbled, "Me? I never look at them."

## XLIII

And this is the song Gatipie sang  
 To Beleerd, while Ambrose and the back-bench listened:  
 "Master, I tell you in this new-fangle calypso

The Brown people called me Gatipie, the Dipso.  
In the Desert, where we went by the transport boat,  
I caught this most painful drought in the throat.  
And when the war was over and peace was made  
I came home, thirsty, to the building trade.  
Believe me, lime and cement is the worst  
Thing to swallow for a permanent thirst.  
And often me and some old pallies from the war  
Drank a few doppies to the old Cape Corps.  
And I was just coming from having a few  
When there's a helse gewolt in the Avenue  
And a Boere policeman up with his gun  
And knocks off a kaffir, and me the next one!  
Watse respectable! I jump for the gutter,  
And Masters, I'm down the Black Hole of Calcutta!  
Soon I know its the world I'm falling through  
Me and my guitar going China-toe  
Or one of those places where the men wear silk  
And girls without clothes bring you coconut-milk.  
But what I saw was a different sight,  
Girls who'd give the devil himself a fright.  
My brother, from drinking, once had the horries  
But he saw nothing beside my worries.  
It was like there'd been a donderse battle  
With Loch Ness Monsters and people and cattle  
And spooks and goggas and in-betweens  
And elephant cray-fish and skokiaan-queens.  
And when the whole damn jamboree is dead  
And there isn't a body left stuck to a head,  
Then their spirits come rushing hell-for-leather  
In a hurry to stick their parts together.  
Some grabs three heads and some two tails  
And ladies get bodies with wings and scales,  
And a whale flies past like an autogyro.  
Its like a one-day leave in Cairo  
Anything goes that you somar picks-up.  
Masters never saw such a blerry mix-up.  
It was like the annual Moffies' dance  
Where a zoo and a mad-house take their chance  
Stomping around up there on high  
Letting it go in a tickey draai.  
For, Masters, when affairs got tricky

I'd tingle-tangle on my ou ramkietjie,  
 And, true as Gord, you know, those Things  
 Would come and dance round me in rings.  
 Hasn't Masters never looked up and seen  
 Gatipie's heavenly shebeen?  
 Their eyes would shine so much with zest,  
 Thousands, more than at the Rugby Test,  
 It was like the Milky Way went round  
 Dancing to my ou ramkietjie's sound.  
 Music made them so respectable  
 I might have been up there playing still,  
 But I sighed one day, 'My throat's on fire,  
 And I want to get back to my old Maria!'  
 And one of those Things came dancing near  
 And bends and whispers in my ear,  
 'Maria's alive but she walks with sticks  
 And her age is one hundred and twenty-six.  
 And drink—they went on with that ethnic bunk  
 Till everyone was getting drunk,  
 And one fine day with all their nerves on edge  
 The whole damn nation joined to sign the pledge.  
 Sorry, Gatipie, that is the position,  
 They had a revolution and got Prohibition.'  
 Haai, Masters, this news was a terrible shock,  
 And my heart was heavy like a concrete block.  
 And I got that falling feeling too,  
 So I drops like a sinker here, to you."

## XLIV

Though members felt the telling of the time  
 Toll great bells within their hearts  
 They stuffed their ears with brown Gatipie's song  
 And muffled a deep sound with memories.  
 They kept Gatipie playing, playing  
 Recalled brown hands upon long-gone ramkietjies  
 And under other skies in which familiar stars  
 Tinkled their light like silver tickeys,  
 Remembered childhood where an outa might  
 Twang strange wonders from a high-strung heart.  
 They built a fire where the husky throats of flame  
 Murmured the past through all of one day's bills,

And shouted choruses to drown the vast inane.  
 At last like children fell asleep  
 About the ash of Acts and other paper—  
 The desert watched, an old grey nurse outside.

## XLV

Gatipie rose, shook Ambrose, said,  
 "Let's get to Hell out of this frightening place.  
 Its better fun among the proper horrors."  
 They tip-toed through the consolatory dreams  
 And went—the Neths lay round as worn-out children  
 Do when they have cried themselves to sleep.  
 The last flame twitched among the ashen acts,  
 A little dog asleep beneath a bed.

## XLVI

But later, suddenly Beleerd cried out;  
 And all round shivered out of sleep  
 Into the twilight of intangible calamity,  
 And saw the empty place where Ambrose slept  
 And tracks that went to Life's colossal Tree or wall . . . .  
 It was too late to send a posse  
 And there were no police to call.

## XLVII

The members gnashed their teeth, and strange griefs  
 tore them. . . .

## XLVIII

The bells were ringing for a quorum.  
 "Go! Go!" cried Franz Beleerd,  
 "Work with your sweat and blood that pours  
 The mortar of enactments—see  
 The great achievement that is yours."  
 Following his outflung arm they saw  
 Their wall go wandering in the wilderness,  
 A quavering trace across grey sand to draw  
 By art what nothing could express,  
 Their fate, far-fetched and drawn out fine  
 Developing on its own line. . . .