Staffrider

0258-7211 Vol. 8 No.1. 1989 R3.95 (excl. GST)

afika Gwala: Towards a National Culture
ichard Rive: Writing or Fighting
live Dyer: Narrating the Katlehong Murals
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Staffrider magazine is published by Ravan Press Pty Ltd
P O Box 31134 Braamfontein 2017 South Africa

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Typeset by Industrial Graphics (Pty) Ltd. **Printed** by Sigma Press (Pty) Ltd.

Contributions and correspondence should be sent to **The Editor, Staffrider Magazine, PO Box 31134, Braamfontein 2017.** Manuscripts should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. A short, two-line biography should accompany all contributions.

Cover: Bafalo Soldier
by Prince Tose from the Katlehong Murals.

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COMMENT

Nineteen eighty-eight is gone, and the tenth anniversary of *Staffrider* is now an historical fact in the South African cultural calendar. The past year, however, has not only been an occasion of celebration for the progressive cultural fraternity in this country. For all those concerned with establishing a new cultural environment free of ethnic and class prejudices and the abominations associated with Apartheid, 1988 has also been a year of unexpected and even shocking set-backs. Those who uphold the view that culture in general and writing in particular, when aligned with other progressive tendencies, are capable of assisting the process of radical social transformation, must have found the saga surrounding Salman Rushdie's aborted visit to this country disconcerting.

The history of Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* and that of his intended visit to South Africa have been well recorded. Elsewhere around the globe the saga is taking on increasingly macabre forms. Thus, although it is not my intention to rehash the alarming events surrounding Rushdie's planned participation in the annual *Weekly Mail* Book Week, and the role of the forces which prevented him from setting foot on South African soil, it would be a scandalous omission if this magazine, concerned as it is with the struggle against cultural and political tyranny, remained silent on this affair. In fact, the whole incident has brought to the fore, in a rather ironic fashion, the problems and dangers which face writers and cultural activists living and working in repressive environments.

It would be facile to search for and find culprits in organizations which demonstrably participate in the resistance against all forms of censorship, or to heap all the blame onto the fanaticism of religious fundamentalism, notwithstanding the fact that both of these ingredients went into the rather disastrous dish. An equally spurious position would be to blame it on the Cultural Boycott and the machinations involved in it. Keeping in mind, of course, that there still are problems, if not in the aims of the boycott, then at least in the democratic and strategic implementation of it. From the point of view of revolutionary struggle all these factors, important as they are, have been of relative significance. This is especially so when viewed in relation to the political principles which are supposed to govern broad-based popular movements and the role reserved for culture in all this.

It is to these issues that I wish to turn. I do so with the aim of bringing to the fore at least two important questions.

The first, which is hardly a startling new idea, is related to the mass-based democratic movement in South Africa. While this movement has been responsible for one of the most profound, extensive and successful phases of resistance to the institutions of racial capitalism in this society, it has remained vulnerable to state repression and to dissent among its nominal allies. To effectively address problems of dissent, it seems necessary for progressive organizations to disabuse themselves of sentimental notions

of unity which in practice only serve to impede effective action. This means that alliances should be built on firm historical, material and ideological lines which will enable them to resist the tactics of coercion, usually practised by minor allies with reactionary agendas. If democratic values are to be pursued then it should be made clear to all that no group has the right to dictate to an entire people what they should or should not read.

The second question pertains to the relationship between culture and the struggle for national liberation. It is true that in radically simplified terms, two broad cultural formations are operative in South Africa. One is represented by the so-called culture of apartheid which is linked to the institutions and ideology of racial capitalism. The other is a culture of resistance rooted in the experiences of the majority of people and oriented towards the non-racial democratic option which is aligned to the struggle for national liberation. However, if we are to grasp the complexities involved in the relations between these two general cultural formations and their respective political perspectives, this simplification is in need of the following qualification: While culture in South Africa is politically saturated, it is mistaken to reduce the cultural dimension to politics or to equate it with the political dimension. When this reduction is made, consciously or otherwise, it is bound to give rise to confusions of extremely violent and frightening proportions.

If we restrict ourselves to literature for the moment, the following should be stated unequivocally: Only privileged philistines with narrow bourgeois mentalities will argue for the complete disengagement of literature from history and politics, while discreetly and not so discreetly supporting the political and cultural imperatives of racial capitalism. On the other hand, only fascists, who, as we historically know, are the perverted but nevertheless logical consequence of capitalism in crisis, will reduce literature to politics. In this regard the cultural critic Walter Benjamin was occasioned to write the following at the time of the struggle between socialism and fascism in Europe: While fascism rendered the politics of destruction as a form of aesthetics, dialectical materialism responded by politicizing art.

What Benjamin had in mind with this apparently paradoxical axiom is that the symbolic and critical means of cultural production offer to writers, painters, musicians, photographers and others the possibility to question and oppose political ideas which are not in accordance with the demands of social justice. In situations such as South Africa, where the rights of the working millions are subordinated to the privileges of a few, the challenge to oppose Apartheid, to expose its fallacies and formulate democratic alternatives becomes almost all-pervasive and ineluctable. At the same time, however, Benjamin's axiom warns against the aesthetification of politics which usually involves a vulgar substitution of political slogans for art. It quite often amounts to either flat denunciations of that which it opposes or uncritical affirmations of that which it supports.

Thus, if Rushdie's book is offensive to earnest adherents of Islam, as it patently is, it is so because of the devastating critical power embodied in its imaginative and satirical range. But instead of receiving it as a symbolic act that sets up the possibility of

critically examining certain cultural taboos, it is equated with a sinister plot against Islam. While the liberating potential of self-reflection which Rushdie's work offers is spurned, the manner in which this rejection has been conducted has ironically not enhanced the image of Islam or the claim that compassion, mercy and tolerance are central constituents of religion. I, for one, profoundly hope that those who are responsible for the erroneous equation of Rushdie's fictional narrative with the history of Islam will come to understand that it is the prerogative of the writer to engage critically with his or her society. If culture is stripped of its critical dimensions it spells disaster for the ability of societies to move beyond fixed and frozen modes of thinking, feeling and acting. Such a prospect is of course irreconcilable with a progressive outlook.

This issue of *Staffrider* carries the work of a wide range of contributors, including both established and new writers. There are several new short stories, a variety of poems, a critical essay on South African literature, an essay on the murals of the Katlehong Art Centre, a radio play and a satirical play, as well as reviews and reports.

Also announced in this issue is the planned *Staffrider Visual and Plastic Arts Exhibition* scheduled for 8 October 1989. It will be open to graphic artists, painters and sculptors as well as photographers. There will be two awards, one for the visual and plastic arts and the other for photography. Details concerning the awards will be released shortly. Artists and photographers are invited to submit work before 31 August 1989. Works should be submitted to: The Manager, Market Galleries, Cnr Bree & Wolhuter Street, Box 8646, Johannesburg 2000.

Andries Walter Oliphant

Staffrider

ART & PHOTOGRAPHIC AWARDS

THE MARKET GALLERIES 8 OCTOBER 1989

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

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

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

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

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

ENTRY FORM

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

.....

CATEGORY AND NUMBER OF ENTRIES .....

TITLE/S .....

I .....HEREBY DECLARE THAT THE WORK SUBMITTED HAS NOT BEEN EXHIBITED OR PUBLISHED BEFORE NOR HAVE I AS YET HELD A SOLO EXHIBITION.

Please note: Although every care will be taken in the handling of submissions *Staffrider*, Ravan Press Afrapix and the Market Galleries takes no responsibility for lost submissions.

TEN YEARS OF Staffrider

1978—1988 MAGAZINE

Staffrider Magazine became ten years old in 1988. To mark this occasion Ravan Press has published an anniversary anthology. This 412 page book - to which more than 200 individuals have contributed - consists of a selection of the finest short stories, poems, essays, oral history, photography and artworks that have appeared in the magazine over the past ten years.

Among the short story writers the work of early Staffrider contributors like Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Richard Rive, Mothobi Mutloatse, Achmat Dangor and Ahmed Essop, as well as that of more recent figures such as Njabulo Ndebele, Bheki Maseko, Greg Latter, Steve Jacobs, Gladys Thomas Jayapraga Reddy and Joel Matlou, are included in the collection.

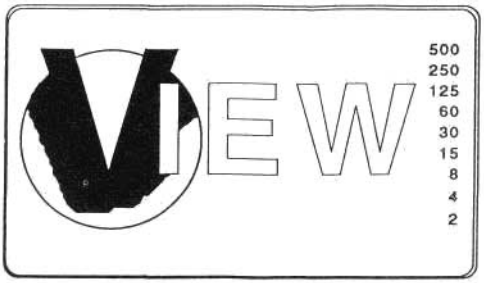
The poetry selection draws on the work of more than sixty poets including outstanding figures like Wally Serote, Lionel Abrahams, Chris van Wyk, Sipho Sepamla, Mafika Gwala, Douglas Livingstone, Don Mattera and many others.

In addition to critical essays, interviews and cumulative index of all the work which has appeared in the magazine, there are reproductions of graphics and art along with a special photographic section compiled by Omar Badsha and Paul Weinberg. This selection of photographs includes work by Paul Alberts, Ralph Ndawo, David Goldblatt and almost every other South African photographer of note and brings into focus the pioneering role performed by Staffrider in the development of social documentary photography in South Africa.

This collection, edited by Andries Walter Oliphant and Ivan Vladislavic, is an important landmark in South African culture for writers, artists, photographers and the large numbers of readers who have been following the exciting journey of this valuable cultural magazine. It is a publication not to be missed.

412 pp (205 x 148) ISSN 0158-7211
Price R24.95 (plus GST)

Orders for this publication can be placed at:
Ravan Press
PO Box 31134
Braamfontein 2017



Volume 1 / Issue 1
January/February
1989
R3,95 excluding GST

FINDER

VIEWFINDER
THE PHOTO-JOURNAL

This publication is intended to facilitate a process of photo-communication between participants, trainers, media-interested individuals, cultural groups and the community at large. Furthermore it will assist in exposing and unearthing the work of our trainee photographers to a larger audience. Through the **VIEWFINDER** and the training programme for 1989 we seek to develop and nurture an interest in design and examination of photographic works for their visual qualities amongst our participants and other readers. It shall provide a good basis for the application of general education and an appropriate medium, to relate it to the discipline of photo-communication. Our first issue in March focusses on **HISTORY** as reflected through the medium of photographs. Looking at the meaning of photographs to historians and community efforts in rewriting history using images. The next issue is continuing the theme, looking largely on **DEMOCRATISATION OF PORTRAITURE.**

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A *DYNAMIC IMAGES* PUBLICATION

The Prophets

Bheki Maseko

The Durban-bound train was due to arrive at any time. The 'black' side of the platform was crowded while whites accompanied by trolley-wheeling porters moved freely at the other end of the platform.

MaNgubane waited anxiously, next to Nhlanhla, keeping a close watch over the luggage that was clustered around their feet. Time and again she felt with her hand between her breasts to see whether the knotted handkerchief in which she had enfolded four hundred rand was still there. She knew very well that it was during the stampede that pickpockets turned pockets inside out.

She was going to Ladysmith to visit her late brother's children. She was also going to slaughter a goat and brew some beer to cleanse the children, as it was custom.

Accompanying MaNgubane were her grandsons Nhlanhla and Sipho to help with the luggage and secure her a seat on the train. Amid the crowd that stood at the edge of the platform awaiting the arrival of the train was Sipho.

The train reared its light at the dark end of the platform causing the crowds to surge forward. Before it came to a halt people were already jumping in through the windows and doors. By the time it came to a halt most of the cubicles were occupied and bolted from within.

'Gogo! Gogo! woza ngapha!' (grandma come this way) rang the voice of Sipho peering from one of the train windows. MaNgubane and Nhlanhla rushed with the luggage towards the window through which Sipho was waving excitedly. They shoved the luggage through the window. It took MaNgubane some time to squeeze her way through the congested passage to the cubicle where Sipho had 'booked' her a seat.

Sitting next to MaNgubane as the train jerked out of Johannesburg station was a fat young man dressed in a white overcoat. He wore a long beard that somehow gave him a priestly look. MaNgubane felt uneasy when he squeezed his massive body between her and another old lady.

'Sorry my people, I don't mean to make you uncomfortable. You can see for yourself that things are bad,' he said smiling apologetically.

Before the train reached Germiston the young man had set the cubicle into a lively discussion. He was a prophet from Evaton where he was born thirty-two years ago. His father was a priest of the Roman Catholic Church but he (the young man) decided to join the Zion Church because he had the holy spirit that gave powers to prophesy.

'Right now I'm on a mission to Newcastle to kick out a tokoloshe that gives the Khambule family sleepless nights. I want to give him a whipping that he will never forget. He'll never set his foot in that house again,' said the prophet, stressing his point by thumbing his lap with his banana-like forefinger.

The train rambled on. The vendors forced their way in and out of the compartments to market their wares. The prophet joked with each of the sellers. He even bought apples for all the people in the cubicle. Each time somebody alighted he would willingly help to off-load the luggage.

'I once went to Koloni to get rid of a mpundulu. It is said to be an evil spirit that is sent by someone to kill or frustrate another person by kicking him. To the victim it appears in the form of a bird or a nicely dressed gentleman but it is invisible to those around him. This mpundulu had already killed many members of the Majola family,' observed the man munching a banana.

'That was one of the most difficult tasks God had assigned me to do,' continued the prophet. 'The man who came to ask me to undertake the task told me that he was told by his late father to consult me because many prophets and traditional doctors had failed. I knew the undertaking was a risk. My own life was in danger. But what else could I have done?' asked the prophet wiping his sweating hands with a handkerchief. 'God had chosen me to do the job.'

'What happened then my child, did you manage to stop the mpundulu?' asked an old lady clad in full church uniform seated in the corner. She had taken great interest in the young man.

'Who? Me Mama?' cried the fat man pointing at his chest with his forefinger. 'Nothing can stop you if you really believe in your God. I knew I had to take precautions because what I was going to face was not child's play. I took all my herbs; called on all my ancestors and prayed to God to give me strength.'

'Mmmmm,' exclaimed his congregation, the old ladies clapping their hands in wonderment. The train rambled on.

MaNgubane and the old lady clad in church uniform were so interested in the story that they even related their own stories,

MaNgubane going as far as telling the purpose of her journey.

The train was now nearing Newcastle. The alighters gathered their luggage, some already forcing their way towards the doors. Slowly the train crawled into the station until it came to a halt. The prophet also alighted and joined throngs of commuters who had streamed onto the platform. He waved cheerfully to his fellow travellers still in the compartment.

Two hours later the train pulled into Ladysmith. MaNgubane joined the crowds of people hurrying to catch buses or taxis to various destinations.

She was still battling with her heavy luggage down the platform when she felt someone touching her on the shoulder and calling her by name. When she turned her head she came face to face with a neatly dressed middle-aged man wearing a clerical collar. He was a total stranger to MaNgubane.

'Don't be surprised to hear me calling you by name, mama, I'm a messenger of God. I have something very important to tell you. Can we just move aside to avoid obstructing passing people?' he said gently pulling MaNgubane aside.

MaNgubane was in a state of confusion. Many things went through her mind as she complied with the man's request. The man looked harmless. He was every inch a priest.

'I'm sorry to tell you that I have bad news for you, MaNgubane. I've had a vision of you for the bigger part of the journey but I did not expect to see you so soon.'

'What bad news do you have my son?' gasped the old lady, laying her open hand on her heaving chest, her eyes wide open.

'Don't be scared mama, nothing on earth can defeat God. God helps all those who believe in Him. First and foremost I would like to tell you that isithunywa, God's messenger, has told me that you are MaNgubane from Senaoane in Soweto.'

'Hawu, hawu, hawu my child, how did you know that?'

'Wait mama, I still have more to tell you. You are going to KwaNomlebhelele to see your late brother's children. He died in a car accident a year ago.'

MaNgubane stared back in disbelief. She wanted to say something but no words came out.

'Quiet mama,' said the man raising his hand to silence her. 'The most important thing I want to tell you is that you will not reach your destination. The person who caused the death of your brother is after you. You will die the same way as your brother.'

'Oh my God, what have I done in this world,' moaned the old

lady literally shivering. Her knees felt rubbery. Her clasped hands remained on her heaving chest. 'Please tell me what to do my child, help me my child.'

'I can help you if you need my help. But you can still look for aid elsewhere if you want to. I have done what God had assigned me to do,' the man replied.

'Excuse me mama,' MaNgubane heard the voice of a young woman addressing her. 'May I please talk to mfundisi?' Before MaNgubane could say anything the woman proceeded, 'Mfundisi, I need your help. Everything you told me on the train is true. If I don't get your help I'll be in trouble.'

'Okay my child, I'll give you my help if you need it. Mama,' said the priest turning to the old lady, 'I'll need your cooperation to solve the problem of this child. She will have to leave everything that is metal or paper as well as her luggage with you while I give her a little prayer in the change room.'

The young woman fished out some paper money from between her breasts, and put it into a purse that she gave to MaNgubane. She also pushed her luggage nearer to the old lady before vanishing into the change room with the priest.

MaNgubane waited anxiously, still pondering what the priest had told her. She was still thinking when the young woman appeared, looking relieved and content.

'The priest says you can come mama. He is waiting for you in the change room. I am happy I met this ma of God. I don't know what I would have done without him,' said the young woman smiling.

'I wish he could also help me,' observed MaNgubane in a tired voice. With trembling hands she took out a purse from the side pocket of her dress. Then she fished out the knotted handkerchief from between her breasts and unclasped the catch pin that fastened it to her dress. She handed everything to the woman.

'So you've come mama,' said the priest as MaNgubane entered the change room. 'Let's not waste time,' he continued, producing a bottle containing water. He ordered MaNgubane to open her palms and sprinkled water on them.

'Close your eyes now, pray silently to your ancestors to brighten your ways.' MaNgubane obeyed. Her hands clasped before her she mumbled silently while the priest placed one hand on her forehead, the other on her chest, appealing to God to have mercy upon her.

'You may go now mama, God will surely be with you,' the priest assured her, shaking her hand.

The old lady left with confidence mixed with anxiety. She walked for some time before realizing that she was not reaching the place where she had left the young woman with her luggage. She looked back and forth to make sure that she had not passed her but could not see her on the semi-deserted platform. She continued thinking that she might have left her further on and walked until she nearly reached the end of the platform without seeing the woman.

MaNgubane's heart was pumping fast. Her knees felt heavy. Quickly she turned back, rushed in the direction of the change room – half running, half walking. She went into the change room several times. She walked right around the building, looking for the priest. He was nowhere to be seen.

'Hawu Nkosi yami, imali yabantwana!' Her voice resounded throughout the station. She slumped to the ground, sitting flat on her buttocks. Tears flowed freely down her cheeks as she sobbed.

The gathering of enquirers was instant. 'Kwenzenjani mama?' some enquired. 'Hawu, hawu, imali yabantwana bami, my children's money,' was all MaNgubane could say as she peered at the faces around her. From time to time she thought she saw the priest or the young woman, but she was always mistaken.

Happiness is a Punch in the Eye

Lawrence Maimane

Martha and Mike were Tshobotsi's neighbours. They were happily married and lived a life filled with fun and lots of fighting.

There was hardly a week that went by without Martha looking as if she had just had a scrap with the riot squad. But the woman was always laughing. All day long, in spite of the plaster and the bandages, she used to sing as she cleaned the house and cooked for Mike. Her man, she said, had no equal in Bophuthatswana, even in Africa. She loved him and she was very happy.

Now Violet Tshobotsi is a woman who minds her own business. When Martha came over to chat with her she always pretended that she did not see the swellings and the scars and she kept her conversation strictly to the weather.

However, one day Martha came running into Violet's kitchen with both eyes closed. She could hardly see through the fat lids – and she was laughing!

She said, 'Well, come on Violet, what do you think about these two beauts, eh? That man of mine has a beautiful punch. I love him.'

As I've said, Violet does not want to know other people's business. But the woman was practically beaten blind and Violet just could not help herself so she said, 'Dammit! Are you crazy, mad or something? Just what are you smiling for. If you are thrilled by facial damage why don't you stand in front of a moving bus? If I were you I would leave the dog! How on earth can you keep on taking all this punishment and still love the big gorilla? Here, come to the sink and let's see what we can do about your eyes.'

Over the sink Martha said, 'You do not understand, dear, these blue eyes are going to get me a white winter coat, the one you and I admire so much in John Craig's shop window. Remember three weeks ago when my front teeth were knocked out? Well that got me these smart Barker shoes and this double-breasted two-piece suit. Not only that, but after every fight Mike is the world's best lover. I tell you Violet, after every punch-up he begs me to forgive him, promising he will never lay a finger on me again, and says I can ask for anything and he will buy it for me. With Mike it is so easy to be a happy woman,' Martha laughed and went back to her place, singing.

Joe walked in and, after pecking Violet on her cheek, slipping off his coat and settling down in the easy chair to read his paper, asked, 'What did old Mike do this time? Can I help you with the dishes, dear?' Martha looked at Joe. He sat behind the large sheets of newspaper in his shirt sleeves, so gentle, so kind, so understanding, so predictable – so bloody unexciting!

That girl, Martha, was living, Violet thought as she left home and went next door. Casually, she asked Martha, 'Why does Mike hit you in the first place?'

Martha grinned broadly and said, 'Aha! You are getting the message, eh Violet? Listen, sister, when I need something badly, which is always, I start an argument with him. If he comes home drunk, I give him a few smacks, accuse him of all kinds of things and keep on until he loses his temper and pow! I get it on the nose. Later, I get it in my bedroom. The next day I get it gift-wrapped from the fashion shop. Easy. What more do you want to know?' she concluded with a grin.

Violet thanked her and went back to her place. Her head was full of plans. From the fridge she took a bottle of beer and placed it with a glass next to her kind, lovable, peaceful and half-dead Joe.

Joe said, 'Thank you Violet,' as she knew he would. He drank and once again vanished behind the paper, just as she knew he would.

'Now, Violet, now!' she said to herself and without warning she tore the paper from his hands and screamed, 'I have had enough of you! You just sit there day after day, drinking beer, dropping your cigarette ash on my floor and you expect me to go down on my knees every time to scrub and polish. You don't give me enough money and who was that girl in your taxi-cab last night? And when are you going to buy me a new double-breasted coat, you miser!'

Violet pulled him up by his shirt and gave him a few smacks. She closed her eyes waiting for the punch, already working out the style of coat she was going to buy and the warm kisses that were going to come after this fight.

Martha and Mike met Violet on the front stoep. She was crying like a pig being slaughtered and Martha gave her her shoulder to weep on, saying, 'We heard the shouting and I told Mike we had better come over in case Joe went too far in this first fight. Did he hit you very hard, girl? Let me see. Is it your eyes? Your lips? There is no

blood. Where did he hit you? It must be very sore to make you cry like this. You are sobbing like a broken woman.'

Mike went to the door, saying, 'Let us go in and speak to Joe. He must be careful where he hits you. After all you are a woman.'

Violet stopped him. 'Please,' she said, 'you must not go inside. I do not want you to see what happened there. It is going to shock you.'

'What did you do? What did he do? Is he alright?' they both shouted. Violet did not answer them. She could not speak. It was all too terrible for words.

How could she tell them that after she had smacked him and waited for his manly punch to knock out her teeth, Joe stood up, went to the kitchen, came back with a bucket of water – and was now inside, on his knees, scrubbing the floor.

A Day in the Life

Steve Jacobs

'Do you have a play by Shakespeare?'

I looked up reluctantly from my crossword. 'Which one?'

'William Shakespeare,' she said, rather awkwardly.

'Of course,' I murmured, rising to help. As I led her into the shop, I felt her eyes on my back, unsure whether to trust this guide into a foreign territory. Her suspicion proved well-founded because I abandoned her in the drama section and returned to the safety of my newspaper and coffee. From the desk I could see her, balanced on high heels before a shelf of titles which she contemplated with obvious and growing dismay, reluctant to touch. In one of the aisles, the vacuum cleaner droned, rotund dog on its morning walk: cleaning is a noisy business and Primrose makes the most of it.

A hand slapped down fifty cents and snatched a *Cape Times*. Quick eyes flashed in a face which was a map of knobs and scars, underlined by a grey wisp of beard. Before I could say good morning, Gibson had gone. I watched him weaving his way through the traffic, a small energetic figure protected from the cold by his balaclava of yellow, green and black stripes. I imagined him leaning against the wall of the Shell Garage next door, flipping through the newspaper that he'd bought for Morris, as he does every day.

The morning's headlines made me shudder: CROSSROADS DEATH TOLL RISES. I felt that we were at war.

'How are things out your way?' I asked.

Primrose looked up from inside a cloud of dust. 'Only Crossroads is burning,' she said. 'Khayelitsha is quiet.' She returned to her work, green feathers twitching indignantly at dirt trapped between pockets of books.

Overcome by Shakespeare, the woman in high heels hurried out, signalling to me with a shrug of the shoulders that she had given up. I smiled sympathetically and settled down to wait for the housewives and tourists, although there have not been too many of those since the unrest began.

Two teenage boys erupted into the shop, pushing a supermarket trolley full of boxes. 'Naartjies!' they chimed in unison. 'Arandabag! Sweet as honey, more for your money!' They jostled each other in the exuberance of selling.

'They're good for the heart,' the bigger boy declared. The other one nodded sagely, a wide-toothed comb protruding from his head of tight curls like a tipsy halo.

'Tomorrow we got apples,' they promised, and left, nudging and kicking each other around the wheels of the trolley.

When Brian returned from depositing our small profit, I tidied the shelves. I have a theory that the books go visiting at night after we've closed the doors: Conrad had journeyed to the African section to see how Kurtz was doing; Coetzee had left the austere heart of the country for the cooking section, settling between *Scrumptious Cheese Cakes* and *1000 ways with Brown Rice*. A bluebottle, brilliant as an emerald, had chosen to die on the Penguin edition of Orwell's *Collected Essays.*

Brian, balding and paunchy, a cigarette hanging from his lower lip, was sitting at the desk. The phone rang and he spoke into it, exhaling smoke. 'No, I don't have one in stock at the moment but I can order it from Jo'burg. It'll take two weeks. Fine, I'll call you when it arrives.'

'If lung cancer doesn't get you first,' I muttered, but he waved my comment away with a flick of the wrist. His bracelet tinkled.

At 12:30, a sweating man in blue overalls delivered the *Argus.* As the pile of papers thudded onto the counter, the headlines screamed: SHACKS RAZED AS MEN GO ON RAMPAGE. Primrose clicked her tongue when she read the report, and shook her head. I took a mouthful of coffee, but it was cold.

During lunch we had a flurry of customers, men buying thrillers and detective stories, and women asking for books of 'nice poems'. They blurred in my mind, became one Secretary selecting Patience Strong and one Chartered Accountant paying for Robert Ludlum.

Brian took his half hour break after lunch, and I could breathe again. With the vindictiveness of a passive smoker, I threw the ashtray containing his burnt-out ends into the dirt bin. Emotion expended, I stared out of the window. The shop was empty. A few women from the supermarket next door, done up in bonnets and aprons, were taking their afternoon stroll, pretending to be English country maidens; a girl, thin as paper, jogged by jerkily, her pained eyes reflecting pleasures of bodily torment which slobs like me have been fortunate enough to avoid; the chemist's messenger wobbled his scooter into the traffic, as heavy as the overloaded taxis that pluck their fares from under the noses of oncoming buses. Across the road, a fat couple squeezed through the

turnstiles of the delicatessen, perhaps salivating in anticipation of the smoked salmon on rye which is my favourite.

I was dreaming of Rita when a woman in a blue outfit confronted me, her low neckline revealing a full bosom. I caught a whiff of a rich scent; a diamond put the seal on her pedigree.

'I'm from the Hydrangea Book Club,' she announced with a sweet smile. 'Can you help me with the new books?'

Where was Brian? Book clubs are his department. He loves escorting these bejewelled, thickly made up wives through the softly erotic delights of the Judith Krantzes and Shirley Conrans: something to do with his mother, we've discussed it. I looked around frantically, but there was no sign of my partner. And so, fixing a grin on my face, I led her to the hardcover fiction section where the shelves groaned under the weight of thousands of pages of Literature's lucrative flip-side, our bread and butter. She followed me happily, her face bright with anticipation. I felt her heavy warmth, and, despite my strongest efforts, found that I was glancing down the front of her dress. Thankfully, we reached our destination before I could embarrass myself and bring the firm into disrepute. At random, I started pulling out volumes. 'The new Robin Cook, a medical thriller ... and you could try this one about the Arab-Israeli conflict ... here's a nice family saga ... and this is the latest Stephen King: horror.'

Her gold earrings swung as she leaned forward; her gold necklace tied her domestically to a husband who was a doctor having an affair with his nurse, or a lawyer with his clerk.

'Some of the girls like horror,' she said coquettishly.

'It's very good,' I lied. The husband had better secure that necklace tightly.

'Is it new?'

'These are all new.'

'Which have the other Book Clubs bought?'

As I floundered for an answer, God showed His mercy: Brian returned. Gracefully, I bowed out. 'My partner will help you,' I said smugly, and left her groping for meaning in a treacherous forest of blurbs, her small mouth twisted in concentration as she tripped over superlatives.

Our bread and butter.

During my break, I walked past Morris's Garage. Gibson, neat in his blue and red Shell outfit, pulled himself away from the wall beside the cashier's kiosk and sauntered out to meet me. Dreadlocks escaped like eels from under his balaclava.

'Hello,' he rasped. 'Has the new *Learn and Teach* come in yet?'

A team of municipal workers digging up the pavement, watched over by a white foreman, glanced up at Gibson's voice which grated through the air like a file through bars.

'Not yet. I'll let you know.'

'Thanks.' He stood, looking towards the mountain, his hands thrust deeply into his pockets.

'Excuse me,' I said, self-conscious under the scrutiny of the foreman, 'I have some shopping to do.' Gibson did not seem to hear, but continued staring at Lion's Head as if it were the most wonderful sight in the world.

Primrose passed me on her way back from the post office, a pile of parcels in her stately grasp. 'I'm going home now,' she said. 'I must take the early bus ... just in case there's some trouble.'

'All right,' I replied absently, still thinking about Gibson. 'I'll see you tomorrow.'

The sun shone brightly, the pigeons foraged in the middle of the road, a yellow police van hurtled helter-skelter down the main street. I returned to the shop burdened with my packets from Woolworths.

At 4:30, a harassed deliveryman dropped off the late final. Brian was making tea. I'd served a young couple who were emigrating and wanted a glossy book on Cape Town to take overseas, to remind them, as they put it, 'of this beautiful land'.

Gibson sidled into the shop. He stood at the doorway, squinting at the newspaper. 'It's terrible,' he declared. He did not look at me: he might have been on a platform addressing an audience. 'Last night they burned down my house.' I inspected the shop anxiously, relieved that there were no other customers. Gibson jerked his head. 'They chased us away and burned down my house. We just had to run, my wife and my children and me.'

'Who burned down your house?' I asked.

'The witdoeke.' His hands groped for imaginary weapons, fended off attackers who lived in his mind.

'But what about the police? Didn't they help you?'

'The police are there all the time in their hippos. But they shoot at *us.*' He stubbed his chapped finger on the newspaper. 'They shoot while the witdoeke burn our houses.'

I stared at him, unable to grasp fully what he was saying.

'The witdoeke are like Judas, betraying their own people,' he rasped. 'The Government gives them guns and money to attack their brothers and burn down their houses. But we will have

revenge.' He looked up at the ceiling. 'God will help us.'

'Where's your family now? Are they all right?'

He snorted. 'They're staying with my brother in Guguletu. But he's already got fifteen people in his house. It's too small.'

'How do you still manage to come to work?' I asked incredulously.

'I must come to work. Otherwise Morris will get someone else in my place. And then how will my family eat? And I must have money to buy more zinc ... to build my house again.'

He turned to go, but stopped, scratching his head under his balaclava, as if he had forgotten something. He wiped his hand across his eyes.

Then he said bitterly, a slight lowering in the pitch of the rasp. '*He* doesn't know how difficult it is for me just to come to work.'

Suddenly I blurted out: 'Do you want me to give you a lift home tonight?' The words had a momentum of their own; they escaped from my mouth as fleet and sharp as weasels, surprising me, although he seemed to take my offer for granted.

'The Airport Road is dangerous,' he said, 'and so is Lansdowne Road. And so is Klipfontein Road. And there are police roadblocks and you can't get through.' I expected him to thank me, and was piqued when he did not. 'I'll take a taxi,' he said. He dug in his pocket and produced 40c. 'For the *Argus*.'

'No, keep the money.' Rita would have accused me of being patronizing, but Gibson seemed to appreciate the gesture. He looked directly at me, as if only then discovering that I was present.

'Thank you, Comrade.'

'A pleasure,' I stammered. He folded the newspaper under his arm and walked out, chin held high.

For a long time, I stared down the empty aisle at the large Penguin which hugs the wall at the end of the shop; a modern hieroglyph which, to me, represents knowledge, the best face of a flawed Mankind.

I was roused from my reverie by an insistent little woman with a beak-like nose and a black moustache. 'Are you serving?' she clucked irritably, stabbing her umbrella into the carpet. 'I'm looking for a bridge book.'

'This way,' I said brusquely and she waddled after me to the section on card games where I left her.

Brian came out of his office. 'We didn't do so well today.'

'Too bad!' I snapped and he stared at me, taken aback.

'My my, we're touchy,' he commented after a while, stroking his mouth for comfort. 'Are we having trouble with Rita?'

'It's nothing.'

'This should cheer you up.' With the flourish of a magician, he produced an envelope from the papers he carried. 'Go on. Open it.'

I did, to humour him. It was already open: he wanted me to repeat an action that must have given him pleasure. It was a cheque for over eight thousand rand for books we had supplied for black education. Brian's face was wide with joy and the expectation of my delight.

'Very nice,' I said, but my happiness was tempered by a vague disquiet. Brian took the cheque back without comment, although I could see he was puzzled.

For a moment, we stood in silence, looking past each other like strangers. Through the window, I could see the flower-seller sitting despondently outside the delicatessen. A man in a dark blue suit got out of a BMW and bought a bunch of roses from her. She smiled tiredly as she accepted his money; he was smiling too as he drove away.

Behind me, the woman carrying the umbrella slapped a book on the counter. 'I'll take this one,' I heard her say.

Brian rang up the sale.

The winter night settled heavily on the grey city; street lights and car lights tried to ward off the gathering darkness. I pulled a copy of the *Argus* towards me. There was a photograph of the squatter-camp, a pall of smoke hanging over it like a volcanic cloud. With morbid fascination, I read the accompanying article. It began: 'The body lay on its back at the side of the road, charred beyond recognition – a victim of the Crossroads strife...'

A 50c coin drops on the counter and I look up. It's Morris.

'Where's Gibson?' I ask as he takes a *Cape Times* with dirty fingers.

Morris shakes his head; he has sad eyes. 'The bugger didn't come to work, so I fired him. You just can't trust them these days, can you?' He hitches up his pants and shuffles out, muttering: 'You can't trust them at all ...'

From the street, a voice chimes: 'Arandabag! Arandabag!'

Unrest Report

Peter Rule

An enormous fly with red fiery wings, as big as a crow or a buzzard, he guessed, landed on the nurse's shoulder as she leant over him. It gave him a covert predatory glance like something awaiting its meal. She didn't seem to notice or care. Probably used to the monsters, an occupational quirk. It glistened, rubbing its fat legs as if in anticipation, grinning at him.

'What's the matter, baba?' the nurse asked nonchalantly, tilting her head. Her boobs heaved inside her tight uniform as she shook the thermometer. The monster-fly glanced at her secretly, gleefully, with its cluster of fluorescent eyes. Then it took off, buzzing like a surveillance helicopter over his bed. He ducked, wincing; the pain burnt through his shoulder and up behind his ear like something tearing.

'What are you playing at? Can't you lie still once in a while? Now you've disturbed the bandages with your bobbing and weaving. Is there a spider in your pants or what? Lie still, man!'

She rearranged the bandage behind his ear, pressing his head. Why did she always have to shout at him? There was nothing wrong with his hearing, despite the head wound – he still could not touch it without flinching and his ear was swollen and raw like a peeled fruit. But that nurse, she treated him like a deaf imbecile whose wits had leaked out with the blood loss.

'And what's with the big eyes?'

She frowned at him, scribbled something on the chart at the end of the bed and waddled off to see to the man down the row with pipes stuck under his pyjama pants. Fortunately the fly had buzzed off in search of other prey and he was out of danger for the moment. It was all very well for her to frown and click her tongue and flaunt her superior airs. Did she have to lie in bed all day and watch them leering like vultures from the flypaper above his bed? And when the coiled flypaper shifted in the air, the light caught in their wings like the blades of knives, razor-edged and brilliant, penetrating deep into his eyes. Hot blades of pain criss-crossing behind his eyes, cutting the tissue of his brain. Could he scream? Could he shout like the fat uncle three beds along for them to do this, do that, run here and there? Sometimes he tried to shake his arm to get their attention. Once he had torn down the flypaper in a fit and then cried silently as it stuck to his fingers. They scolded

him like a child, crumpled it into the wastepaper basket, hooked up a new coil. But most of the time they ignored him.

Yes, they had no time for him in their bustle – that was plain to see. And hadn't he always wanted to marry a nurse? He so admired their tight white uniforms, their sense of purpose, their composure under pressure. Give a man a nurse, that's a woman who knows how to go about business! That's what he used to assure his friends when the conversation turned to relationships.

What had the old man said? The government was spending all its money on military equipment, on invading neighbouring countries, on skop-skiet-donder law-and-order in the townships – it could not afford to give the nurses a fair deal. But they had to fix what was left over from the wars, that's what he had said. And there were empty wards in white hospitals where they used black nurses but refused black patients. Did they think blacks would stain the sheets? Crazy, but the old man had said it was happening, no doubt about it. Rows of empty beds. Maybe the government should make a law that more white people had to get sick to avoid wasting bedspace.

His body stiffened, toes curling in sudden alarm. Government spending or the lack of it reminded him of his rent. Rent! A hot flush swept down his body. The noise, the lights, the clench of fear in the guts – it all came crowding in now.

He propped himself up on his good elbow, eyes wide, cheeks burning. The memory, so sudden and immediate, seemed to have its own spilling heat like some virulent brew in a crumpled tin. It consumed the saliva in his mouth, parched his throat, flared match heads in the corners of his eyes. He tried to loosen his clenched throat, swallowing in spasms, shivering from the memory of that pre-dawn chill. All sorts of uniforms – green, khaki, blue – stamping on his front door at four o'clock in the morning. *Greenbeans* with soldiers as back-ups hammering the door so that the house shuddered and reverberated. Panic gripped him, under the blankets he was hot and cold. His sister's child crying with fright, a thin wail beneath the heavy blows. Four o'clock! Of all the godforsaken hours known to human visitation!

They flashed torches into his face, clinked rifles, made formal declarations about council arrears and services rendered, shoving the furniture around like they were itching to dump it all in the street there and then. Did they have to send an entire battalion to his front door to issue the warning? Did they expect him to swoop out of his bedroom in a Mig fighter aircraft?

They had gone, slamming the doors of their vehicles, revving the engines. But the headache! It had stayed with him through the next day at the garage. Yes, and he had tried to drink it off in the evening at Maluga's place, on his way home from the station.

How long ago has that been? He lay flat on his back shaking with an agitation that made his blood rush. He had to pay the rent, the rent, the rent! He was the sole breadwinner for the seven in the house. Rent boycott or not, they would have nowhere to go if they were evicted. Erect an emergency settlement in the street? Scrounge for a site at Mshenguville? What if it was already too late to pay? And what was he doing in this bed in this row of sick men covered in strange-smelling sheets?

He crouched up, rocking unsteadily with the burning in his veins, and crept to the end of the bed. He lifted the plastic file with its pages and charts and stared at it. It was his name. He remembered that at least. But what were these squiggles and scrawls? – the doctors made them after talking to each other over his body. He could not make it out, leaning trails of crushed loops and blotched full stops. It looked like scribbling to test the flow of ink in a pen. He grimaced, pulling at the corners of the pages, trying to make sense of it. The superstitious rural people used to think if you swallowed a paper with the doctor's writing on it you would recover from your sickness. He crumpled a page in his hand, trembling.

'Give it back to me, baba!' the nurse demanded, standing in front of him. She prised his fingers open and took the paper away. 'This is the doctor's stuff. It's not for you. You must lie still now otherwise you will not get better. Come, get under the sheet.'

He shut his eyes, gritting his teeth as she moved him back, pushing him down, pulling the sheet over him. He felt extremely weak, hardly able to move, as an inner heat licked the strength from his muscles. He wanted to cry. He seemed to have no control over his emotions. What had got into him, he wondered. Why did he want to cry into the soft uniformed bosom of the nurse? He resisted the compulsion with great effort, clenching his teeth. The nurse patted his sheet, adjusted his pillow with her efficient hands. Then she went away and the tears rolled down his face, hot and salty at the corners of his taut mouth. What had happened to him, he asked. What had sucked away his strength and laid him flat in this place? He shuddered, folding his knees up to his chest, trying to hide his face.

He felt someone take hold of him, thin fingers half-rubbing, half-

shaking his arm. Bloody nurses! Did they have to continually prod and vex him? Were they paid peanuts specifically to harass him in his confusion? He looked up angrily and saw the old man's pot-holed grin, sporadic teeth contending crookedly for attention. It was the grandfather whose words he had recalled earlier. Perhaps he had heard them in his sleep – the old man always seemed to be talking to someone as if determined to show everyone what prizes he had left in his oral cavity. He was sitting in his chair beside the bed with a brace on his neck. He looked up at him on the bed and winked an ancient veined eyelid.

'You're shaking like a cold dog,' the old man said. 'It affects my bones to see you rattling in your skin like that, son of my daughter. Can't you take a pill or do up your shirt buttons? It is clear that the shock has caught you, but no one is going to kick you in here. Try to relax, it is quite all right to do that in this place if you can manage it. Besides, the creaking of your bed is beginning to annoy me!'

He tried to tell the old man to go to hell but all that came from his throat was a broken sound, a crushed sob from beneath his strange tongue, and he turned on his side, shuddering with a new release of tears. The old man grunted, hissing between his teeth, and reached his old hand up from the chair. At last his shuddering subsided. He wiped his eyes and nose on his sleeve and sat up nodding his head to the grandfather.

'Don't mention it, son. At my age, do you think I have not seen a man's tears before? It is the shock that has got hold of you. They brought you in last night, said you were attacked by tsotsis on the way home from a shebeen. Maybe you can't remember what happened. Give it time, give it time, and it will return to you, young man. At least you are alive and out of danger.'

The old man picked up the newspaper which was lying in his lap, put on a pair of scratched black-rimmed spectacles and began to read, pouting as he gently touched his cigarette-ash wisps of beard with a knobbled finger. Every pore in his face seemed to have its own wrinkle, from the broad forehead with its ridges and furrows, isolated tufts of white hair around the ears, to the corners of his eyes and mouth with their criss-cross of tiny dry tributaries to the sinuous folds of his throat. His face was a country trodden on by the years, each wrinkle and crease an etching of history. But when he smiled, the terrain rumpled in a habitual quake of skin and chin and cheekbones.

'I can see you are wondering why I am here,' he said, looking

up from the news, eyes glinting beneath the old lids. He leaned forward and looked from side to side down the rows of beds. 'Even if you're not wondering, you're going to hear anyway. What else can a distinguished elder do in this place but poke his finger into someone's ear. The truth is, I am in detention at the moment. I have an arrangement with the guards: I promise not to run away, they promise not to babysit me. They can sit outside in the sun, I can be sick without their supervision.'

When he laughed it was no toothpaste advertisement – a scantily pipped wedge of watermelon with an off-colour rind. But the mirth ran across his face like quick ripples of light.

'Why detention? Well, I was elected to a committee in our street. We organized garbage collections and dug holes to bury it in. Got hold of the street gangsters and helped them to mend their ways. Oh yes. And when the councillors and *greenbeans* tried to evict families for rent, we sounded the alarm, blew our whistles; everyone got themselves outside and we managed to discourage those money-grabbers and send them packing. As you can imagine, my fellow, they weren't exactly overjoyed and singing praise songs to us! So they came back looking for us. I had a little fall from one of their trucks. They didn't want me to cause them public embarrassment by dying in their capable hands – and believe me, I gave them the impression that I was about to exit for the fathers – so they sent me here!'

The sharp spirit of the old man bewildered him. Here he was with a twisted neck braced in some kind of stiff toilet roll and under police guard because he had stood forward to serve his community. And he was still able to assure a fellow patient that rest would do him the world of good. Sleep is a sick man's friend, as it leans down on his eyes and the sounds of voices and a spurting basin tap and mattress springs weave into a thick rough blanket that pulls itself slowly over him.

When he awoke he was hot, breathing shallowly. There was a sharp pressure on his eyelids, something pricking his irises through the thin skin like invisible swarming insects.

'I know my old age from the wars I have seen with these old eyes and heard from my elders. Indeed, I count my years by wars.'

It was the grandfather talking to two younger men who sat with him in their dressing gowns, listening. He squirmed in his bed, rubbing his eyes, blinking.

'And my father before me. He told me about the red uniforms

and the boers, the conquest of the land. They made our fathers pay rent for their own land, you know, hut taxes and dog taxes to force them into wage labour.'

The light streamed in through the windows at the end of the ward. It fell on a bedframe and was spinning slowly along the bars like the white tongues of flame that swirled through the air, glancing off motes, licking his eyelids with sharp hot jabs. He covered his eyes with his arm, gritting his teeth against the *detonations of pain inside his skull.*

'Kruger and the Queen – they squabbled over the land and labour of our fathers! Then there was the Great War. Many of our fathers volunteered to serve the Crown. Perhaps they thought it would earn them redress in their own land. What dreams! They sailed on a big ship to the war in Europe, but it was sunk on the way and they drowned in a foreign sea. Did they know the white men were fighting about how to divide up Africa among themselves?'

The old man polished his spectacles as he spoke, spitting on the lenses, squinting and frowning as he recalled the days of the fathers. The familiar voice of the old man eased him, the fires slowly dying in his head. He lay still, listening.

'My father was among the drowned,' the old man continued after a silence. 'But this long life, is it a blessing or a curse? They say to me, "Joo! You have so many years in your beard. You are a lucky man!" But is it lucky to see this one killing that one? To go to the funeral of your son's first-born – seventeen years old, stabbed in the street. All the while you live a great number of years, you witness a great number of deaths. The children of my childhood, they are all gone. They have left me behind to count the wars of my life. And the young ones think I am an old fool. "The grave forgot about him," they say. But the wars are taking these young ones now. It has come into the townships with soldiers stampeding in all directions – haven't we seen it, my brothers? – and children hunting for impimpis with matches and tyres. Yes, I have outlasted many of my son's generation. And maybe it's a punishment.'

He had tried to warn the nurses about the fires in the ward. Those fires could eat a man in his bed, lick the flesh off his bones, turn him into a pile of ash. But they scolded him and sent him back to his bed, treating him like a child. Did they think that because he had lost his voice he was witless? 'Stop your games! Get back to

bed!' What was wrong with them that they could not see the dangers?

Of course he knew it was not their fault alone. It was the same problem in this hospital and in any other hospital he had ever been to. Too many patients, not enough nurses, not enough beds. That meant there were old men sitting in armchairs with torn seats and stained covers dribbling into the lapels of their pyjamas. They would die soon anyway, perhaps that was the reasoning. The public contribution to eternity? 'Go to hell!' one had said to a doctor the day before. 'Leave me alone! Can't you see I'm sick?' And a kid with a hole in his head who had limped out that morning, no name he could remember, discharged for taking up space. The nurses run off their feet because there was always a sick mouth crying from this bed or that mattress on the floor, a drip here, a bedpan there, a whining delirium in the corner.

But what about the fires?

'My colleagues,' he heard the grandfather say with a sly chuckle to his two friends, 'we must look at the shortage of white patients in our white hospitals. We must bend our minds in that direction, colleagues.'

He turned over to listen to the debate. The old man put on his spectacles importantly and glanced down at some notes scribbled on the back of a cigarette box. The other two frowned attentively in their bandages.

'As Minister of Health,' the grandfather continued, 'I propose the Health Wastage Elimination and Annihilation Bill. Quite a mouthful, heh – but don't be surprised at the terminology, gentlemen. I have had many years to collect clever words and store them for special occasions.

'In order to fill the empty beds, we in the government – I have discussed this intimately with my colleague the Honourable Minister of Defence – propose the conscription of all white males and females under the age of sixty-five with a view to the immediate invasion of Libya. Don't raise your eyebrows, gentlemen! It is common knowledge that the place festers with terrorist bases which threaten our frontiers! We will invade through Zimbabwe, Zambia, Zaire etcetera. Since they are unlikely to grant us travelling permits, we will be compelled simply to shove our way through! The Minister of Defence has promised me this will fill our beds with patriotic patients. What's the verdict, colleagues?'

One of the listeners sucked in his cheeks meditatively, fingered

the bandage over his left eye and cleared his throat with a prolonged grate.

'As Leader of the Official Opposition,' he began, straightening his back and craning his neck, 'I can say I agree, comrade Minister with this amendment: that we convert Zimbabwe and other neighbouring states into resettlement camps for our surplus blacks. My justification is that they come from the north anyway.'

'But what about the darkies, the non-whites and under-whites already in our three-roomed house?' The other listener peered expectantly over the wall of bandages which covered his broken nose. 'If they want to sit in parliament they must also do their duty on our ever-extending borders. What could be more reasonable?'

'We might have to appoint two new Ministers of Defence to take care of them. The present minister might not take kindly to the influx,' said the old man with a frown. He cocked his head. 'What about you two?'

At night the ward seemed so full of breathing, each man's lungs fighting for precious breath through another night. He lay still, listening to the tugging breaths around him, the sounds of sick men sleeping. He saw no flames in the dark – perhaps he would die in the daytime – only the shapes of breaths touching one another like messages from dreams. There was somebody under his own bed, breathing in, breathing out, sometimes groaning as he rustled in his blanket. Once the man under the bed said, 'You have none left, you have none left,' then sighed and slept quietly.

Later a man cried out in his sleep down the row, then cried out again, calling from his dream. The whole ward seemed to stir, men rolling over with a murmur or a cough. Air breaking from their throats or their bellies, the used air of sleep. Someone else cried out as if in reply to a neighbour's dream, and then there was only breathing: thick, shallow, sonorous, insistent – a collection of breaths that twined and curled beneath the ceiling.

Men spoke to death with their breaths, he heard them blowing into its face as they turned and pressed through another night – the lucky ones like him on beds, the others in a chair or on a mattress on the floor or stretched on a blanket.

The light came slowly, a hint of arousal touching the breaths of the ward, stirring the lungs. And when they awoke, yawning and groaning, there was one whose chest made no movement, who lay still and staring, who had not had the strength to blow in death's face until dawn.

So there was one more space, perhaps even a bed, for the living.

He woke just as it was getting light, jerking himself out of sleep like a man trying to pull himself free from a tangle of pipes and jagged metal coils – 'I want this job finished tonight, Julius, you hear! You can go home when it's done.' He woke with the breath pushing in and out of his lungs, his heart stamping against his ribs. It was hot, hot as a job under a car with the engine running, hot as grease on the eyebrows and fluid leaking onto the chest, a hammer of pistons and blue sparks leaping.

He jerked upright. The patients were asleep or just waking, up and down the row, each man grappling with his own hot breath. He threw off the sheet and the blanket, wincing with the sudden pain that hot-wired through his shoulder blade. He had to remember to avoid sudden movements, he thought, as the pain awoke him fully.

It was then that he noticed the fire on the window sill at the end of the ward. This time it was spurting and shooting out of a Coke bottle, right next to the snorer with a fractured hip down the row. He was bellowing in his sleep, you could see his mouth open and close, his nostrils quiver. And the fire, tongues of orange and blue darting and twining from the mouth of the bottle right next to him, twisting in his exhalations. Where he himself sat on his bed he could feel the waves of heat striking his face and his chest. Then the buzzing of a fly distracted him. He sat rigid, listening. It approached from somewhere behind him, the sound of its wings growing louder and louder until it was an electric hacksaw slicing the air around his head as he cowered under the sheets, clutching them over his head.

He threw the sheets off, lashing out wildly so that the pain cut through his shoulder again. He curled tightly on the bed, hugging his knees to his chest, pressing his head down against his thighs until the sound receded and the spinning daggers of pain eased in his shoulder. He lay still, but then he felt the heat again touching his body like fingers – first a stroking tingling sensation but quickly sharpening into tiny exploding points of heat that criss-crossed the small of his back and his buttocks, stoking the base of his spine. Had someone bewitched him, sent a clawed spirit to torment him? He had to leave this hospital, escape its flames and birds of prey by any means possible. He had to make his way to town, claim his due wages from the garage, pay the rent. Above

all, he had to get out of the ward.

He found a pair of trousers and a shirt and a pair of loose-lipped shoes in a plastic bag inside the bedside locker of the poor fellow stretched out in the bed next to his. The old man had gone visiting on the other side of the ward. The nurses were busy as usual. He looked at the fellow: he had a tube up his nose and his fingers twitched at his sides in spasms that rippled through the tendons of his neck and down his arms, the quiverings of some deep heavy sleep that pinched his nerves like a dark taloned creature caught under his skin. He would not need the gear for a while, that was clear to any sane eyes. His struggle was to find a pathway out of his heavy dreams.

The snorer, a high school teacher who had fallen off the stage while directing a dress rehearsal of *Julius Caesar,* had nicknamed the fellow *Astronaut* because he had so many tubes stuck into him: blood, water, food. He had been in his own orbit for days, ever since he had met a delivery truck while crossing a street, the others reported. Some of them seemed to specialize in case histories, chiefly and most verbosely, their own.

Anyway, the Astronaut would be exploring extra-terrestrially for a while yet, dark and disturbing explorations, from the shaking of his vital tubes and the twitching of his body. He would bring back the gear as soon as possible, he silently pledged to Astronaut, even get the shoes mended at a While-You-Wait workshop. But he had to get out of the hospital and that prospect was unlikely in green, pink and white striped pyjamas. The burning sensation had eased and he felt better. He would wait for the visitors to arrive in the afternoon then slip into the toilet with his borrowed garb, hastily change out of his pyjamas and discharge himself forthwith.

But he had to work out some details first, before any great escape. When had he last been to work? How was he going to get there? – he had no money on him. Come to think of it, where was his work place? A garage, sure, with a chief mechanic who bullied him into unpaid overtime. But where? A noise stamped persistently inside his skull – someone was doing a hellava percussion number in there, but the rhythm was confused, the dancers were tripping up in their manoeuvres. Man, he had to give himself a chance to find his feet. These questions would snap the elastic in his pants, so to speak, and leave him contemplating his shrivelled self for how much longer? Meanwhile they would empty his house and move in some councillor's sidekick. He had to take things

slowly if he was going to get anywhere at all. As the old man had said in between wars and genealogies, things would come back to him.

He knew the garage was in town, there was no doubt about that. At least he knew he had to get himself to the Golden City-paved-in-the-black-man's-sweat. His employer had crooked him, that also seemed to stand well outside a shadow of doubt. How many years had he worked for chickenfeed filling a fat white man's pocket? He had a pavement somewhere in the city paved in his personal sweat. What is more intimate than a man's own sweat? He would be able to smell it out as long as he somehow got to town.

He had to wait in line at the toilet. Three toilets for a ward of how many men? Some of them couldn't wait. They pissed against the wall, shat in their pants. They bowed their heads in silent humiliation or avoided your eyes with a frown or, too sick to care, exclaimed with the relief of it. He had to watch where he put his feet as he opened the cubicle door, bracing himself against the stench.

He slipped out of the toilet with a quick furtive glance this way and that trying not to appear sheepish. Astronaut was a man of legs – talk about giant leaps! He had had to turn up the trousers in three folds and tread carefully so that they wouldn't get caught in his loose-lipped footwear. His first priority was to sidestep the ward nurses.

If only he had a hat to hide his bandaged head, a stetson tilted to shade him from scrutiny. Turning up his collar, hiding his hands in his huge pockets, he submerged himself in the stream of visitors and got outside into the open corridors of the hospital. A shuffling fugitive with a partially shaved scalp and no sense of fashion, he jostled among best-dressed visitors, nomadic patients in checked dressing gowns, loitering porters and haggard-faced physicians. The corrugated roofing above him crackled with heat as he walked between prefabricated wards, heading with uncertain legs towards the hospital exit.

He made it to the broad footbridge which crossed the road outside the hospital under the huge scalding blue of the sky. The sun seemed to have singled out his throbbing bare head for special attention. It bit into his eyes off the railings, baying off every sheen surface – belt buckles, wrist watches, flashing spectacles, transistor aerials, and the rims of the vendors' umbrellas swirling with thin fire. He stopped to steady himself, holding onto the hand

railing. The vehicles passing below glittered up at him with many eyes. And in the distance there was a cluster of yellow vans at the side of the road bristling with blue lights that spun in the hot air.

Then his brain fissured suddenly, his legs wobbled and he collided with a table of plastic bangles, vaseline, bead necklaces, super-size fruits fresh from the market. The necklaces coiled and rattled around him, glistening; bananas, guavas, green apples jumped and skidded before his eyes. He lay prone with his face against his shoulder; it was hot and sticky against the skin of his face. Someone laughed and laughed. How long did he lie like that, cushioned in the wet mouth of his wound?

But the mama behind the table was quick to give vent to her disappointment, her bulging face honing down on him, rushing her hot words at him. And, as far as he could make out, it was no sweet-tongued salestalk:

'You son of a whore! You blind cripple! Did you leave behind your legs in your mother's blanket? And look at the blood on your teeth, ei! Whose child have you eaten, you dog? You better have money to pay or I am going to sell your clothes, underpants and shoes, the lot! – and whip you naked to your shameful mother!'

The tirade seemed to slap things back into order inside his mind and to correct his errant limbs.

'Woman, don't shout like that!' a neighbouring vendor chirped. 'You will kill them off in the hospital and then we will have no customers.'

Now he was clear-headed enough to be angry. He stood up and looked at the bloated quivering face of the woman, her snarling lips. She had no teeth, not even the token of a tooth like the old man. Probably they had fallen out because they were ashamed of her tongue. Or her husband had knocked them out one by one with his fist, she was foul-mouthed! She was saying he had to PAY! PAY! PAY! and others were beginning to gather around and sympathize, although some were pocketing her scattered fruit. He had no money to pay her. And anyway what about the rent? What about his house?

Just then the woman caught sight of an urchin sneaking a banana under his ragged shirt. She grabbed hold of him by the arm and applied a dose of instant heat to his squirming backside with her fat tough hand. He screamed, kicking his legs as she pulled him over her lap. With her attention diverted for a moment and the crowd's eye caught by a new spectacle he was able to escape: a whole choir of singing mothers in church uniform –

white doeks and bibs, red coats, black skirts – had arrived for hospital visits and a bottleneck had begun to develop. They offered him a holy and ample camouflage, bless them. With his neck tucked into his shirt collar he sneaked between generous busts and heaving rear ends as they sang a hymn. Praise the Almighty for his well-endowed matriarchs!

He hurried along the footbridge feeling suddenly light-headed. He would return to settle with the vendor, he thought with impulsive generosity, despite her foul mouth. She had discovered his flight and was shouting after him now. Now he had to get down to the road and hitch a lift to town. What a man had to go through to keep his leaking roof over his head, his rusty bedstead under his back! He tried to quicken his stride, pursued by a tirade of vitriol which compromised his entire line of descent as he clambered down the steps trying hard to discipline the independent tendencies of his limbs, breathing quickly.

'You! Heya! Are you crazy, man? Are you looking for a sudden death play-off with my front mudguard?'

The screech of the tyres seemed to have peeled off a strip of flesh down the middle of his skull leaving a burning trench in his head where the words of the man in the suit fell in.

'You know, there are easier methods of stopping a car than with your butt! Are you looking for a ride to town?'

He nodded, trying to cover his head with his hand. The man had a moustache that crowded beneath his nostrils like caterpillars when he spoke, an active bristling moustache that seemed to crawl all over his face.

'Look left, look right, look left! Ever heard that, man? The highway is no place to disco. Next time just point with your thumb and you will get to town without denting somebody's bonnet. Well get in, get in! Now that I'm late anyway, you might just as well come with me. Danger is everywhere and anywhere without having to do a tapdance in the traffic! Get in!'

The man opened the passenger door and levered him in. Slamming the door, he strode around the front of the car with a rap of ringed knuckles that jumped like sparks across the bonnet. His own hand felt hot and strangely sinuous; it crouched like a small animal trembling on his head.

'Okay, it's not going to fall off. You can leave it alone now, it's got your neck to lean on, bra,' the man said.

The caterpillars spread and rustled, glistening above the man's

smile. He let his own hand drop, bowing his head and looking at his upturned palm in his lap as the car pulled off into the traffic. A green light snatched at his eye from the dashboard and he flinched, gripping his seat.

'You must have nearly lost your pants with fright back there. No wonder you're a bit shaken. Where you heading? Like some music?'

The man reached his laden fingers across to a panel of buttons. A red light spat on and off, the speakers crackled and hissed somewhere behind them and then the noise thudded in compressed explosions in the closed space of the car so that there was no space for his head. The man's lips moved beneath his contorted moustache as he pressed another demanding sound into the thud and whine. Why did they all have to shout at him? Did they think he was retarded? The sounds pushed his head sideways against the window.

The brake lights of the vehicle ahead spilt over the mudguard and numberplate, dripping and congealing. The sound from the speakers beat against the windscreen and rebounded into his face. He turned his cheek and closed his eyes, pressing back against the seat but there was no space left, he had none left. He felt for the doorhandle.

The noise stopped with a click.

'Shit on my head if there's not another ten minute delay coming up! I might as well hand in my resignation before they fire me. First you and now the boers!'

The thump of the man's palm against the steering wheel, a dull sound, his voice suddenly distant. A blue light burning across the windscreen, turning and returning like a blowtorch on the glass, ricocheting off the face of the man's wrist watch, needling in through the corner of his own eye so that every tiny shining particle exploded.

'What's the matter with you? Hey, now what are you up to? WHAT ARE YOU DOING?'

Unrest Report: An unidentified black man was shot dead by police at a roadblock outside Soweto late yesterday afternoon.
The man reportedly acted in a suspicious and provocative manner when the car in which he was travelling was waved down for routine safety checks.

According to a police spokesman the man jumped from the passenger seat of the moving car and ran headlong down the embankment, ignoring repeated police orders to halt. Police were compelled to open fire and the man was hit in the back and the head.

Police are investigating a possible connection between the dead man and a gang of insurgents the police suspect are behind the rent boycott in Soweto. The man was evidently in disguise and trying to flee the township.

The driver of the vehicle said he had stopped for a man hitching a lift to Johannesburg. The man, whose body revealed evidence of earlier wounds, had refused to answer any of his questions and had leapt from the vehicle as they approached the roadblock.

The Apprehension

Stan Motimele

If there is any country that can accommodate all sorts of shady characters and kill your sense of patriotism, look for it in the southern tip of Africa. Honestly, there are some times in my life that I don't feel quite proud to be a South African. And this particular morning was one of those days I felt unpatriotic. I thought of running away to the USA but being a member of the proletariat class and a concrete thinker, I decided, ag no, I couldn't cope with the American make-believe way of life. I thought of running away to the Soviet Union, but being a member of the proletariat class again, I felt the Soviet workers must be too jealous about their socialist achievements to share it with a man who ran away from liberating himself.

Then I packed my bags and set out to my grandfather's place on the farms of Eastern Transvaal.

As I walked up the slope through the lush greenishness, I saw a noisy group of girls coming down from the farm mission. Maria, my uncle's eldest daughter, was among them. The girls seemed to be dissatisfied with something that happened at the morning mass. Their pace slowed down to a standstill as their topic reached boiling point. They noisily interrupted each other and waved their hands – each in a frantic attempt to present her side of the story first.

They abruptly stopped talking when they saw a young man sitting under a cluster of avocado trees. The girls shouted reverently, 'Rasta! Rasta!'

Zakes the Rasta, a young man in his early twenties, remained indifferent. He was enjoying his morning zol in a trance. He wore a red, green and yellow woollen hat. Strands of untidy dreadlocks dangled from the edge of the hat and peered into his equally unclean T-shirt. To me, he looked like some sort of shady character. He took the last very deep puff from his dagga zol and tossed the stub away.

'Jah will punish you!' He furiously wagged a finger at the girls. 'How dare you disturb me while I communicate with Jah? You're from communicating with your Jah now, did anybody come and disturb you?' he asked, and added, 'Shame on you sisters.'

'Forgive us Rasta,' Maria apologized on behalf of the girls.

'Positive my sisters, Jah will forgive you,' he replied, rubbing his knuckles against theirs. 'What's all the excitement about?'

'Father Warwick!' the four girls exclaimed.

'My sisters,' he pleaded, 'you can't all talk at the same time, it's against Jah etiquette!' He looked at Maria and nodded his head to gesture that she was authorized to speak.

'Father Warwick, i-jo!' Maria said and disbelievingly clapped her hands.

My cousin told him how they sat side by side in the church with whites, from the neighbouring farms. Then all of a sudden Father Warwick decided that blacks and whites should sit separately. She said that they were reconsidering their membership of the church. She said what left them even more insulted was that Father Warwick claimed even God liked the new order in the church.

'Because he knows that the Bible is big and we can't read all of it,' one girl said.

'Ja,' said another, 'Father Warwick is a bad influence.'

'After all he's corrupt, that's why he's got two sons with the mission cook,' Maria added.

'How do you know that?' Zakes asked.

'Their ears!' the girls shouted.

'Who are you talking about?' he asked, confused.

'Patrick and Dominic,' the girls said, 'don't you know?'

'Can't you see those long ears belong to the Father,' Maria whispered.

After I had decided the priest, too, was some sort of a shady character, I made myself visible to the group. Maria introduced me to her friends, telling them, with pride, that I'm her cousin from the Locations. She helped me with my bags and told her friends she'd see them later.

Along the way she asked me where my younger sister was. I told her she was at home and well. She complained that my younger sister doesn't like people, that's why she won't visit. She concluded by telling me that the trouble with my younger sister is that my mother spoilt her. She kept quiet for a while and then asked: 'Ja ... cousy what can you tell me?'

'Ah ... cousy what can I tell you, nothing,' I replied.

Recalling what they had said about the priest I probed: 'Cousy, you say this priest has children with the cook?'

'Listen, I'll tell you everything,' she said. 'When Father Warwick came to the mission he had two nuns to assist him, you

understand cousy. He got used to the village people and started to ill-treat the nuns. Finally he sent them away saying that his mission was not a monastery and couldn't accommodate recluses who couldn't fit in with the daily mission activities. He proposed to create modern nuns from the villagers. Despite the nuns' complaints of his irreligious behaviour, the central church fell for his idea because it was in desperate need of local nuns.

'Selina, his first potential recruit, started cleaning and cooking in the mission house at the age of sixteen. She was still a virgin developing a heaved breast and hard upright teats, you understand cousy. Since then she has lived in the outer room of the mission house. Warwick told her parents he wanted her to be a nun and that's the reason he didn't want her to mix with the immoral village girls who knew no other values except the gumba-gumba jive. Her parents are devoted members of the church and didn't mind, are you with me cousy? But Warwick encountered problems with boys who came during the night to peep through the windows and relished at the sight of Selina's maturing body when she undressed to sleep. Some older and braver ones would knock at her door, but they always ended up frustrated because Warwick locked the door from outside in case Selina was tempted. And in the following church ceremony he'd warn whoever hung around the windows not to disturb the prospective nun or the wrath of God would befall them, you see cousy?

'The boys were dealt a death blow when, after six months, it became obvious that Selina's stomach had become extraordinarily bulgier. Father Warwick was still insistent and warned whoever had impregnated the prospective nun not to come near her as the pregnancy didn't change anything, you understand cousy? At eighteen she became pregnant for the second time, Father Warwick persisted with her as a prospective nun. Her beauty lingered on for a while, then diminished, turning her into a fat and sloppy woman who looked older than her twenty years. The boys of her age had no option but to forget about her. But, up to now, the father of her two sons, Patrick and Dominic, has never emerged, cousy,' Maria said, concluding her little story.

It was just after sunset when Morodi, my uncle's son, returned with his father's four cattle. Maria had already started cooking supper, while her three younger sisters gathered wood for another hearth and prepared another fire to warm them up after supper when my grandmother told folktales. Their mother, my aunt, was curled up

in a corner, breast-feeding my newly-born cousin. I learnt that my migrant-worker uncle had not yet returned from the mines.

Having spent most of my time with my grandfather since I arrived in the morning, talking about this and that, I asked him about his boss's dogs just to kill time while we waited for our meals.

'Dogs?' Rakgolo asked, 'what dogs?'

'Last time when I visited Kaffernek had six dogs.'

'Oh,' the old man said, 'a dog which is good at devouring its master, is as good as no dog. Have you ever seen a dog that runs away when in confrontation with a hare? A dog that cannot hunt and shies away from relish. They are only brave when his son, Klein Kaffernek, sets them on people!'

My blood raced as Morodi slid his hand down the back of his thigh and showed me the puckered scar on the back of his knee. The wound was inflicted by the collaboration between Klein Kaffernek and the dogs.

Eventually supper time arrived. Maria placed gourd dishes in the middle of the courtyard. The meal was disastrous. Porridge and fried peanuts. After we had finished eating the girls gathered the dishes to wash them but only after they were reminded that it was untidy and lazy to leave dirty dishes overnight and that they wouldn't last with their future husbands and in-laws. By the time they finished, the mountain behind the grass and reed hedges of the courtyard had already cast its shadow onto its foot and the whole valley.

Now the children sat silently, hoping that grandmother would start telling folktales. But she seemed uninspired. She sat with one leg curled underneath her and the other stretched out. She was making a reed mat. The only audible sound was the grrr of the bicycle-spoke knitting needle as she pierced, four at a time, the thin dried reed grass. She took three strands from potato bags and wove them into one strong cord with amazing speed by rolling them with the palm of her hand on her thigh. After every sleight of hand I gazed expectantly at her thigh, to see whether the wrinkles there had disappeared. But on each occasion the wrinkles waved back and gathered again in their original position. And she hooked the woven cord on the blunt edge of the knitting needle.

She took a break, snorted snuff and grimaced. I looked at her and thought it must be unpleasant to sniff snuff. She shot cousin Morodi a contemptuous glance. Cousin Morodi had just become restless and sent my younger cousins on errands. He sent one of

his sisters to bring him drinking water. When she returned he sent another one to fetch wood on the verandah. After she put the bundle of wood down, he ordered the other one to put the wood on the dying fire.

'You know what,' grandmother said, 'some animals were deprived of having tails because of not standing up for themselves. It happened very, very long ago. You were not yet born, your mother and father were not yet born, even your grandfather and I were not yet born. The land was still settled in its natural beauty. It was before the chief sold this land for a set of whiteman's teeth.'

There was a legend that people who lived in the village were sold by their toothless chief. When the white farmers came they gave him a set of false teeth in exchange for fertile planting and grazing land. When these white farmers became rich the government resettled the people. I understand my grandfather's family remained on the farm because Kaffernek was one farmer who didn't want his tractor driver to stay far from the tractor. My grandfather was a tractor driver.

We were still held in suspense when the headlights of a car pierced the reed hedges.

'What could they want?' Rakgolo said as he stood up and went to the entrance. He already knew that it was Kaffernek's bakkie. It was Klein Kaffernek and Father Warwick.

'Mm-mm-mm, it's that rubbish of a boy,' grandmother said after hearing Klein Kaffernek's voice. 'When did he come back from soldiering?'

I was surprised to find that Klein Kaffernek was a boy of eighteen. He was in army uniform and carried a gun. The gun was so long that it killed my sense of patriotism. He said he had come to shoot the cattle because they had eaten the crops in the fields earlier that day. Rakgolo furiously asked Morodi why he let the cattle into the fields. Morodi said he closed the gate to the fields and slept under the shade of a tree as it was very hot. When he woke up, he said, he saw Rasta closing the gate, having driven the cattle into Kaffernek's fields.

'Eh, you see Simon,' Warwick said to my grandfather, 'these cattle will get you into trouble. Sell them to the mission. Look at the village people, they sold all their livestock to me. Now, they all have jobs at the mission.'

'Who's this tsotsi?' Klein Kaffernek asked when he saw me. After Rakgolo told him that I was a grandson from the Locations, he asked if my presence had been reported to *groot-baas*.

'Not yet,' Rakgolo said, 'I'll report him tomorrow.'

'Are you not a comrade, tsotsi?' he bawled out in an unsuccessful attempt to sound like a tough army general.

I told him I couldn't be a tsotsi and a comrade at the same time.

He poked the cold muzzle of the menacingly long gun against my chin. 'What are you?' he bawled out again.

I was agitated and radicalized. I felt like giving him a hot slap on the face and disarming him, but I was paralysed with shock when the smell of gun-oil entered my nostrils. And I had never been so close to a gun. 'I'm a tsotsi,' I promptly said. I felt very humiliated to tell such a small boy that I was a tsotsi. But I said that because he had a gun in his hand and he seemed to tolerate tsotsis more than comrades.

'You better be,' he said as he pushed the muzzle deeper into my chin. 'This thing barks like a dog when it sees a comrade.'

'Leave him alone, Gert,' the priest suddenly said. 'What's your name son?'

'Simon, Father,' I answered.

'Oh, you're your grandfather's namesake. Do you go to church Simon?'

'I'm an altar boy Father,' I lied. The truth would force me to tell him that I'd get to church only if my mother could be canonized, because she's been going to church every day for the last twenty years but she doesn't seem a little bit Christian. She still demands my whole wages every Friday. So I had faith in saints, not Christians.

When our factory closed down for the festive season, I got my full wages plus backpay, leave pay and bonuses. And after deductions I remained with four hundred rands. My mother made her deductions, too, and with the remainder I bought my grandfather khakis to appease the ancestors.

It was now three days since I had arrived here on the farm. But so many unpleasant things happened in both Kaffernek and the adjacent mission farm. What pained my heart, more than anything else, was the way grandfather was cheated into selling my uncle's cattle to Warwick. Christmas was two days away and my uncle had returned from the mines. He, too, was very pained at the loss of his wealth.

The following day, early in the morning, I set out with grandfather to complete the *madlozi* rituals. It had rained the previous night and the raindrops glistened as the morning sun fell

on the grass. Rakgolo's forceful strides hacked the grass and scattered the raindrops on his car-tyre sandals.

We arrived at a dense bush. There was water in a cracked clay pot underneath the bushes. The place looked sacred. The water was calm and reflected the sunlight. I knelt down and Rakgolo rubbed the water on my face. It was cool and relieving.

'The water is your Jah old man?' Zakes the Rasta said.

We were startled because we didn't hear him approaching. This man is a true farm prowler, I thought, because I didn't expect a person there.

'Who are you, son?' Rakgolo asked.

'They call me Rasta.'

I thought Rakgolo would go for his neck, but it seemed that he didn't associate the name with evil.

'Who's your father?'

'Punch,' Rasta said with a clenched fist.

'Punch,' Rakgolo said. 'Punch's son? The malaita fighter?'

'Yes.' Zakes the Rasta was proud that Rakgolo acknowledged that his father was a great fighter.

'What happened to you then?' Rakgolo said. 'You look like something that scares birds out of the fields. Your father was a gentleman like all the malaitas. His head was always clean shaven, his fighting sneakers ever clean. And his Jeppe trousers ... you know Jeppe trousers, son? They were fighting trousers which we bought in Jeppe. Your family used to live with us here before Kaffernek and the other farmers came and evicted many people to Malaeneng.'

'You mean the village?' Rasta asked.

'Yes,' Rakgolo said, 'you build houses in lines there. Now, you see that I know your people? Greet your mother, son.'

Rasta stared at us until we disappeared into the aloes, and sat down for a mid-morning zol.

I saw Rasta again on Christmas. My cousin, Maria, invited me to a village gumba-gumba session. We went to Rasta's home first. We found Rasta ready. He tucked small parcels wrapped in paper in his socks.

'You take the stuff brother?' he said and offered me one parcel.

'No,' I replied.

He tucked the parcel in his sock and said, 'You see what brother, *ganja* is good. Better than Babylon waters. But the stuff I'm having today is very cheap, I don't smoke it. In fact I take no

other stuff except the Umtata stuff. But then the supply is limited these days. Maybe if I had a *wadada* ... Brother tell me, don't you know of anyone at the Locations who wants to sell a strong *wadada?* A *wadada* that can take punishment without complaining?'

'What's a *wadada?'* I asked him.

'Wadada ... a man from the Locations doesn't know what a *wadada* is? Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! A *wadada* is a cab my brother, positive'.

'Oh. I don't know anybody,' I answered somewhat irritated.

He tucked a bundle of reggae records under his arm and we set out for the gumba-gumba session. The session had already started. The jiving villagers' heads seemed, from a distance, to be immersed in oil as they bobbed in the mirage. We were deafened by the sound of *mbaqanga* and *kwela* music as we neared the session.

'Rasta! Rasta!' the girls shouted when they saw him.

With confidence, he handed his records over to the disc jockey. 'No Babylon music please.' Any music that was not reggae was Western music to him. He started to jive when the speakers amplified strong reggae rhythms. His jive was indescribable and inimitable, I can tell you. And he turned everybody into a spectator. When the music stopped he sat down, streaming sweat. The women crowded him and asked him where he bought his reggae.

'Jamaica, sisters,' he said, 'you can't get such music when you spend the rest of your life toiling on the mission farm and other Babylon farms.'

He rolled his afternoon zol, buttered it with spittle and lit it. The women left him because they knew he wanted to be alone now. I realized that Rasta was unpopular with males. You know, since we'd arrived at the session I hadn't seen a single man talking to him. They tended to avoid him because of his charm and swashbuckling manner. And that made Rasta the only bull in the kraal.

The way I was mesmerized by these village souls and their simplicity, I was oblivious of anything else. I just gaped at the merry-makers, nodding my head in an unsuccessful attempt to keep pace with the rhythm. I even tried to shake-shake but my body, as usual, was as stiff as a starched collar.

I was shocked when I saw a yellow four-wheel-drive sedan standing a few paces from me. I wondered how long it had been there because I didn't hear it coming. Its windows were darkly

tinted and I could not see the occupants. When the driver rolled his window down I saw that he was a white man. He said something to a boy, who then called Rasta. Rasta's zol just vanished as he ran to the car. He must have swallowed it. After talking to the white stranger he waved at me to come.

'Brother, let's take this man to his Babylon brother at the mission,' he said with urgency.

The driver was too pale to be a citizen of sunny South Africa. Instead of taking the driveway to the mission, he passed it and concealed the car in a nearby bush. 'I want you to help me and you won't get into any trouble,' he said in a heavily accented English.

My hair stood on end when he said that. I thought of bolting, but I decided to hold myself. In fact I thought he might have a gun with him. He seemed to me too shady a character to move around without a gun. And, for the first time, I thanked Klein Kaffernek for having given me a taste of gun-smell. Otherwise I would have blundered.

'I've come to capture the most dangerous man in the world. A man who murdered thousands of people, including my whole family,' the stranger told us.

'Who's that man?' I asked with fear.

'The man has gone out,' the stranger said, 'but he'll come back any moment now. His name is Franz Meisner.'

'Now look here, mister,' I said, 'how do you expect the three of us to capture a man who killed so many people? Do you want him to kill us too? Like your family?'

'Ambush,' the stranger said. 'I want you to stop him when he comes.' This he addressed to Rasta.

'Me?' Rasta exclaimed. 'Why don't you ask your Babylon brothers to help you. They've got guns. Warwick can organize them.'

'Father Warwick can't help me,' the stranger said, 'because he's Franz Meisner, the second World War Nazi general.'

I nearly fainted when I heard that. In fact, I don't know why I didn't faint.

'Can you use a gun?' he asked me.

'A gun? Me? No! No! No!' I shook my head so vigorously that I felt faint again.

After he warned me how dangerous Meisner alias Warwick was, I accepted the gun. It was so small and heavy. No wonder people who carry guns are such bullies.

'What about me?' Rasta asked.

'You don't need one. He won't suspect you since he's your boss. I've been watching you for the past two weeks and I know you sell dagga for him. That's why I chose this place. I know that's where you meet him every time.'

Now I started to understand why Rasta drove my uncle's cattle into the fields. It was not sheer accident or a vendetta against Kaffernek. It was a plan to force Rakgolo to sell the cattle, as he subsequently did.

The criminal was successfully apprehended.

The following day I packed my bag and set out for home. I was afraid that Klein Kaffernek would come for me, because I suspected he hated comrades more than Nazi criminals.

WRITING OR FIGHTING
The Dilemma of the Black South African Writer
Richard Rive

Arthur Nortje, one of South Africa's finest young writers, died at Oxford in 1970 at the early age of 29. He was a poet and he was black. He was also intensely lonely. Some say he committed suicide because he dared not return to his native land. Others say he had died well before his death. We do not really know. What we do know is what can be deduced from his work, how exile can erode the sensitive individual. In one of his last poems, he wrote:

> It is not cosmic immensity or catastrophe
> that terrifies me
> It is solitude that mutilates
> the night bulb that reveals ash on my sleeve.

Like all black South African writers, because he was both black and a writer, he faced the cruel dilemma of whether he should write or fight or do both equally. In another poem he tried to clarify this problem:

> For some of us must storm the castles
> some define the happening.

In those lines he seemed to suggest that although these functions may happen simultaneously, the different activities are performed by different people. He himself was not a political activist *per se* which might account for his seeing his essential role as one of defining the happening. But no matter how mutedly, he also stormed the castles because he found it possible to do both. But it was a matter of different emphases.

There is a current theory that not only can the black writer do both, but that in South Africa it is incumbent on him to do both. This emanates from the safety of certain American and Canadian universities and tends to prescribe from the outside what the writers' role must be inside. But what these critics fail to realize is that the black writer is no different from the black man in the ghetto, the oppressed, faceless individual whom Aime Cesaire in *Return to My Native Land* describes as

> a Jew man
> a Kaffir man
> a Hindu-from-Calcutta-man
> a man-from-Harlem-who-hasn't-got-the-vote

The only difference is that the writer is the articulate black man in the ghetto and is therefore better able to express himself through words. Otherwise he is indistinguishable from the non-writer, and what is more, is treated no differently by the South African authorities. He reacts in the same way given the same conditions and is as aroused when flogged with quirts or blasted with teargas. Then he retaliates by angrily recording his experiences or throwing stones at Casspirs or both. He is not either a literary person or a political activist, nor can he be forced to perform both functions with equal attention. There will always be a difference of emphasis. His status as a writer can never protect him from being shot at. His poetry can never deflect bullets. But he has one important advantage. He is able to translate his experiences and emotions into words. Often he records the happening in red-hot prose and lurid description to the despair of the academic purists. At other times he paints his strokes with quiet, subdued brushwork to the despair of the literary activists overseas.

Some writers are jailed and others are not. Some writers are exiled and others are not. A tragedy is no greater when a poet dies than when a worker is shot. It is necessary now more than ever to demystify the role of the black South African writer. Although the emphasis at present is on storming castles and less on defining the happening, it is essential that he be allowed to fulfill his main function, which is to define and record. He is an articulate memory of his oppressed people.

Who then defines what is happening and for whom is it defined? In South Africa the function of the writer is circumscribed by the social, economic and political factors affecting him. He is either a white writer or a black writer not because of the colour of his skin but because of the external conditions forced down on him. And because of these artificial restrictions his writing assumes a different emphasis and texture. For the black writer it is heavily threaded with the Group Areas Act, the new Pass Laws and the Population Registration Act. The writing he produces tends to be angry, argumentative and polemical. He has no control over who reads his works and often discovers that he is defining the happening for a readership consisting largely of liberal whites who have the sympathy to be interested and the means with which to buy his books.

Until recently the black writer found himself in the anomalous position of not being read by most of his fellow blacks. His comrades in the ghettos could not afford to buy any books and in most cases were victims of enforced illiteracy. He found that his writings were read mostly by those whites who had the franchise and thus were in a position to effect change. Blacks defining the

happening found themselves being read by whites who, albeit unwillingly, were occupying the castles.

In 1883 Olive Schreiner published the first major novel by any South African writer, *The Story of an African Farm,* and catapulted colonial literature into the international arena. The next time this was to happen would be in 1948 with the publication of Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country.*

By the middle of the forties, Pauline Smith with her books of the Little Karoo was looking back at Olive Schreiner; the *Voorslag Movement* of Roy Campbell, William Plomer and Laurens van der Post was looking forward from Olive Schreiner; and Sarah Gertrude Millin with her jaundiced and blinkered vision was not looking in any direction. Early black writing of the twenties and thirties tended to be stilted, banal and imitative of whites. Even Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi,* fine and innovative a novel as it is, could not resist side-spying the white reader to catch any possible reaction. In the forties with Peter Abrahams and Es'kia Mphahlele, black writing took a decidedly different and more challenging direction. But the writers found that they were still producing works mainly read by sympathetic whites who had political and economic clout.

We still find instances of critics today who foam at the mouth when arguing whether the appellation 'protest' may be applied to literature of this period and later. This is a matter of semantics. Seen in context that literature represented a revolutionary advance on the didactic, bible-tract works that preceded it and taught the black moralist how to die. The later literature shouted 'White Man, Listen!' as loudly as had Richard Wright, the black American novelist. True, the thematic treatment was as negative as that of the Harlem Renaissance, the Afro-American literary movement of the twenties and thirties, which indeed strongly influenced it. The Protest period was essentially a literature about victimization. But it had the advantage of being written from the inside, by the victim himself. And although trailing by two decades, it ran parallel to the literature of the Harlem movement. In an indirect way Richard Wright and the poet, Langston Hughes, can be seen as the progenitors of black South African literature which flourished from the later forties.

Olive Schreiner's liberalism found echoes more than half a century later in the novels of Gerald Gordon, Harry Bloom and Alan Paton. This literature still retained a sharp emphasis on white responsibility towards politically powerless blacks. The need for change was still implicit. There was still concern with the victim rather than with the acts of victimization. Liberal literature remained writing by concerned, enfranchised white citizens for other enfranchised white citizens to emphasize their social and political responsibility

towards unenfranchised black non-citizens. The appeal was directed at those who had the power to effect change or at least the ability to keep controversy alive.

But during this period and later there were hazy, grey patches and writers such as Nadine Gordimer, Athol Fugard and John Coetzee did not fit comfortably into any category. The *Sestiger Movement* in Afrikaans (named after the sixties when it was started) represented an enlightened and liberal direction much as their white, English-speaking counterparts had, only this time they were addressing an Afrikaner readership. Again writers such as Breyten Breytenbach and Etienne le Roux could not be categorized and moved well beyond the confines of Afrikaner liberalism into dangerous and more challenging arenas.

The early sixties saw a proliferation of black writing. There were many contributory factors for this such as the universal revulsion at apartheid, the focus on South Africa's constitutionalized racialism, and the international interest in works by black writers. The last factor was given momentum with the publication of the first ever anthologies of writings by black Africans in English, Peggy Rutherford's *Darkness and Light* in 1958 and Langston Hughes's *An African Treasury* in 1960. The most favoured genre of the black South African writer was the short story but there were also novels, plays, poetry and autobiographies.

But the state's juggernaut was moving heavily but inexorably against black writers. The middle sixties saw an intensification of repressive political legislation which hit them very hard. Peter Abrahams and Bessie Head had already gone into voluntary exile. Alf Hutchinson, Todd Matshikiza, Alex la Guma, Bloke Modisane, Dennis Brutus and Lewis Nkosi were forced into exile. Can Themba and Arthur Maimane also left on exit visas. All writings by Alex la Guma and Dennis Brutus were proscribed since they were banned persons. Many other writers had books banned. Then in the Government Gazette Extraordinary of 1 April 1966, the names of six black writers living abroad were published as banned under the Suppression of Communism Act. This was not an effort to restrict their movements to the magisterial districts of Camden Town in London or Manhattan in New York. It was to make all their writings and utterances illegal in their native land. South African literature had become white by law.

For the next four years black writing in South Africa lay in stunned disarray. Then in 1970 there was a rejuvenation with the publication of Oswald Mtshali's *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* which gave impetus to the poetry of

Wally Serote and Sipho Sepamla. This time the favoured genre was poetry. Then in 1976 Mafika Gwala with his collection *Jol'iinkomo* sent literature of the townships unequivocally in a Black Consciousness direction.

Today, with the political extremism that is becoming more acute, there runs a parallel literary polarization. Writers are more and more writing from distinctly different sets of circumstances in an effort to reach a different readership. Just as the castles are now being stormed from different directions with different emphases, the happening is also being differently defined and emphasized.

The present then is a period of continuous political turmoil and confrontation. This has severely affected the quantity and quality of black writing, ironically at a time when publishers, mostly white, are more than ever prepared to publish their works no matter how controversial the subject matter. Some black writers have been jailed. Others have gone into exile. And many more are also busy attacking bastions and storming castles. But despite all this, creativity continues in different shapes and forms. Until recently oral poetry was the genre most used especially at political funerals in the townships. The authorities speedily moved in and banned any of these performances. Plays with a heavy, political content are still being performed in Cape Flats church-halls and in Soweto. People are both recording and living out their experiences. Progressive movements such as trade unions are in no doubt about the importance of keeping revolutionary literature alive and encourage the presentation of plays even at the heights of the unrests.

In his book of literary criticism *Home and Exile and Other Selections* published in 1965, in an essay entitled 'Fiction by Black South Africans', Lewis Nkosi had very harsh judgment to pass on black South African writing. I wish to take issue with him, even at this late stage, not in any way to exonerate these works, but because many of the points raised still have relevance today. Discussing black writing in the sixties he observed that the situation '. . . seems to me quite desperate'. He then continued, 'It may even be wondered whether it might not be more prudent to renounce literature temporarily, as some have advised, and solve the political problem first'. It could be easier to ignore this somewhat facile and uncharacteristic remark in an otherwise thought-provoking essay, except that the argument is still being bandied about and I feel should be exorcized once and for all.

Some insist that the black South African writer must both write and fight; others say that he must write while others fight; and we also have this third variation which claims that a literary state can be so desperate that it can demand that writing ceases in order to allow the political problem to be resolved.

My argument is not so much to counter the last statement as to assert that, in order to bring about meaningful change in a society, there is no place whatsoever for reckless pronouncements such as that.

Much of what is produced by black South Africans today may be seen as unstructured, uncontrolled and 'quite desperate'. But there must be room made even for such writing which, in its own inadequate way, attempts to confront the situation and make its own limited contribution. This is not to make any case for bad writing. It is to challenge the criteria and standards employed which say that such writing is bad. It is time that such criteria themselves should be analysed and reviewed. Out of the plethora of works produced, relevance and excellence will dictate what will survive as most definitive of the happening. But the motivation behind its production is not posterity. It is in order to make its own contribution, to vent its own anger, to challenge the state machinery in spite of the overwhelming odds pitted against it.

One could ask the question, 'who then is qualified to decide what the standards are'? That would be moving into a polemic not really relevant to this argument. One could speculate who the critic should be, but it would be arbitrary to decide what standards he should employ. The main argument is to determine what prudence there is in renouncing any creativity temporarily for whatever reason. Is it to suggest the wisdom of choosing between writing and fighting? Is it to suggest that the standards of literature in a given situation can reach such a stage of deterioration (in itself an arbitrary judgment) that creativity must be halted to make way for other matters 'as some have suggested'?

No person should and must be asked to stop creating. For when creativity dies it also spells the death of the creator. No writer must stop writing just because some critic feels the situation warrants it. There are sufficient forces at work, especially in South Africa, bent on stopping the black writer. Which is not to equate Nkosi's statement with any pronouncements from Pretoria. But it would have been more constructive had that assertion been one for improvement and not for cessation. Any voice stopped for whatever reason is an idea stifled.

The black South African writer indeed has a dual function. As a black he storms castles and as a writer he defines the happening. He knows he lives in a country where the state will deny him basic rights. He opposes this in the way he can do best, by writing about it and revealing its injustices. Whether he sometimes fights more than he writes or the converse, depends on the circumstances he finds himself in. It is impertinent to suggest that his literary credentials be dependent on how often he can throw stones at white police-

men. Also it cannot be prescribed that he performs one function while the non-writer performs another. The exigencies of his situation might demand that he performs both. But then it becomes a matter of timing and emphasis. While he is being tear-gassed he is too preoccupied defending himself to sit down and write, and then he is forced to wait until the air has cleared, the troops have left the location and a relative calm has settled over the township before he is able to define the happening to the best of his ability.

In conclusion, the writer can never stop writing because in the opinion of any critic his work does not measure up to some arbitrary standard. The black South African writer has always been faced with this dual function from Sol Plaatje to the unpublished Soweto poet reading his work at a funeral. And it is to his credit that up to the present he has been able to maintain both his perspective and commitment.

From the Pot by Bhekisani Manyoni

NARRATING THE KATLEHONG MURALS

By Clive Dyer
With Photographs by Ramabala

This essay is offered as a homage to that which inspires the work of the artists based at Katlehong, situated near Germiston some seventy-odd kilometres from Johannesburg. Its aim is primarily consonant with that of the murals themselves. This is to provide an introduction to the art centred at Katlehong and reaching right out to reality itself. This essay concentrates on the murals which can be seen on the exterior walls of the Katlehong Art Centre. It thus seeks merely to whet the reader's appetite for a fuller exploration. Moreover, the actual murals and the photographic and literary representation of them are interrelated. It would defeat the purpose of the representation of the murals in this format if the priority of the works themselves were not recognized in terms of artistic creativity, political reflection and social responsibility.

No assessment in these terms is offered below. All that is offered is a descriptive representation, that is, a narrative, assisted by photographic images.

The dialectics of creativity and destruction are symbolized in the omnipresent municipal township refuse bin sited in the grounds of the Katlehong Art Centre, the telling words used to label both the bin and the place where the artists must work.

Turning around one encounters the results of some of their labours depicted on the walls surrounding their work-base. The building complex was reportedly erected as a dairy and used as such for some time before its transformation, first into a centre for dancing and other performing arts, and then, into a pottery, plastic and fine arts studio, weaving workshop, and accommodation area (initially for living in and now for administration). The architecture is therefore quite rambling and rustic with large areas of out-facing walls. It is these walls that artists drawn to work there first started painting as a public symbol of their inspiration and as a demonstration of the power of art to invoke the source of recollection, to protest at the denigration of this source, and to reveal the struggle for liberation.

The narration of the murals now proceeds and is presented in two parts.

1) Graphic Murals

In a large mural entitled 'From the Pot', Manyoni shows the *amaDhlozi*, or ancestral spirits, coming in from that side of the world that is opened every day by the sun. They are carrying the burden of the people's economy on their shoulders; the homestead. In front of them, now, the people are herding their cattle, themselves the keepers of *amaDhlozi*. Around the cattle are the builders and members of the homestead. Before them is the homestead itself. The children are carrying beautifully rounded and decorated clay pots for water or for beer: the sustainers of life. They disappear into the distance, always in the care of the *amaDhlozi*. **AmaDhlozi,** their people's task completed, return from the resting place of the sun, flying swiftly, as **birds,** through the homestead, created and re-created, over the builders and dwellers in this life, over their keepers themselves, themselves the keepers of freedom.

The artist is Mr Bhekisani MANYONI – who carefully provides the following gloss on his name. INYONI is the Zulu word for 'bird'; the prefix MA- usually means 'mother of –': however, in recognition of the fact that our ancestors are not restricted to this continent alone MAN, the translation of the root-word in Ur-BaNtu, must also be recognized. Thus the artist MAN represents himself as a bird, though never alone. But, it is not so much as a bird that he represents himself, but as INYONI: always signifying the spirit of freedom which originates in the origins of MAN, here in Africa.

Manyoni received some of his education at Rorke's Drift, where he worked under the supervision of and in collaboration with such notables as Azaria Mbatha and the lately deceased John Muafangelo. Although his work as an

artist is not limited to the production of graphics, this is clearly a major aspect of it. His transcription of this work into murals such as the one shown above prompts the title given to this section. Its appropriateness is borne out by the two following works.

In the beginning of the mural entitled 'Ncome: Scenes through the Decades', by Ephraim Ziqubu, a work which is twice the length of the first one described, we can discern Mvelinqangi overseeing the happenings at Ncome River. Ncome was a battlefield between the amaZulu and the amaBunu. (The mural is painted, in graphic style, over a very long wall behind which are housed the administration offices, formerly accommodation used by artists such as Ziqubu himself.)

Mvelinqangi[1] is the name of the unknowable which precedes any placings or events. The two huge spheres of light beaming out from the beginning of this mural narrative (at the left) are the enlivening eyes of Mvelinqangi. They reveal for us the tale, beginning with a pastoral scene of horses, captured in the battle, now shown simply grazing along the banks of the Ncome River. Immediately one notices a bird fluttering about at the head of one of the horses, perhaps about to pluck a tick from its mane.

The multiplicity of birds depicted on this mural, in a splendid celebration of the variety of movement and change, is an enticingly mysterious pointer to the uninitiated observer. There are birds busy at mundane activities, solemn birds, startled birds, birds ducking and diving, catching water-snakes, making love, fighting or duelling in flowery combat, nesting: and then there are birds in so many attitudes of recognizable emotions and moods that one's apprehension of them coincides with amazement.

Put simply, it is only once one recalls *zizolibusa inyoni zezulu,*[2] the last words of Emperor Shaka the Great, spoken in his death throes to his brothers, telling them that, despite their murdering him, the land could never belong to any person as it is only the birds from the skies who can rule it eventually – it is only once one recalls this historical saying, aided and abetted, furthermore, by the Manyoni reflections already presented, that one can begin to appreciate the lights in this mural as originating from Mvelinqangi, that which is before any origin.

Continuing the narrative[3] now, with the understanding that the birds are birds as well as symbols of divine authorship, we see them presiding not over the battlefield, but over its effects and the influences exerted upon the people engaged in it. In front of the horses described above, we see the injured warriors who were helped to get back home after the battle. Above them are birds

Ukuthwasa kwehlobo by Mbongeni Dingane Ntanzi (detail)

Ncome: Scenes through the Decades **by Ephraim Ziqubu (first half)**

with piteous gaze, flying about gently, as if they would give them their aid and consolation. Below the injured men here depicted there are birds flocking along the river, looking with a terrible surprise for the changing colour of the water – from creamy-brown to blood-red. Then, a distance further on, we see people presented as spectators, watching for the injured men coming back home.

In the sky aeroplanes are making their ways to and from lands far across the seas. The one which leaves is strikingly machinelike, four-engined, with a remarkable tailpiece and an almost comically discernible pilot.

The returning one, also four-engined, is caught between the amazed discernments of two birds at either end of it, both of which are astonishingly enraptured by the sight. This aeroplane indeed appears to be transmogrifying into a bird-ancestor. In the same portion of sky, large clouds of white paint have been shown by the artist to represent the luminous transformations inherent in the firmament.

Back down to earth, we see the victorious battlemen waving high their spears and their shields. Before they reach their homes the women come out to meet them, offering Mqombothi beer as a sign of their happiness at the warriors' return. The women rejoice at the prospect of their dreams being fulfilled.

This prospect is materially represented by a magnificent picture of men building the round house of yore crested by an exquisitely carved bird-ancestor symbolizing perfect reintegration.

The two halves of this mural are divided by a doorway providing entrance to a long thin courtyard giving way to rooms which Ziqubu himself lived in for a time. Continuity between the two halves is facilitated by a narrow strip above the doorway. However, both division and continuity are imaginatively reconciled and effected through the motif of **Ncome,** the river, which is clearly the same river in both halves yet, also, obviously different. In the first half the river is striated, in graphic representation of the streaks of blood spilt in it. The round black and white shapes are boulders signifying difficulties in these most terrible waters of Ncome. In the second half of the mural the river Ncome becomes swollen and marvellously clear of any obstacles, eventually running its full way into the ocean of our dreams.

The transition adumbrated at the end of the first half by the enlivening icon of a communal house-building is joyously realized in the second half with scenes of celebrating and feasting and a productivity coming directly out of a now wholly mystical river. Out of the second half's side of the dividing doorway, the figure of a man emerges with his feet firmly following the path cut through a field by a plough pulled by an exuberant, leading team, a team plodding firmly upon the land, a ploughman skipping with exhilaration out of the river of fertility.

In front of the team leader we see rocks which have been removed from the river, a beautiful field with a plentiful harvest, a line of round rocks guarding the perfectly rounded houses, and birds and people intermingling everywhere.

Further on up in the sky we see birds bearing the mighty ancestral warrior of old, hero of great battles, the guiding spirit of those who must struggle on, until victory over their foes. The birds painted on this wall present a virtuoso display of reinforcing the warriors and people with their indescribable, magic deeds. Dream-like spaces of integration on earth are shown by scenes of men ploughing their fields and elsewhere sitting animatedly under the shades shaking their Mqombothi calabashes.

After the decades, scenes of inventive cultural transformation, adaptation and progressive exploration are presented in which people travel outwards and abroad in vehicles ranging from a car to a ship, flags flying and people waving from the shoreline, in farewell or welcome?

It is Spring Time, heralding the beginning of the new summer season. Each and every year, this is the work of spring that we see and take part in. The rhythms of spring are shown in this painting. It is dawn, the sun is rising over the mountains and the *ingwababa* bird shouts out this news for all the world to hear. As we look up, we see the *ingwababa* streaking upwards in front of the sun.

The homestead houses are tranquil in the first light of day. To the one side is a large storeroom, with its outer wall cracking just as the bricks of the wall on which this mural is painted are cracked.

The people of the homestead have already been up and about for some time: two great oxen are resting and eating whilst having a little break, still in-spanned but their leather harnesses loosened from the ploughing sleigh – *isihlibi.*

And the women are already returning from having collected water from the river in large pots, now carried gracefully on their heads. The motion of their bodies has to be finely tuned to retain their balance with this delicate and essential burden. The young girls have to learn from their mothers, or, if they are too small, they tag along anyway, playfully.

The woman who is hoeing has also to maintain a vigorous body-rhythm, even whilst wearing the *isicolo* headdress, looking after her sprightly child with her own *isicolo* on, being aware of her neighbour and fellow wife working alongside, and acknowledging as well the limits of the *impungushe* hunting jackal intruding just so far, and no further, into the *amasino* fields.

The benign optimism communicated by the integration of the enlivened images painted on this wall, organically interrelated with the wall itself, with the eternal cycles of the past at just the point when summer is about to break out, brings us to the end of the monochromatic murals in the graphic style.

2) Chromatic Murals

The transition to the polychromatic, high-protest, modernist murals is not suppoed to effect a distinction in the vein of a schism leading to isolated opposition, but rather to enable the realization of a distinction which throws us violently into contact with walls filled with the signs of conflicting opposities.

In confrontation with these walls, perceiving oneself in the midst of the transition from old to new and locked into the logic of reflecting opposites, no simple explanatory reductions can suffice to protect the viewer's understandings and, indeed, even our responsibility. Instead, the longer one looks at one mural, from one to another, and back again, the more one is provoked in a staggering elision to bewilderment. This does not necessarily render the viewer inactive. The capacity for action depends on the ability to respond to tensions generated by the projections onto these Katlehong walls. They are artistic renditions of where people come from, of who presides over them, of what they are, and of what they might become.

The complexity of the modernist, chromatic set of murals is uncompromising and arresting. The major exponent of these murals, Prince Tose, is himself an enigma. Many stories are freely related about him and his connexions. The most engaging of these, to date, is that concerning his determination to creatively re-introduce into contemporary language the sounds used by the first people of this world, namely, the San click-sounds. Another tale relates how the first work done on these walls by this artist was recently wiped out and painted over in order to project the protest described below. (The photograph represents a detail of this untitled mural.)

The writing is printed in red and yellow – JAh ARMY – it covers the people – Babylon WATCH OUT JAH ARMY IS THERE – it covers the people, the people are there, up against a wall, behind a green line, they are terrorized – PEACE USSR-USA come OUT IN AFRIKA PEACE Fighting agAINST NUcleAR Idears Step OUT – they are harshly out-lined, bodies, with exteriorized skeletons and interiorized pink skins like thinly veiled sacs of thin blood.

SToP KilliNg Us liKE Flies This WHAT do to JAH Shilren PEACE THOSE WHO Kill by GUN SHAll die by FIRE ReMeMber THE TEN CommandmENTS THAU SHALL NOT Kill I&I FOR FUN PEACE IN AFRIKA.

The brilliantly silver-white teeth in mechanical, gaping mouths are set in vice-like gestures of UNcommunication. Finally, the adjacent electricity mains box has an anthropomorphic mask outlined on it. Is this our future? Is this the present that we are facing?

Moving on, towards the entrance-way leading into the pottery, we find the side-walls also painted with Tose masterpieces. The one curling around the corner from the terrorized people is dated in the same year, 1987.

It is a highly abstract and modern work depicting one massive, boulder-like human head, angry as a vengeful warrior; another, contrite in supplication; whilst a third is smashed and defeated.

Although the defeat is wrought in strokes of blood, with an execution that can only be described as reminiscent of the old Chinese masters, the figure nonetheless retains essential features of humanity, however pained.

On the opposite wall, seven warriors, with faces so fierce that in two cases at least they have become pure masks of war. In their great hands the warriors clutch the spears of the nation whilst on their heads they wear the caps of recent guerillas. Tose has signed this piece 1988.

Continuing on up the entrance-way one can descend steps to the left which lead to the area where the weavers work, and to the right, leading to the stu-


STOP K
Remember THE
HAY SHALL NO

Ukuthwasa kwehlobo by Mbongeni Dingane Ntanzi

dio. Taking the latter route into a sunny courtyard bounded by a straggling vine growing along a portion of the walls, on either side of the door to the studio we encounter another mural by Tose on the left and one by Mziyabantu on the right.

As with his other works, a visual encounter with the colours Tose uses in 'Bafalo Soldier' is crucial to a full appreciation of it. Here we can see colours combining vividly and yet so subtly as to give off a numinous effect of surreal power. This mural presents itself to us as an icon of the warrior incarnate, straddling a steed whose saddle is a Kandinsky piano, whose neck is a conduit for its libido, whose head is that of the lizard-frog aimed like a phallus at the source of all ephemerality.

The warrior has the great spear of the nation, perhaps of destiny itself, thrust through his chest, whilst behind him another awaits his bidding. The warrior is so phantastic a creature that we are forced to avert our concentration from his wild, incandescent, emerald eyes *('mahlo 'matala)* and down his open-structured body, further down his musical legs, to the beast's belly which is vibrantly open to the slender stalks of grass below it and back up again to the clouds in which its head seeks . . . one is finally lost in appreciation of the legs leading into, merging with the grass, except for the one which rests within it as the tail of a tiger.

'Should we do art on this condition' by Mziyabantu is a work of African expressionism which represents the cruel reflection of the Madonna and Child.

In it is expressed the violent anguish of the Mother's stricken oppression, the horror of the Child's apprehension of it, the grotesque supplication of a limb incapable of providing the protection which is the child's birthright: all these are executed with a hardly constrained verve and such an intensely intricate use of colours that the whole is rendered sickening with a power sufficient to appal even the most disinterested on-looker.

Mziyabantu is part of that younger generation of artists whose members have been catapulted, indeed, who have actively catapulted themselves into the centres of theoretical-practice in our land. He, at least, wants no part of what he terms 'dinner-art'. Naturally enough he is not precisely certain of what it is that he does want to be part of, but it is surely the definition of this that we must all feel challenged to engage in, with whatever courage, talent, and critical awareness we can bring to bear.

Postscript

Preliminary investigations have shown clearly that the material history of the murals painted at what is now known as the Katlehong Art Centre, worked out and presented in its relationship to the mythologies[4] of the past as well as in its relationship to the dynamics of changes occurring in the present and the advances of future visions, is a potential field of study that would, on its own, require substantial independent work. Two brief remarks should provide sufficient further indication of this.

Firstly, it seems that a mural was first produced on one of these walls in the sixties. That same work has recently been wiped out by the original artist, who has since completed a new mural precisely in the place of the old. Thus the dynamics of transformation are indicated right from the starting point of historical investigation. Lastly, the wall surfaces seem not to be regarded as in any way sacrosanct or inviolate except, perhaps, in so far as they effectively accomplish the task of communication with those who perceive them which has been assigned to them by the muralists. The fact that the wall surfaces are noticeably, and in places quite severely, deteriorating is understood by at least one of the art-workers to have been, from the start, a given which, far from being worked against, could be recognized as providing the potential for a relatively short-term process of ageing. This constructively enhances the historical perspective of the mural through the ways in which the disintegration might reflect on that suffered by the San rock paintings.

1. *'Mvelinqangi'* means literally, the a priori originator; and figuratively, 'the ocean of the dream' – see, for example, Mazisi Kunene, *Anthem of the Decades:* A Zulu Epic, translated from Zulu by the author, Heinemann, London, 1981, Part III Book xi page 245 lines 24-34; and also, Doke, C.M. and Vilakazi, B.W., *Zulu-English Dictionary,* Second Edition, W.U.P., Johannesburg, 1972.

2. In conversation with Napo Mokoena; See, Mazisi Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great,* a Zulu Epic, translated from Zulu by the author, Heinemann, London, 1979, Book xvii page 425 lines 13-14. 'Only the swallows shall rule over it [Zululand].'

3. The skeleton of this narrative, from beginning to end, was written by John Sekhwela, also an artist based at the Centre.

4. **Myths** viewed properly, as Robert Graves has pointed out, as 'verbal iconographs', *The White Goddess: a historical grammar of poetical myth,* Faber and Faber, London, page 21 et passim.

Photograph by Omar Badsha

MAFIKA GWALA: TOWARDS A NATIONAL CULTURE

Interviewed by
Thengamehlo Ngwenya

NGWENYA: When did you begin writing poetry?
GWALA: Between 1966 and 1967. I did not choose poetry, it just came. I started by writing prose. Short stories. Then there was the problem of publication outlets. *Contrast,* of which I was aware, was conservative, *Black Orpheus* (of which Es'kia Mphahlele was co-editor) was in Nigeria and *Transition,* in Kampala. Of course, I read them all. Somehow I did manage to get out a story in *The Classic,* before it ceased publication. This same magazine also had my first poems – I had five in one issue. This was the time when poetry was being well received in liberal circles, largely owing to the tendency brought about by poets such as Allen Ginsberg, LeRoi Jones, Gregory Corso, Gary Snyder, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and others of the Beat Generation.
NGWENYA: Your first collection had a suggestive title – *Jol'iinkomo.*
GWALA: Firstly, I am a jazz digger. And I'm in love with that song: *Jol'iinkomo.* I think Miriam Makeba was brought up in the ghetto, but she also kept to her African roots. Hence her deep expression in that song. In 1970 I found myself teaching in the countryside of Transkei. I came back in 1972. It was one of the best periods of my life. In that first collection there is sometimes an attempt to handle the rural context:

> 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.

My best contribution to Black Consciousness and to SASO came out during this time. I came to understand better the meaning and dimension of my blackness. I appreciated better the circumstance of my background and what Africa meant to me. So the title of that collection was a declaration of solidarity with the rural masses.
NGWENYA: Miriam Makeba says *Jol'iinkomo* is a song of encouragement which was sung by Xhosa maidens when the young men were preparing to go to war.
GWALA: Sure. *Jol'iinkomo* is a song of encouragement. In all my writing I have had to strive for a positive negation against the cultural system of the

oppressor. I see my role as being that of awakening the consciousness, and opening out the negative reality of lies and complacency, despite the desperation encountered.

NGWENYA: Your poems, together with those of your contemporaries who are commonly known as the 'Soweto Poets', are informed in varying degrees by the philosophy of Black Consciousness.

GWALA: I refuse to be called a 'Soweto Poet'. We have all disagreed with the labelling. Just yesterday some artist friend was showing Chapman's book to a group of jazz musicians. Every one of them unreservedly condemned the title of the book *Soweto Poetry.* Here (in Chapman) is a good example of liberal patronizing. I just cannot consider myself in the mould of a 'Soweto Poet'. Living with constant fear and bitter anger in this country does not revolve round Soweto alone. More, telling the world how my people are suffering and being hounded is more important than being a 'literary' figure. It is more than any literary award.

Soweto was a culminating point in a lonely and grisly blow-for-blow contestation by the Black Resistance movement against racism and class exploitation. The whole of South Africa was 'Soweto'. June 16 spilled over to all corners of the country. By then I had been around for quite some time. We had precipitated Soweto, so to speak. I actually predicted it; and said so in December 1974: 'One of these days Soweto is going to burst.' It was during my address to the Black Renaissance Convention at Hammanskraal. You can perhaps understand, now, why we hate being called 'Soweto Poets'.

Taking into account the period of the seventies, no honest black can disavow or disown Black Consciousness. We are in a cock-eyed situation. We had to call for some kind of common identity and mutual understanding amongst the people of colour. The positive value systems of the past had to be brought into play. My poetry stressed Black Consciousness because it was the major theme of the historical moment. Also, as cultural input it had to stimulate what we then held politically. It was a matter of putting everything into the struggle. And the historical aspect had to be maintained. It is no use if a man cannot function within his own culture. Black Consciousness was there to help us understand the values, ideas and images that tied us to our social functions. It was a mode of consciousness that helped black writers to analyse patterns in the experiences they were writing about – giving them some fecundity. Remember, it was a very repressive period, intellectually and otherwise, and very few would dare talk of class struggle. So, it was part of an ideological mediation.

NGWENYA: Did you see Black Consciousness as having affinities with the Pan-African concept of Negritude?
GWALA: No two social and political situations are the same. Negritude belongs to a different era. Whilst one can say that both Negritude and Black Consciousness had bourgeois overtones, Black Consciousness did have an approach that defined its target-group by its rejection of liberalism, 'non-whitism' and tribalism. There was also a general acceptance that culture had no real face in terms of colour or nationality. The role of African identity was not stressed because Black Consciousness adherents realized they could not escape their time. Indians and 'coloureds' had to be brought into the common fold of Blackness. Pan-Africanism was seen by many to be not only ideologically dangerous, but a slanted oversight of the fact that South Africa's problems are not exclusively ours, but are at the same time problems of the Third World. The solidarity rally that took place at Durban's Currie's Fountain – it became known as the Frelimo Rally – was a way of saying from now on we are openly going to speak a socialist language.
NGWENYA: The proponents of Negritude have been criticized for idealizing and romanticizing the traditional African way of life.
GWALA: One did not have to idealize or romanticize the traditional African way of life in order to speak of Black Consciousness. The basis of apartheid was enough. The main thing was to acknowledge the conflict between the values of the white oppressor and those of the oppressed (including conditioned thinking), and to activate this awareness in a manner that called for involvement in the struggle for national consciousness. Another significant difference is that the proponents of Negritude formulated their ideas in exile, in the capitals of the colonial world. Black Consciousness developed in active struggle amongst the oppressed people, so that the urge to idealize or romanticize was minimal.

What we need is a vision of the future rooted in a critical awareness of the past. A new national culture should not be seen as being in conflict with traditional customs. Or that would be like going to war against the masses.

Take writing. A literature is being born in the process of social crisis and political change. We should be able to say: we were here; and this is how we were.

Even in a non-racial South Africa people should be able to maintain those traditional customs that contribute to their self-determination. There is nothing wrong with that. After all, there has always been a re-shaping of the past in true accordance with perspectives within the present. A regard for the past is an essential aspect of change.

NGWENYA: You have stated in some of your writings that literature in our historical epoch cannot enjoy the luxury of neutrality.
GWALA: Our culture is not polite. Particularly when we cannot yet lay claim to a National South African culture.

Whenever a writer makes innovative use of English words, there are possibilities of literary contribution. It is sometimes dialectically imperative for the writer to be unconventional with a language. In our case, how can there be neutrality when apartheid has reached terminal velocity? The class and colour value of our education proves that we have to challenge the ruling political ideology placed before us. The linguistic poverty in the dominant culture calls for a politicization of literary effort in the fight against language manipulation upon the public by the dominant sector. In short, it comes to this: with regard to the state and the role of English, who owns it? Is violence between black and white culturally adaptable? How does one use English as a site of struggle.

If the writer is ever to enter into the heart of his nation, his mission is political action through letting literary form take its own logic – political consciousness. The necessity of understanding the individual and the socio-cultural levels of our communities turns out to be politics.
NGWENYA: Yet do black writers not feel that they have to operate within the very conventions and standards that they seek to transform? Critics, who very largely belong to the dominant culture, expect writing to display 'literariness'.
GWALA: I would say that language is spoken from different dimensions. Linguistic fixations do exist for the worker, the liberal, the Marxist, the verkrampte. Inevitably, literature becomes a political background. For most black writers literature will continue to reflect the language of the people rather than 'literary' language, just as 'art' language will not prevail above national expressions.

In any case, the majority of our literary critics are intellectual propagandists. They prefer the language of the elite. Hence the cultural cynicism of South African English. We have had very erudite, very learned explanations as to how writers should go about their business; but you cannot divorce language from power. The Humpty-Dumpty and Alice story on words and their meaning is a very old example.

It is the responsibility of the present-day writer to remould language in such a way that it becomes African but remains English. Once freed of dogmatic meanings language becomes dynamic. 'Literary' means different things to different people. The task is to criticize all that is false in our sense of values . . . 'literary' language included. A writer cannot throw strain on this

country's controversial ideas, its centres of culture, its institutions of learning and yet use 'literary' language, as opposed to the language of the people.
NGWENYA: Your poetry reflects an urban iconography – would you describe yourself as a city poet?
GWALA: It is bad to be categorized unduly. The urban influence is there; but the attraction of the rural cannot be discounted. *No More Lullabies* is mainly urban because that is where I had been staying at the time, experiencing. If I were to go to the countryside I would wish to express the rural experience.

The urban iconography was to help me expose and fight the 'supermarket ideology'.
NGWENYA: How significant has the influence of jazz music been in your poetry?
GWALA: I was not aware of the influence of jazz music in my poetry until people started telling me about it. Basically, I love jazz; and I easily make friends with jazz musicians everywhere I go. I even wish to write about them, their talents and their frustrations. When writing I love to play music. There are times when I've played music for several days – not reading and not writing – and then felt an urge to go back to writing. Yes, jazz has formed psychographical segments of my writing.
NGWENYA: The influence of Black Consciousness on black writing in the 70s was profound. But with the emergence of militant worker poets in the 80s, this influence has diminished. What is the role of Black Consciousness in a situation where the national democratic movement is achieving phenomenal success in mobilizing the black working class?
GWALA: As I have said, the liberation of Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and later, Zimbabwe, spelled the demise of Black Consciousness and called for the adoption of socialist humanism. As for the mobilizing of the black working class let me remind you that workers were included in the Black Consciousness programme through the Black Workers' Project.

The emergence of militant worker poets, most of whom write in the indigenous languages, is in itself a manifestation of black awareness. The problem begins when certain persons try to compartmentalize what was once defined simply as 'a way of life'. The mass democratic movement is itself heavily teamed with former Black Consciousness activists at leadership levels. It must be borne in mind that throughout the Black Consciousness days ways and means of focusing the legitimacy of the ANC and the PAC were always being sought.
NGWENYA: Do you see the work of the new worker poets (published in *Black Mamba Rising)* as a continuation of the trend set by Black Consciousness poets, or as a new development?

GWALA: The fact that the poems in *Black Mamba Rising* are sometimes written in complex Nguni symbolism shows that they are meant to evoke a deep sense of pride in the workers. That pride is an expression of an African awareness. Black Consciousness is recognition of our cultural roots and as such cannot be ushered in and out of our experiences. Identity cannot be wished away at will. The re-introduction of old oral forms of repetition and incantation to express persistence of will, and hope in the future of final victory, creates a base for a truly indigenous culture in the writings of the worker poets.

NGWENYA: After reading your poems in *Jol'iinkomo* and *No More Lullabies,* as well as your writings on culture and literature, I was left with the impression that you have always been a cultural worker/cultural activist rather than an 'individualized' poet.

GWALA: I take it that art, any art, is an endeavour towards the understanding of reality and coming to terms with it. Therefore, I cannot disregard the conflict within the social reality I'm faced with.

Liberal humanism detaches itself from the conflict and merely comments on it, whereas cultural activism challenges the social forces as well as the anti-freedoms imposed on us. Cultural engagement does not preclude political engagement.

NGWENYA: You have spoken of writing as a cultural weapon – what exactly does that mean?

GWALA: Partly it implies national literature as opposed to 'art' literature, popular language as opposed to 'purist' language. The objective is to place imagination and suavity before purity and precision. Therefore, it means what the black imagination can do with the English language through the metaphorical language of ghetto and rural blacks. Also, it means exploring the potentialities of the English language within the Third World context.

Is the small 'freedom' conceded to writers not, at times, a proof of our cultural failure? The workers need freedom as well. How literate are they? Why should I write for the already convinced, converting the converted? Literature should not be the refrigerated food of bourgeois culture. As Sekou Toure said to the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in 1959: 'To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves and of themselves.' To be a cultural weapon writing must become an act of solidarity with the down-trodden masses, the wretched of the earth.

INTENSIVE CARE

a radio play
by
Stephen Gray

Characters:
Margie
John Gibbons
Nurse
Sister
Ernest
Doctor

A car's engine running fast and easily. The radio is dimly playing 30s late-night dance music.

MARGIE: It's so ghostly on the highway at this hour . . . At least we have the radio for company . . . Would you like me to drive a bit? John, you shouldn't drive so fast . . . It's fine by me if they want the shop. Really, I think we should – let them take over and be done. Don't even think about it; just do it. I'm not the impulsive one, but don't you think so? . . . Switch this thing off. *(She turns the radio off)*
JOHN: It'll work out, Margie. Don't worry now.
MARGIE: I suppose so. We'll decide tomorrow.
JOHN: Tomorrow's Mother's Day – we won't have a moment.
MARGIE: Please slow down a bit. *(He does)* Mother's Day makes the flower business really worthwhile. Pity fathers don't get flowers too . . .
JOHN: I know . . . Without the shop what will we have to – you know? Keep us going, actually.
MARGIE: I'm game for whatever it is – John, are those lights in our lane? They're in the wrong lane! Slow down, slow down – John, it's coming for us – pull over, pull over! Watch out, Johnnie . . .
A skid, followed by a sickening and complicated collision, including all the impact of crunching metal, breaking glass and then . . . a hubcap rolling, and against silence a drip-drip.

(A life-support machine blips)
NURSE (from a great distance): Come now, baba . . . I know inside you very, very strong . . . So strong deep inside, baba, you are a raging bull. Yes, you still have many, many days left to make all kinds of trouble. Ai, the trouble you can make – it is without end, I know, I know. Always there is room for more trouble from a man . . . I don't care if you white, I don't care if you black, because underneath it is always the same . . . Ai, baba, and there are so many different kinds of trouble, I can tell you . . . Look at the trouble you are to us now. We have to keep you all the day long and all the night long and you don't even know the trouble you are . . . But that is not the kind of trouble I mean – look at all these machines, they are working much harder than me, just to keep you on this earth. I mean the trouble men do when they're fully alive, shame. You must come right now because the Kombi is waiting for the staff. I must go now to my children, they are waiting for me in Soweto. You must come right quickly, baba, then I can go. The Kombi is waiting.
JOHN: It was a Kombi, a white one . . . But it was on the wrong side of the partition, travelling the wrong way, on our side.
NURSE: Toe nou, baba, toe nou. You cannot talk with the wires in your jaw.
JOHN: It was, it was – a Kombi, completely in the wrong lane.
NURSE: Toe nou, baba. Sister is coming and I must go in the Kombi because my children are waiting . . . *(Fade out)*

(Fade in)
SISTER: Ernest, please help me. No, just leave the trolley . . .
ERNEST: Sister, must I –
SISTER: Just put your hands flat under his back. That's it. Now let's – ease him down a bit.
ERNEST: Nurse's gone, sister.
SISTER: Yes, Ernest. She had permission to go early. That's why I'm asking you. Little bit lower. I don't like it when their necks are all cramped.
JOHN: Is it a white Kombi? – tell her she must drive very carefully.
ERNEST: That's better for the breathing now, sister.
SISTER: Thanks, Ernest. Sorry to ask you, but it's such a difficult time. If only we could get some basic training for you. But you're not even through school yet, are you?
ERNEST: Standard Eight, but there's no school now because of the boycotts.
SISTER: I don't know, I really don't . . . All right, off with you or the tea'll get cold. *(Tea-trolley wheeled off)*
JOHN: It was a white Kombi with one headlight dimmer than the other.

SISTER: Dear Mother of God.
JOHN: It was, it was, and it came straight for us.
SISTER: Dear Mother of God, can you tell me if this poor man will pull through. *(Fade out)*

(Life-support system and washing sounds)
NURSE: You do nothing, baba, and look how you sweat right through the sheet into the mattress. Ow, it's getting hot again now. Look, this cools you right down . . . And the Kombi was so late again I thought I'd never get to work. That's the trouble these days – in the townships it is barricades and emergency and all the police. Mind you, baba, I don't say it is a bad thing the students are doing . . . they just want it all very, very quickly . . . and it's coming, it's coming – so slowly, baba. There are many people who don't want it at all . . . But it's very good, both sides, when they see us in our uniforms – they just signal us through. What can they do, baba, when we are nurses on the job? Isn't it right we must have immunity? When there's trouble, baba, who must fix it up but the nurses? – I say to my children, you throw the stones, someone receives them; they do the shooting, someone gets shot. You drive too fast, someone gets run over. Who must fix it? – the nurses, for four hundred rand a month. Look at you, baba – so broken you don't even know . . . aia, troubles! There . . . now you much much cooler. Next week I'm working night shift again . . . All right, see you tomorrow.
(Fade out)

(Tea-trolley approaching)
ERNEST: Hello, mister . . . No, you don't want any tea. I just put my head round the door. To see how you doing . . . You know what, mister – I been the whole hospital, up the lifts and down the corridors and – of all the patients you have the best flowers. Maybe they wanting some water. Shame, you cannot look after them . . . No, this one is full, and this one of the biggest and best, also full, and this one – all full . . . Hey, mister. *(Pause. Close)* Ah, you are looking at the flowers. That's good. All the flowers were sent for you; all have the same label. Ah, that's fine; I must ring for sister. Okay, okay –
JOHN (indistinctly): Your name is Ernest.
ERNEST (anxious): Hey, wait minute. Don't talk now.
JOHN (determined): Your name is Ernest and you want to finish school.
ERNEST (delighted): Hey! Hey, that's right. My name is Ernest. But you mustn't talk now because – your teeth were all knocked out.

JOHN: Ah hell, I think you're right.
ERNEST: Ja, ja, ja – I told you it's sore. I'm going to call sister.
JOHN: No, wait. Why didn't you finish school?
ERNEST: Why didn't I finish school?
JOHN: Yes, why don't you?
ERNEST: Well, mister – you see . . .
JOHN: John.
ERNEST: Mr John. At least you remember your name.
JOHN: You seem a bright lad to me.
ERNEST: The school is closed, don't you know? I must earn money now.
JOHN: You look too old for school.
ERNEST: Yes, yes, sister's coming. I can't give you tea without her permission. I'm only temporary, part-time . . . No, don't go back now, mister.
JOHN: Gosh, Margie must be running it.
ERNEST: Yes, I'm sure. Wait a minute, wait a minute. *(Trolley going)* Sister, sister, you know what? That old Mr John . . . *(Fade out)*
(Slight car engine)
JOHN: The lights came at us, Margie. One was full on, and the other had a drooping eyelid. Do you know what I mean, Margie? Of course you do; you were there, weren't you?
MARGIE (replay): It's in the wrong lane! John! They're not meant to be there!
Squealing tyres, the collision again in an abbreviated form.
JOHN: Margie, Margie – get me out of this! Margie, are you all right? . . . *(In silence)* Of course you must be . . . Of course she must be. Who else would be – emptying the whole shop into this room?
MARGIE: Never thought, after all these years . . . the function flowers have at the sickbed. How many times have we sent bouquets to the hospitals? They never come themselves – phone and dictate, and we have to write out the get-well cards. They don't really care for their sick, do they? No longer than they can be charged for something suitable. It's things like that make me fed up with the flower business.
JOHN: They very bad at night in a ward. Suck up all the oxygen.
MARGIE: Oh, John! Here it comes again! John, we're not in the right lane! John, look out – it's coming for us!
She screams. Skid and very abbreviated collision, ending in drip-drip.

SISTER: See, nurse,it's running just a bit slow – when the level here is almost dry, see, it mustn't get so low, or you get bubbles.
NURSE: Such a little bubble can kill such a big man.

SISTER: No, but it'll make his arm jolly sore. Adjust the valve, that's all.
NURSE: His arm is getting very sore, sister.
SISTER: Well, you know what to do about that. And get him ready before doctor comes.
NURSE: Sorry, sister; the Kombi was in trouble again.
SISTER: I know, but doctor's such a fiend for punctuality.
(Fade out)

(Tea-trolley approaching)
ERNEST: Hello . . . Mr John, you awake?
JOHN: Ah yes, Ernest . . . Come in, come in. I want to ask you something.
ERNEST: This time I can stop, because you are the last one.
JOHN: Sit down, won't you?
ERNEST: Just now sister is coming and I must wash up.
JOHN: You can relax a bit . . . So tell me, Ernest, there are just a few things worrying me. Is this hospital very full?
ERNEST: Tonight not so bad.
JOHN: I know this is the Trescott Hospital. I can read it on the sheet, you see.
ERNEST: Yes, Trescott. Very good hospital.
JOHN: This is the first time I've been in any hospital. As a patient, I mean . . . Yes, do take one. I had a lighter as well. It must be in my jacket over there.
ERNEST: Ah, that's a very nice lighter.
JOHN: You go ahead. No, not for me now.
ERNEST (lighting up): You smoke one, you feel better.
(Exhales)
JOHN: I'll just have a drag of yours. Just hold it there, thanks . . .
ERNEST: These are very, very strong.
JOHN: Mmm . . . *(Exhales)* That tastes good.
ERNEST: Yes, yes . . . So what you want me to tell you, Mr John?
JOHN: What date is it, for a start? Sorry to ask, but I can't remember so much, you see.
ERNEST: Ah, now it is the fifteenth.
JOHN: The fifteenth, good heavens! Azaleas should be out.
ERNEST: Ja, that's right.
JOHN: Ernest, you seem a very nice type. Can you do me a very big favour? Take the packet, and the lighter too. I'm having a bit of trouble, you see, because every time I try and think what happened, this – Kombi – runs straight for me and boom! . . . I don't suppose you've ever had that feeling.

ERNEST: That's why you in hospital, Mr John.
JOHN: I know, I know. But you see, I've got to find my wife. Will you help me get out of here?
ERNEST: But your car is completely broken, Mr John.
JOHN: I know, but I have to find her.
ERNEST: If you try to go, I must ring the bell for sister.
JOHN: This is just between you and me. Is she all right? Have you seen her bringing these flowers?
ERNEST: No, I only come at six o'clock, after visiting hours.
JOHN: I must know how she is. I've got to just – sneak out. With your help.
ERNEST: No, Mr John. I'm going to call sister.
JOHN: What will she say? – seeing you smoke in a patient's room. You're meant to be doing the washing-up.
ERNEST: You must get sister's permission.
JOHN: All right, all right. I can see you're such a loyal person. I can't tempt you. No, keep the packet, anyway.
ERNEST: All right, see you tomorrow, Mr John. Goodbye, goodbye. *(Trolley goes off)*

(Bell rings. Sister enters)
SISTER: Ah, Mr Gibbons! Ernest said you had your eyes fixed on all the lovely flowers. That's good news. Now try and sit up a bit.
JOHN: Sister, just tell me one thing.
SISTER: First you must get nice and comfortable. Don't pull on that arm. Here, I'll straighten the pillows. Shame, you must feel absolutely wretched. But from here on it's all going to get better. How does that feel now?
JOHN: Oh fine, thank you very much.
SISTER: That's what I so like to see – rallying, Mr Gibbons. Let me tell you how close to the edge you were. But I thought you'd make it. Doctor is such a genius, too. Thank God in heaven and all the saints as well.
JOHN: I gather you're from a religious order.
SISTER: Oh, that I am, Mr Gibbons. There isn't much point in having this job otherwise.
JOHN: All right then, where is she?
SISTER: Who do you mean, Mr Gibbons?
JOHN: My wife, of course. Who did you think I meant – the Virgin Mary?
SISTER: I'm afraid she's in heaven, Mr Gibbons.
JOHN: I know that, but where's my wife?
SISTER: I beg your pardon . . . I think we better start this conversation again.

JOHN: The Virgin Mary is in heaven, that I freely concede, if you believe in such a thing. I hope you're not trying to say my wife is there, too?
SISTER: Oh dear, I see what you mean. I think we'd better have this out with doctor. He has a very clear way of speaking.
JOHN: You see, I get this very terrible impression I'm talking to my wife – Margie her name is – and . . . and – we're in the car again. We just wanted to get home, that was all. We'd been to the couple who want to buy our shop. There are the flowers we sell, before your very eyes. They always used to sit the shop when we went on holiday. You can't just close up when you've got fresh-cut flowers and pots and . . . living things, sister.
SISTER: I think I know the feeling, Mr Gibbons.
JOHN: Of course you do. They know the business as well as we do, treat it like their own. But they don't have the capital, you see, that's their trouble. We've been at it for forty years, Margie and I, built up adequate protection.
SISTER: I'm sure you have, Mr Gibbons. Now, don't get overexcited.
JOHN: It was all going so well, so very, very well. When this – when this – came out of – nowhere, sister. Absolutely nowhere.
SISTER: Don't work yourself up into a state.
JOHN: Didn't know whether to go – left – or right. Straight for us! It was coming right up out of the dark, and Margie was yelling, Pull over, pull over. And then, and then – head-on! Lucky my bonnet's low . . . Oh no, do I need that needle? . . . Oh sister, please not now.
SISTER: Won't feel a thing, and it's all going to be all right in the morning. You'll see, you'll be right as rain, Mr Gibbons, right as rain in the morning, God willing . . . *(Fade out)*

DOCTOR: Mr Gibbons . . . Mr Gibbons . . . Sister gives me such good reports of you. I'm your doctor, appointed by MedicAlert. Thank goodness your wife had your silver tag in her handbag, and the rest was quite orderly. In these uncertain times it's the only way to proceed. You're covered one hundred percent. I'm sure that is a comfort to you.
JOHN: Ah . . . doctor. Thank you for everything you've done. Labouring away, and I wasn't really aware of it . . .
DOCTOR: Just focus on the end of my pen . . . There now.
JOHN: I suppose you know a lot more about my body than I do.
DOCTOR: You've got a tongue like everybody else. Tongue out – say Ah.
JOHN: Ah, ah . . . I just can't get that sound of – tearing metal out of my head.
DOCTOR: I'm not surprised. They had to use the jaws of death to get you free.

JOHN: Funny, but I imagine it's Ernest the tea-boy, and the night sister who works here, bearing down on me in that Kombi, really gone berserk. Completely wrong, I know . . .
DOCTOR: Couldn't have been them. They'd be pretty mangled, wouldn't they?
JOHN: Yes, of course . . . They were – terrorists, I suppose, on the get-away.
DOCTOR: Well, the Kombi was stolen, it appears. And they were on the run.
JOHN: Full of arms and grenades, that sort of thing, I suppose.
DOCTOR: They were country people, not used to our double carriageways.
JOHN: And the police gave chase, of course.
DOCTOR: No, but they identified them in the mortuary all right. Trafficking in that dreadful dagga – bales of it all burst out, blowing into perfectly respectable people's houses.
JOHN: Oh well . . . that's not very glorious, is it? You hear such terrible things about – sabotage and . . . gun-running. We never kept up with such things. I suppose you don't, until it hits you straight in the face, as it were.
DOCTOR: Just an unfortunate accident. Blood pressure's climbing up nicely.
JOHN: She was killed too, wasn't she? I know that because otherwise she'd be here. And if she were ill, too – at least her handwriting would be on the cards with the flowers . . .
DOCTOR: Instantly, I'm afraid. MedicAlert took care of the details.
JOHN: You didn't have to confirm it. I knew it, even before I came round.
DOCTOR: I'm so sorry, Mr Gibbons . . . Didn't sister tell you?
JOHN: She didn't have to, doctor; I really knew already.
DOCTOR: I'm afraid that's how it is.
JOHN: I suppose that's why I'm taking so long. Don't want to live without her.
DOCTOR: Yes, I know what you mean.
JOHN: I stare out of that window, you know . . . at that clump of cane-grass. There's a little yellow weaver-bird, cheeps about. When he thinks I'm not looking, nips at a blade, strips it . . . and off he goes to weave at his nest, over there in the gum-tree. So industrious, such a creature of habit . . .
DOCTOR: Sorry, this may hurt a bit.
JOHN: Seems so futile, if Margie's dead.
DOCTOR: Does that hurt?
JOHN: Yes, a bit.
DOCTOR: At least it's not numb . . . Small world, isn't it? My wife's been using your very shop, she tells me, for years now. Didn't think we had you and your wife to thank for such lovely displays. Florists are the best part of life, I always say. Don't get much time for gardening, you know, so I have to rely on people like you.

JOHN: At least ours don't wilt if you move them from one room to another. And they're not full of aspirin, either. That does – hurt a lot, doctor.
DOCTOR: Let it settle down. You'll get used to it. *(Fade out)*

Car engine and radio music in a different version of the opening scene.
MARGIE: It's so ghostly on the highway at this hour . . . Jan and Elsa are so keen, aren't they?
JOHN: We started without capital, remember . . . Turn this down a bit. *(Softens radio)*
MARGIE: Let them rent it then. John, I love the shop, heaven knows, but – sometimes I feel if we have to supply another barmitzvah or banquet, or another wedding, I'll just . . . I don't know, dump the whole load and tell them to arrange it themselves.
JOHN: But banquets and weddings are our main income.
MARGIE: And funerals, don't forget the funerals . . . Please slow down a bit.
JOHN: You know that wife of the doctor who works at the Trescott? She always comes in herself. It's worth carrying on, if only for people like her.
MARGIE: She's the exception. I don't like any of our other customers.
JOHN: Well . . . I love you, Margie. You know that.
MARGIE: Yes, I do know that. John, I love you, too. Why do you say that now? That isn't the issue.
JOHN: Isn't that enough, my dear? We're a lot luckier than most.
MARGIE: No, you see, it isn't. Not now. Things are on the move in this country somehow. Can't you feel it – changing every day?
JOHN: So you want adventure.
MARGIE: No, don't be stupid.
JOHN: You want – a change of scenery.
MARGIE: No, John . . . well, yes. What I really want is other people.
JOHN: You want –
MARGIE: John, anything but flowers, you see. They don't work anymore; they're not applicable anymore.
JOHN: Then I definitely don't say I love you often enough.
MARGIE: Johnnie, don't you see at all? How can we just go on as you and me, and Elsa and Jan?
JOHN: What'll people do on speech days? Go on without a spray from John and Margie?
MARGIE: Go on with a spray from Jan and Elsa. John, I told you slow down . . . John, aren't those headlights – ah, watch out – like a mad bull coming straight! –

Highly abbreviated crash, but this time there are sounds of banging in a trapped vehicle and incoherent voices, a varoom of explosion and approaching sirens. Fade until only the radio music remains.

JOHN: Margie, Margie . . . It's going to be very hard without you. *(Fade out)*

Sister enters

SISTER: Oh, Mr Gibbons. Those people who took over your shop phoned again. She always sounds such a nice person. Sends lots of love. Can't get away during visiting hours.

JOHN: Thank you, sister.

SISTER: I said she shouldn't worry about a thing.

JOHN: Ah, that's fine, sister.

SISTER: And she told me you shouldn't worry about a thing; it's all under control.

JOHN: Ah, good . . . Did they attend my wife's funeral? I suppose they must have.

SISTER: You've figured it all out, Mr Gibbons. With MedicAlert they had it all figured out, too. Thank goodness you made such thoughtful arrangements – for any eventuality, Mr Gibbons. *(Fade out)*

(Tea-trolley)

JOHN: Ah, there you are. And yes, tonight I will have a cup – one sugar with milk.

ERNEST: Milk and two sugar, Mr John?

JOHN: No, just one sugar, please . . .

ERNEST: Ja, but will it be tea or coffee?

JOHN: Oh, tea please . . . You don't know what this means to a dying man in the desert. Thanks, just let it cool a bit.

ERNEST: I put it in front of you on the table.

JOHN: That's grand, Ernest . . . So – how are things with you tonight?

ERNEST: Very bad, Mr John.

JOHN: I'm sorry to hear that. You look perky enough.

ERNEST: Not me, Mr John. We cannot go home tonight. I'm in no hurry tonight because I'm sleeping in the hospital kitchen.

JOHN: Oh well, I suppose that makes your hours shorter.

ERNEST: But my mother in Soweto, she has no food, Mr John.

JOHN: You mean – roadblocks, cordoned off?

ERNEST: And helicopters, Mr John – voom-voom-voom-voom paf! paf!

JOHN: Oh, I see. Siege conditions.

ERNEST: Yes, yes.
JOHN: Look, sorry to trouble you at a time like this, but could you . . .
ERNEST: You not trying to escape again?
JOHN: No, no . . . just lift this cup up a little bit. There, there that's better. Just a bit more . . . *(Fade out)*

The scene begins in mid-conversation
JOHN: And you're also sleeping overnight at the hospital? Like refugees, honestly.
NURSE: No, I am on nightshift. But tomorrow there is an empty ward.All the sisters are sleeping there now, baba.
JOHN: And your husband, won't he look after your children?
NURSE: I told you, baba, he's drunk – completely useless.
JOHN: At a time like this, how can he be? And the children must fend for themselves? Are there many, many casualties?
NURSE: Many, baba, so many.
JOHN: How many? I suppose they all go to other hospitals.
NURSE: Who can tell, baba . . . it is nothing new with us.
JOHN: Hold this drip, nurse, please . . . then I can take your shoulder. Ah, thanks, thanks . . .
They walk awkwardly down an echoing corridor.
NURSE: It's all right . . . put your weight on me. I am very strong, baba.
JOHN: Have you got the right change?
NURSE: Yes, I've got it, baba.
JOHN: Why don't you phone yourself, to see if your children are all right?
NURSE: There are no phones to Soweto tonight.
JOHN: Complete black-out, must be.
NURSE: Ah, careful, baba . . .
JOHN: All right, got the hang of it. Nearly there . . . Right, you put the coins in, only when I nod.
NURSE: Okay, baba.
He dials. They wait.
JOHN: Ah, there's someone. Put them in, put them in. *(She deposits the coins and presses)* Jan, is that you? Thank goodness you're – in our home. That's exactly what I expected you'd do . . . Oh, I'm fine, fine . . . You'll know how it is when you've also been smashed to hell and gone . . . Ah, give her my love, too; how is she? . . . Good, good, and thanks for the best of our flowers, too – you're keeping up standards . . . Oh, it's all so back to front, isn't it – you sending me my flowers and . . . Well, I don't mind telling you

I'm going to miss her a lot more than that . . . No, I'm on the public one and this kind nurse – is propping me up. No, don't bother, we've got lots of change. There – put it, nurse, put it and press the button . . . Thanks.

Now Jan. I can't explain this to you, so don't query what I'm saying. We can sort the details out later. But all those flowers you have in the shop . . . Azaleas fully out; ah, that's grand. Well, you see, they're not yours. Legally they're Margie's and mine. Now this is what I want you to do. Every single pot and bowl, evergreens, cut, all the foliage and flowering, succulents, bulbs and tubers . . . orchids, yes; bonsais, too . . . tubs, bulbs, even the cactuses and ferns. Load the whole lot, every last bloom in the truck – clean out. Then see if you've got any courage. Drive it straight to Soweto for me; you'll find one of those mass funerals there. They won't stop only plants, for goodness sake. That's where I want them – the proudest display you've ever seen. From Margie and me, put that on the labels. I want it to be the most beautiful occasion there's ever been.

Ah, it's cut off now. Well . . . that's message delivered. Nurse, we've done it. Thank you so much.

NURSE: Message delivered, baba.

JOHN: And now . . . if you'd be so kind.

Fade up the original radio-music, a cool late-night dance, bluesy and contented.

THE TEMPESTUOUS
or With the Bard in Baasland

– a play-play in one act –

by

Geoffrey Haresnape

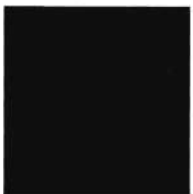
Enter Contraband as one distracted; he carries printed sheets

CONTRABAND: Allow me to recount one of my more curious adventures in this isolated fiefdom.

Singing offstage

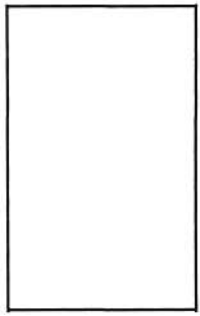
You may not fathom where your father lies;
Round his bones are shackles laid.
Those are pals who've lost their eyes.
He's a neutralized comrade
Lest he utter speeches strange
Or bring about a social change.

CONTRABAND: For some time now this music has been creeping by me on the (murky) waters. And it has merely complicated my immediate problem which is to publicize the literary work of Breaktheban Umkhokheli, a township poet upon all whose utterances a clamp has been placed. Recently, at an illegal gathering of 163 387 persons, Breaktheban said of a certain public figure: 'there thou mayst brain him . . . or with a log batter his skull', adding 'paunch him with a stake or cut his wezand with a knife'. He concluded with an emphatic 'He's but a sot' as a summary of the person's character. He then read the following poem to great applause *(shows a sheet):*



Boeremusiek: enter Prepostero

PREPOSTERO: I saw that. I must warn you that it is unacceptable to present Breaktheban's poem even in that censored format since it is likely to make readers conscious of blackness.
CONTRABAND: It's only printer's ink, your honour.
PREPOSTERO: Consciousness of blackness may just be one step to Black Consciousness.
CONTRABAND: Okay then *(chooses a second sheet)* Ooops, sorry *(notices that it is printed in red ink and hides it behind the others)* . . . you are forcing me to present Breaktheban's widely acclaimed lines as follows *(shows a third sheet):*



PREPOSTERO: Eina!
CONTRABAND: Although this alternative format is bounded by a black line, I respectfully submit that such blackness is of sufficient tenuousness not to create a disturbance in the cerebral cortex of your typical conservative, reformed conservative, or what not.
PREPOSTERO: Don't try to be clever with me.
CONTRABAND: What I mean, your honour, is that by far the larger area of this sheet is of a blankness or virgin whiteness which can be relied on to evoke NOTHING.
PREPOSTERO: I wouldn't be too sure. Let me refer you to W. Shakespeare, *The Complete Works.* In *King Lear,* Act I, scene 2, line 89, the octogenarian father states to his laat-lammetjie, 'nothing will come of nothing'. However, in *Timon of Athens,* Act V, scene 1, line 186, a former member of the Athenian ruling elite remarks – and I quote – 'nothing brings me all things'. Can

you give me a categorical assurance that the censored format in which you have presented Mr Umkhokheli's poem belongs to the first category as defined above: in other words that nothing will come of the nothing to which you have reduced it?
CONTRABAND: (seeing the light) Or have I connived at the second category of nothings from which who knows what might spring?
PREPOSTERO: I don't have to remind you that subversion by omission may be treated as an offence.
CONTRABAND: But your honour . . .
PREPOSTERO: No buts, hey! Buts is illegal.

Enter an airborne figure

CONTRABAND: Chattering choppers! What's this little dingetjie winging its way across my Group Area with what looks like a loud-hailer in its belly?
PREPOSTERO: That's Arsenal, my tricksy spirit, the surest thing I've got next to a bullet from a R4. Arsenal, baas wants you to sing Mr Contraband one of our folk's tunes.
ARSENAL: Can baas tell which of baas's folk's tunes baas wants Arsenal to sing baas?
PREPOSTERO: Baas wants you to sing the one which you sang to baas when you were helping baas to get those beach trespassers sorted out.
ARSENAL: Ja, baas.

Sings

Come to these whites only sands,
We'll tie your hands,
Dare to put your black foot here:
You'll hear us swear.
Hark! hark!
Bow-wow,
The police dogs bark.
Bow-wow.
Hark! hark! poor fellow.
I hear a screeching mello-yello.
Yey – yey-yey-yey – yow!

Prepostero and Arsenal vanish in a puff of legislation

Epilogue (spoken by Contraband)

Miraculously I was delivered from the company of the forces of Law and Order. But for many hours now I have been living in fear that I will bump into the baas's daughter. To be frank, Madrinda's a pest. No further music creeps by me as I wander alone, weeping again – not my father's – but my own likely wreck. I have just remembered the Disrespect to Eminent European Literary Persons Act. In terms of Section 6, sub-section xcvii, read together with Section 1297, sub-sections i and iii, I may be sentenced to detention in my own word processor for a period not exceeding one floppy disc.

Geoffrey Haresnape

Unrest in Rissik Street

in Rissik Street a thump
heretofore expected
and known at once
sets me to checking
the state of my
skin around bones
and office windows . . .
magnificently intact

down there in Rissik Street
in a not preconceived dustcloud
people fan out
across a glass and plaster
mosaic onto tarmac
not looking Left or Right
pressing hands to ears
before seeing seeping blood
on clothing and finding their wounds

above Rissik Street Agnes
says 'terrible' in a language
in a language
i do not know while
i hold to her shuddering
and with my eyes
trace and etch
the stagger of a man
heading for home
into the traffic
and countersurge of a crowd
toward the anticipated
second blast and
firemen stretching coats
to shield one prone on the road
from bright midwinter highveld sun
and prurient eyes like mine

while in Rissik Street
the ambulance is long in coming
and dogs on leashes
snap up like biscuits
invisible offenders
mingled among the righteous
the architects of chaos

are absent and do not see
on this road to freedom
a brown infant's cheek sharded
nor my life
become as tenacious
as a child's balloon

Frances Hunter

Rain

Raining it was this morning
the paths all muddy and obscene,
litter and garbage dirtier in the wet harshness.
It was cold and we huddled over the fire
while its wet wood spewed tears into our eyes.
Yes, it was cold outside
and sort of grey –
gloomy, that's the word –
the rain pelting incessantly
on the tin roofs of our existence,
foiling our plans of resistance.

It was raining this morning
grey and sombre.
On the horizon we saw a bright yellow speck,
then another
and another
another
no,
two more
growing brighter and brighter,
bigger yellow monsters.

The rain beat down this morning
when the bulldozers came
and our plans to set the shacks alight –
one last defiant act –
foiled by the rain.

Rustum Kozain

Old Road Camp

Somewhere a church bell rings:
it is Sunday in a far-off afternoon
here a wild bird's wings
explode into the silences of ruin.

Oil lies blackly on the grass,
black blood from a broken-down machine:
the slow seconds pass,
a slow wind moves across my skin –

But only for a moment: then
it stops as suddenly,
and the old sand-pen,
with its rusting red machinery,

sighs a little, sinks
deeper into the earth's dark core,
as when my own heart shrinks
deeper into a silence it had not known before.

Monoliths of broken masonry,
stonehenged across the blinding sand,
crashed against a shattered tree,
piteous beneath my pitying hand,

are closer to me
than those for whom that far bell rings
for here I am more fully free
than they who fly with paper wings

and put on haloes neither round nor clear,
the while the bird is nearer heaven now
and the brilliant glass they scattered here
lies like rain about the old road plough.

Go back? to what? to slavery?
red blood of black men on the grass?
the silence of the penitentiary?
the dreams of power that will pass?

Leave me here –
among these dead and dying simple things,
my eyes grow clear,
the dying heart with strange joy sings . . .

Tatamkulu Afrika

Moment without Herald

We had begun to think
the weather bureau in Pretoria
could be trusted
for weeks it said
mild temperatures
chilly night times
nothing unusual we thought
for wintertime is wintertime
each day taken for granted
we went to bed grinning
laughter coming into our dreams
mornings saw us hauling our bodies out of bed
for such is wintertime

Then came June 14
air temperatures plunged
into an abyss
they just tumbled beyond any human reckoning
a bloody blizzard hit Gaborone
it fell mankind
it fell houses
it lay to waste
creation
some were old
some were young
the night arrogance bled the streets of Gaborone
moment without herald

What was the instruction
we wondered
not puzzling the hate
nor the speed of execution
for the act spoke loudly
bodies riddled with bullets morsdood
shredded beyond the eye images morsdood

Scoop the gushing warm blood with helmets
hold up the remains of messy bloodied heads
the gory faces saying cheese
capture them for posterity with the instant camera

Kill kill kill
Don't just stand there
snarl – jou ma

swear – se moer
Blast your way in
blast your way out
Let them have it man

We sit in sorrow over Gaborone
almost comforted
a sense of triumph pervades us
for nothing greater can happen outside there
the shit will always be lived here

its stench has begun to multiply
the raids into Lesotho, Mozambique or Botswana
are very poor lessons
as if authority wags its tail in fright
since winter must give way to summer

Sipho Sepamla

This poem appears in the collection *From Goré to Soweto* by Sipho Sepamla published by Skotaville, 1988.

The Written Word

the written word
in this country
has become
public enemy number one

the written word
must be
silenced
jailed
expunged
or outlawed
for it says
things
which should not
be said

Kaizer Mabhilidi Nyatsumba

They didn't tell us these things
for the people of angola & nicaragua

They didn't tell us
  about these things
cos maybe then
  we'd rough up all the lines
  & rock the masterplan

they didn't tell us about nehanda
  cos it was whiteMEN
  doing all the talking, &
  women aren't supposed to be strong
  after all

they didn't tell us about kimathi
  or if so only the bad kaffir
  not the invincible patriot
  & sweet advancing mau mau
  blk accurate machete &
  casualty lists overflowing with dirty
  imperial blood & racial paranoia

they didn't tell us about che guevara
  cos latinos 'have nothing to do with us'
  cos AK strategies are not
    for us orderly christians
  cos men with red stars
    do not believe in god

they didn't tell us about walter rodney
  cos he was too over-hasty
  cos he wanted us to cleanse africa
    with the ashes of europe
    old fucking europe

they couldn't tell us we're beautiful
  cos we're from some disfigured bush
  too full of freaks & loinskin child-eaters

they didn't tell us
we could also rule the world
  this world caked with our blood
they didn't tell us
  we can also run this globe
this distorted globe dirty with imperialist fingerprints

they didn't tell us
these things
    just to keep us once more chained
    just to keep us once more fratricidal
    just to keep us groping in empty spaces
    just to keep us hypnotized a while

they didn't tell us
we have as much right
  to hit back when hit
  to say shit! to the shitters
  & kick the kickers

oh
  they told us about
  their fucking civilization
  reeking only of phantom viruses & bacteria
  asphyxiating us when we try
    to sing or laugh

they told us about their brittle progress
  when landing on the moon
was easier than loving your neighbour

they told us about their god
  when they didn't know good
  but just kept pushing us into backyards
  just kept leashing us with pious hot-air
to keep us in check
  in case we explode

yes
  they didn't tell us
  so that we had to start
    all over again
  pushing thru the pains the aches
    the failures
  pushing thru the conceited bigots
    who call themselves rulers
  brain sockets filled with cow-dung & pig-shit

we had to start all over again
  huddled under some tree
listening so hard to malcolm
  preach all the blk truth
listening with all our heart

to cabral to biko
to sobukwe
telling us
move on!!
take
what's yours

& then they'd point fingers
what they know best
then they'd send in the killer squads
panting motherfuckers with
concealed snipers & pistols
when all fell in place
when all stepped in line
they'd send in their killer virus
marked for blk people

but we'll move on

the SAS won't stop us
the CIA won't be that
intelligent this time
the NIS won't feel that secure
this time

the faggots won't stop us
cos then some pigheads
will have to burst
& burst burst they will
if they try to
stop us

Seitlhamo Motsapi

Censorship

Words whimper at this scaffold,
the hangman's granite teeth
form the stamping ground
of tongues –
any murmur that passes
from here
is tongue bitten:
no matter
the swelling resonance
of the voice –
or its stoic ambition,
all
are made apprentices
in the art of babbling:
each new larynx
re-tuned
to the strings
of a gilt harp,
each leaking mouth
is closed –
then
contrived with shadow:
a new tongue encoded,
is toothed in granite
to decipher –
then blacken
that primal scream.
And yet o hangman –
no one
can rope the phoenix,
burning a book
gives flame to its youth.

Brandon Broll

Cape-Flats Nightmare

At first I was grafted
to that pale cloud,
then began floating
beside the black archangel
down into shotgun range –
gliding
dreamily toward instincts
pitted with lead
and the shrapnel of race,
swooping into
the sniper's rifled eye:
white man in police garb
adjusting his sights
onto the belly
of a smiling charwoman,
she bends to reveal
a baby on her back –
the sniper grins,
imagines the child
howling through fragments
of a splintered jaw –
choking on its milkteeth;
then he turns those sights
onto the feeble gardener
hosing blood
from the road.
Once I was grafted
to that cloud,
until
this nightmare
came true –
on the smouldering flats.

Brandon Broll

Emergency

The neck is the place the yoke rests
heavily; after all it was made by god
or whoever to suffer
submissive the pull
of the plough
something like that

which is a way of saying
finding the escape route of the poem
the bars of the police state
are erected in the muscles of the neck
like fate

Glen Fisher

On the Wire

A dislocation: this
lapse in our voices
immobility of branch of leaf
the locked grip of the shrike
on the telephone wire:

life in its full sudden flood.
Observe how telephone wires
link cortex to cortex: wars
torture detention killings
the intolerable suffering

and our silences, syllables of love.
Consider. It is our silences
that leap soft-tongued
into the ear; that lavish
gestures of tenderness hope

the strong warm wine of the flesh.
But this nausea rage
the daily news makes speech brutal:
the swift bloody thrust of the shrike
off the wire.

Glen Fisher

The Waste Land at Station 14

1

Agreed, Shozi,
laagers are not that cosy.
The baleful sign: 'THIS BEACH
IS RESERVED . . .' like a screech
or a slap '. . . FOR THE SOLE USE . . .'
set black emotions loose.

2

Shozi Bhengu, the literary star,
could pack a hall or church with baying crowds
applauding his poems. He'd yell for shrouds
to wrap the sell-outs. He was called The Czar.
'Death,' he would roar, 'to the northern invaders,
honkies are but sacrificial goats.'
The informers listened, rehearsed their notes
– those faceless ones he slyly dubbed Darth Vaders.
Still, within his skull, the swivelling prism
of hatred, love, the racist catechism
– well-learnt – would not quite jell. 'When I am dead,'
he told his wife, 'that file under the bed
(choose a moment which looks most opportune)
holds my lyrics to the African moon.'

3

What the hell!
I might just as well
have writ the same
if Shozi Bhengu were my name.

4

Between you, Shozi, and the promised land
wavers the mirage of us.
The obstacle is not new
so there's not much to discuss.
We are the new disposables;
and, as you'll soon enough find,
so are you.
The earth you and I now know is a Karoo
of the mind

groping its way hand over hand
north to murderous oceans of sand.

5

Under Africa's moon there dreams a strand
older than old the ancient poets keep.
We both walk it under Africa's sun.
There, a glad profusion of brow and hand
– struck from one Mind – strikes deeper than the one
hundred or so microns which spell skin-deep,
where we could wake those elders from their sleep
with such poems we have not yet begun
to sing: the love which Africa has fanned,
to hymn the earth perhaps, something as grand.

6

Brother-poet, verbose and gallant,
I mourn the sands that waste our talent.
For you, Shozi, this final line:
my apologies for that sign.

Douglas Livingstone
1982

An African Loving, Station 3

There was your first sunblinded glance.
Sand tracked the long hot morning
which turned to a merry barefoot dance
– damp kisses without warning.

Through surf and thicket, glide and flit,
your buttery texture soon
turned to a nacreous slide. Your slit
had us ambushed, both, by noon.

Then you were gone. My dry beached fright
knew no life ahead, alone.
Returning to claim me in the night,
your womb had turned to stone.

Douglas Livingstone
1969

Beachfront Hotel at Station 5

Nine steps climb to a pair of spinster geraniums
pot-shod, covertly watching the blotter-flat out
nightclerk. These plants lurk with intent: just about
to move in on up over submerged chromium
and unpolished salt-stained brass rails.

Mahogany-flavoured yawns bare tusky caverns;
the armpit assiduously scratched; bored registry;
more plants uncoiling sentry palms; the proffered key
accompanied by unintelligible spasms
of nicotine-fingered cryptics.

Deadtired anonymous deadpan exchanges
of the undead; a stumble through dim narrows: frayed
sand-crunching stairs grinding their teeth at their gap-splayed
crab-clawed bannisters whose circumlocutions range
articulately round loose nails.

A dead man's chest of a door yields on to ill-matched
creaking boards and a cigarette-ashen circular
rug – popped in for a minute – holed, tubercular,
Pekinese, flattened into wagless feathers; hatched
down its spine a split cicatrix.

In this arena, a scarred table and armoire
confront each other in sword and trident stances:
unwinking, quite terrible their pagan glances.
One nervy chair among the phalanx of armour
primps through this Golgotha for males.

The sunk huddle of a puddle of bedding shirks
on sagging outcopulated bedsprings upheld
wearily afloat on the upright wood and weld.
Disapproving drapes rustle worn calico skirts
at cycloped pairs of electrics.

Within the wardrobe, a rich yellowing treasure
spreads of leaves from *Drum:* crouched boxers, bronze
beauty-queens;
Todd Matshikiza, Can Themba, news of shebeens
– the Runyonesque wit taking the land's bleak measure
even to the lost shores of gaols.

In shallow warped flimsy ill-fitting drawers slide lined
sheets of Nat Nakasa and Bloke Modisane,

of Casey Motsisi and Arthur Maimane,
pages of Lewis Nkosi, while a piece signed
Ezekiel Mphahlele sticks.

The bad-complexioned tall and wall-collared mirror
that has seen more than just about everything
grimly cracks a reflective and malevolent grin,
lucky it never got its face kicked in terror
from hounding the lovers like quails.

Yet love vaults unbidden from memory's dungeon,
its lyricism whirled from the seabed of this world
to bounce off heedless constellations, to be hurled
back some day when the undraped sun salves ridden men
– hangers on the land's crucifix.

Douglas Livingstone
1964

You are old now

You are old now, your eyes have seen the lives of many come, and go; come, and go; the ebb and flow of nameless creatures bled of life, your children come and go; to and fro into the diaspora of daily bread, returning to your ancient streets at dusk and merging with the smoke and groundmass, a seething sea of grey. By now your streets might have been boulevards to boast in, but they have been abandoned to the entropy of neglect, eroded by the sewers and engulfed by their stench, the apathy in the wake of hollow promises, the anarchy of alien ideas and parasite propositions, your dumps and ditches decorated by the khakibos and weeping bluegums the listless guardians over your streets. Your face mpofu-grey, dust and dirt have fused with crumbling brick, a face resigned to decay, save the slogans on charred walls, desperate assertions amidst the silence of your stony eyes, tired and yet defiant. And the packs of mangy dog-ghosts poking in the refuse for a chicken bone or little-too-mouldy crust amongst the teeming children staring, who have not eaten of the tree of knowledge, who do not yet know, who have not yet eaten; these are your children naked, filthy and with countenance so pure, deprived and beautiful beyond compare with eyes so shining through the dull cracked skin of your face. To alex seven, seven, eighty-seven.

Nick Paton

Hy sweep die onderdruktes op

Hy sweep
die onderdruktes
op
vermoed
rewolusie
moedig geweld aan.

Hy is teen die bestaande orde
die bestel
haat die samelewing
weier om een van 'hulle' te wees.

En as daar verandering kom
keer hy terug op sy woord.

En dan keer hy terug
na waar hy tuis voel en vry
tussen die hoere
waar 'n dagtaak te hemele skrei.

Digters word nie oud of geëer nie
behalwe
as hulle in landsbelang
daartoe
gedwing word.

Wessel Pretorius

I, Child

My mother night, my father stillness,
born of darkness, I
the newborn, rise with my cries,
into the barren,
foreign sky –

and it carries me away.

Ian Tromp

Morning

He didn't die, but he gave a damn good try.
At first it was a matter of coyness;
reading 'Lady Lazarus' and tabling various
'fors' and 'againsts'.

Then it became far larger –
almost obsessive.
As, in the morning, dew clings to live things;
death began to hang on him.

It doesn't only cling, though, but claws inward
until the centre
is emptied
and the body hangs heavy.

Death, it is written, takes everything;
and more and more
he offered
himself to death.

Questions asked with no answers given,
(until he knew:)
there is no answer
and the day keeps darkening,
keeps darkening.

Ian Tromp

Lyric

Blue is the kingfisher.
Blue it is above the water.
When it flies it is a whirring speck of blue
Over the brown, reflecting river.
Green is the world.

Andrew Nixon

Prelude to a Slaughter
For the defenders of Cuito Cuanavale

I've heard it said we lost the colours
though some say they're through to the drift.
The guns? There's no gleam of them
in this hole that stinks of funk and spent powder:
those that know (poor sods) aren't telling.
It's your cold-fish Chelmsford I blame
that can't stop his walking, sunk in himself
on the camp's edge like a soul
in hell, dark against the burning wagons;
he's got a lot to answer for.

That cool he was, pitching camp ten miles off
while his boys were getting their bellies
ripped, then starting back at a stroll
to see what the fuss was about
with a party too small to storm a whorehouse.

Three messages he got, it's said
one from the scout that saw with his own eyes
the thousands on thousands
drop from the high ground and wheel
and roll forward in a wave so mighty
it stole your breath away, through volley
after volley, the living leaping the dead.
No wagon-circle, not even a trench, so
cocksure he was of the scarlet.

There's no moon tonight, nor
for the smoke, yesterday's big white stars
nothing to hear but the crack of timbers
and the moans of some poor brute in pain.

We marched all day from nowhere to nowhere
but all eyes are open, watching the flames
throw shadows like running men.
Just beyond is the darkness:
not a word, but it's on every trooper's mind –
where are they now?

Andrew Forrest

Oppression

Some cuts
wound the soul.
Our daily transportation
to the world of fantasy
with the emptiness of yesteryears.
Our yearly songs
christmas-cum-good fridays
hallucinative in their goodiness,
so much pretendence.
Oppression bleeds
within hearts of
conquered humanity,
for its raped virginity, leaves
sacred soul with hopes of liberation.

Moritso Makhunga

Insurrection

He swings his pen like a sabre
no, like a bayonet
and sometimes like some antique assegaai.
The latter he advances is not a weapon
but a symbol. How inefficient
as a weapon is it not
if a grand killing, a liquidation must be made.

Yes, he is fully cognizant
of Isandhlwana
and the tribute paid
by Engels to the victory
of courage and strategy over technology.

He swings his imagination
like an automatic rifle over his shoulder
and enters the armed struggle.
The latter he puts forward
is not some theory or grand plan
but pure praxis:
which is neither thought in action

nor action with reflection
but the very substance
of revolutionary insurrection.

Wally Mondlane

Now We May Talk
(after thipe and molefe, post-84)

Now we may talk
without reading
preconceived thoughts
to guarantee colonialism.

Now we may talk
our tongues hanged
beyond our hearts
their might a threat.

For we've experienced
the might of the beast
our souls dangling on its wrath
let's nod at a chewing smile.

For we've chewed
the liberation of our brains
ignore the birth of a new america
let's pave way for freedom.

Maybe we shall talk
Before we could talk
Then tomorrow blood talk
And our talking lip-service stopped.

Moritso Makhunga

Cry Freedom

on the screen,
the bloodied head
of a naked, dying man
knocks against the bare, metal floor
of a police van,
travelling seven hundred miles
to a hospital.
the last image,
before the lights come on
to announce the potential of blood
in a bomb scare,
and controlled policemen
marshalling the crowds to safety:
a contradiction of the image
and the real,
yet somehow in the past,
the real had given rise to the image,
as the image in the present,
here,
was giving rise to the real,
and its urgent need for freedom –
or is there just one freedom,
just one cry,
the freedom from fear?

Kriben Pillay

Lines to a Dead Comrade in a Ditch

I have just heard that you are dead;
your body was found in a ditch in Old Crossroads:
I have heard and yet I have not heard:
I must hear still with the deep ear of the mind.

I can still only think of you as you were:
the slow, shy smile, the gentle hand,
the withholding always of the direct glance,
the shaming tribal courtesies,
the sudden eager rush of mundane words,
the sudden nodding off to sleep that made us smile,
the unrelievedly commonplace and
the sometimes childishly profound.

You were never one for funerals,
leaping like a leopard at my side:
at rallies too,
you never were among the roaring lions,
and on winter evenings in the small, bare rooms,
the heater hissing in an echo of the rain,
you never joined us in the telling of tall tales,
but sat with a seeming wonder at
such recounting of our revolutionary deeds.

Always I thought of you as a truly tribal man,
beating on a drum perhaps at a wedding or for rain,
your hut grass-thatched under a primal baobab,
harvesting maize or melons luscious as the breasts
of your two wives.

Forgive me that in death you have grown strange,
that I do not know this thing they broke and threw into the slime,
the angled limbs, the bruised black flesh,
the thousand flies upon the eyes.

No, I do not know you, gentle friend,
I have not known you all these years:
stalled in death and blurred with dust,
your eyes at last
stare unwaveringly into mine,
telling of the man you truly were:
a violent man, a secret man,
a man who had no need to tell tall tales and who,

dead now in this most dreadful place,
is a stranger grappling with my mind . . .

Tatamkulu Afrika

Police Torture

And so the torturer begins his work long before dawn
hours and hours into your precious sleep
he is sharpening and sharpening his blades
and charging his electric prong and dipping the hood
into ice cold water
while you are asleep mother and father
and you turn twice to snore
and to wheeze while the torturer
sharpens his blades.

So don't bother to get up in the morning
after a night on the frozen floor
unless you are called for by five men in raincoats
with thick accents
with no eyes set in deep vomiting pools
just keep breathing
and don't bother to get up in the morning
when your lip and your spine
are aching and sore.

Oh yes there are public holidays
if you want to see the shores and the lakes
and while you are relaxing in that beauty
just think of the meat and then taste the gravy
and pack the boot
and phone the police around midmorning
and thank them for the order
and thank them for the peace
and thank them for the torturer
who began his work long before dawn.

Matthew Krouse

Reading for Liberation: Report on the Launch of the Workers Library

In her opening address at the launch of The Workers Library in the Wits Flower Hall, on Saturday 22 October 1988, popular historian, Luli Callinicos cited the dictum: 'Knowledge is power' and added 'knowledge is power for workers in the struggle against racial capitalism in South Africa.' The re-application of this classical adage is indeed very apt for present-day South Africa and the central role of workers and their organizations in the struggle for social, economic and political transformation.

The particular form of economic exploitation and racial oppression found in South Africa affects workers most severely. In this regard workers are not only systematically exploited but an educational system designed to perpetuate oppression is made available to workers and their children. This education variously known as Bantu Education and Education and Training is not only tailored to keep workers and their children in a state of ignorance but is also made available at such minimal and inadequate levels that it disqualifies itself as education altogether.

Workers and their off-spring have, however, come to see through this. Students have for more than a decade challenged and rejected Apartheid education and in the place of this put forward the need for a People's Education. Simultaneously, the acceleration of the workers' movement has not only witnessed the phenomenal growth of worker organizations but also a related understanding of the vital role education and information play in the effective struggle for liberation. The launch of The Workers Library must, therefore, be seen against this background.

In this context, the launch of The Workers Library was not merely the opening of just another information and literary resource centre. It signals the growing awareness among the various sections of the oppressed and fighting people of South Africa that the struggle for justice and democracy is inextricably linked to the struggle for information and knowledge. In terms of the unfolding national democratic struggle, and the pivotal role of the class struggle in the overall process, it means that as workers engage in their day to day struggles to transform their conditions of employment, they are also engaged in a struggle for fundamental political and social change. In order to pursue this effectively, the lessons drawn from practical struggle require a related educational process which will raise the consciousness of every single worker and that of the class as a whole to such a level that workers are able to pursue their economic, political and social interest with insight and resolve.

Thus, while the opening of a Workers Library enhances the

access workers will have to progressive literature released by local and international publishers, it also marks a turning point in the struggle for knowledge and information. From the wide range of cultural activities presented at this occasion it was also evident that workers are resolved to break out of the stultifying tedium which manual production imposes in order to define the value of culture as an irreducible need which is of equal importance to material and political needs.

The launch offered a day of music, poetry and fiction readings, drama performances and films by progressive cultural workers from all over the country. If one has to single out an event from a vast programme then it must be the energetic and illuminating performance of *Bhambatha's Children* by the Sarmcol Workers Co-operative, which chronicles the Sarmcol struggle from its historical roots in 1906 to the present. On the basis of this and many other cultural displays it is apt to reiterate: Power to the workers!

A.W. Oliphant

The Blood of our Silence by Kelwyn Sole
Ravan Press, 1987. R17,95 excl. Tax.
Familiar Ground by Ingrid de Kok
Ravan Press, 1988. R13,95 excl. Tax.

The ancient question concerning the truth of poetry and the truth of history has been debated with intensity at those moments when societies face severe crises. (Aristotle said that poetry was deeply true, history only true to its time.) South Africa has of course existed in crisis since 1652, but the extreme climate of the 1980s – one of terror and one of new possibilities – has again called sharply into question the function and character of the poet. When Shelley in the nineteenth century called poets the unacknowledged legislators of the world, his romantic confidence belied the fact that poets were being marginalized in an industrializing society. And W.H. Auden recognized, somewhat wryly, that modern states don't regard poets as central voices of authority. Replying to Shelley's defence he remarked that if indeed there were unacknowledged legislators of the world, the role surely belonged not to poets but to the secret police.

In South Africa poets are sometimes taken seriously by the state: James Matthews's *Cry Rage!* (1972) remains banned, and Mzwakhe Mbuli *(Change is Pain),* whom the police don't want to see performing his poetry at funerals, has suffered several periods in detention. Mostly, however, the state is more preoccupied with the information-centred stories of repression and challenge as presented by the so-called alternative media such as *New Nation* and *South,* and the truth of poetry is regarded as peripheral to the truth of history. It is no use poets bemoaning the fact; instead, the Black Consciousness writers of the 1970s – Serote, Gwala, Madingoane, and others – confronted the social terrain with the transfiguring potential of poetry. This had little to do with imaginative wonderlands, but more to do with a new language of resistance and with the charting of future courses of action. Like the poets of Soweto, COSATU worker-poets have also seen poetry as a political weapon: as a means of consciousness-raising, as a voice of community counsel, as a cry of union solidarity.

What about white South African poets? Few of any standing would argue that poetry and history are separate concerns. Yet some have seen the need to preserve private space amid the brute conditions of the authoritarian state, and others have called for an imaginative power in interrogating the slogans both of government and revolution. (Here, black writers like Asvat and Ndebele would agree that the spectacular response can easily blunt our understanding of social process.) The two poets to be reviewed here – two poets who appear for the first time in single volumes – are both alert to the indivisibility in South Africa today of private and public worlds. For Kelwyn Sole and Ingrid de Kok the truth of poetry is, in several ways, simultaneously the truth of our history.

In *The Blood of our Silence* (Ravan Press, 1987) Sole, an English lecturer at UCT who has written extensively on black literature, depicts the actions and reactions that he sees as 'authentic' in this country. For Sole, a middle-class white who rejects the racial-capitalist prejudices and philistinism of white South Africa, authenticity has meant co-operate effort with the 'ordinary' majority. Drawing on his experiences in Botswana and Namibia he says in 'Development Too':

> A decision emerges finally
> – three fields here, and two more there –
> its critics grumble but affirm
> they'll try it once (but don't blame us!)
>
> our method of democracy:
> arduous, indispensable.

And in the long poem 'Ovamboland' he records his journey through the war zone –

> I sat in the dark and contemplated
> the first heroic encounter
> the passage of a leftist
> in search of new experience
> my first night in the war zone
> spent sitting on a toilet –

to conclude with his hopes for an independent future: 'three streamers wave behind/ a defiant blue, red and green'.

Despite some ironic self-reference to his own earlier liberal predispositions (as in the lines above), Sole emerges in the volume as the stern, ideologically coherent materialist. (Several witty, quirky love poems are placed in a section of their own.) And the authenticity of having arrived at what he regards as socio-political and human clear-sightedness can in terms of poetry writing be both a strength and a limitation. The problem is that there are too many poems in this lengthy 123-page book that attack the same or very similar targets, particularly posturing people's poets and liberal do-gooders. There are also too many poems which contrive to illustrate similar 'lessons'. Poetry may of course legitimately instruct us; in a volume of this length, however, there is space for the poet to involve us to a greater degree than he does in the processes of his own recognitions. It seems to me that many white South Africans, especially the ideologically alert variety, must have continuing inner worries about the fact that whether they like it or not they cannot avoid the relative advantages of better education, better pay, better living conditions, etc., and I would have been interested to see more of the poems turning back, interrogatively, on the poet himself.

This notwithstanding, the strength of the volume resides in Sole's frequent penetration beneath the languages and shibboleths of South African life. In 'Hewat', for example, the political/cultural worker insists on conversation about 'aid grants with strings/attached to every dollar':

> This is my country, he says,
> we have lessons to learn,
> And a democracy of peasants and workers
> to begin to think about.

In 'Poems about Fish' we are not allowed to escape into analogy and metaphor; rather we need to live, as writers and

people, with our 'curdled intellect'. In 'The Blood of our Silence' commitment means not the 'crayons of rhetoric', but the 'brave, dumb, despairing/uttered polychrome of our people', and in 'Dangling Poem' we 'avoid slipping our necks/into the noose/of dead men's answers . . . tell the truth/pose questions'. This last poem utilizes, as an epigraph, Hans Magnus Enzensberger's words, 'The text breaks off, and calmly the answers keep ganging up'; clearly Sole (like James Matthews, Peter Horn and Jeremy Cronin in South Africa) has found appropriate stylistic and philosophical models in the European antipoets who emerged out of the holocaust of World War II. These writers felt that the high imagination could not compete with the images of Nazi horror – to try to respond in metaphor, analogy and elaborate imagery would reveal an inauthenticity, a pretence that the 'art' of poetry was still important in the face of a devastated humanity. Their course was to return the poem to plain speech, while several followed Brecht's injunction to strip off the purple robes of Poet and to communicate widely and unambiguously about injustice. Transferred to our own horror, this is more-or-less Sole's 'aesthetic', and in his choice of words and images he addresses the central question of how the individual response of literature in South Africa today can avoid an individualist ideology and remain representative in its concern and counsel.

What does 'authenticity' mean to a woman poet in South Africa today? In her volume *Familiar Ground* (Ravan Press, 1988) Ingrid de Kok struggles with a complex question. Ironically, the fact that she is a white woman adds to her difficulties. When Gcina Mhlope speaks out in 'Sometimes when it Rains', her expression is both gender-specific and national in its compass: 'I think of mothers/Who give birth in squatter camps.' Similarly, Nise Malange in 'I, the Unemployed' and 'First May 1985' links ideas about black women's economic marginalization to those of COSATU's campaign for a living wage. Like black women, De Kok operates in a chauvinist society; but, like Sole, she is the recipient of middle-class opportunities and values, and she first has to write herself out of white patriarchal expectations of the woman as decorous object/submissive wife. She then has to write herself back into a new South Africa where, as a woman, she can begin to experience a transformation of consciousness. Initially, she turns to the harsh local landscape, and in 'Sun, Aloe, Rain' she seeks a 'feminine' alternative to the predominating 'male-formed' terrain:

> And once, when the heat was like sandpaper, like
> scorpions,

I saw a salt pan under the high hard sun,
and watched the flamingoes rise, startled,
their underwings protected and pink.

What relationship do images of freedom and beauty have to a land of rock and stone? Are there 'feminine' images? Is not the very assumption perilously close to old male-critical divisions between men as hard and rational and women as soft and emotional? Implicit in many of De Kok's poems are issues which are current in European and American feminist debate. Throughout her volume, however, De Kok even when she is the lover, the mother and the alienated loner in Canada finds that she belongs to more familiar ground in this country, and she continually delineates ways in which white South African female socialization informs every aspect of our public life. In 'Our Sharpeville' she recalls, as a child, playing hopscotch when her grandmother (a masculine colonial-woman) ordered her inside the house, away from black miners who were coming out on strike:

Then my grandmother called from behind the front door,
her voice a stiff broom over the steps:
'Come inside; they do things to little girls.'

As De Kok says, 'our Sharpeville was the fearful thing/that might tempt us across the wellswept streets . . . But, walking backwards, all I felt was shame,/at being a girl, at having been found at the gate.'

Familiar Ground, then, is about the need for the poet's emancipation from restrictive social and political mores. It is not a yuppy-like emancipation, something which a 'would-be lover' may discover:

Praise be the inelegance of ordinary love
. . .
So, pyrotechnic suitor,
your skin is far too sleek,
your arms too architectural,
your tummy much too neat.
I'm sure you'll find another
to watch you in the mirror
but I must refuse your offer
and decline to conjugate.

Rather, it is an emancipation from a dead image of white South African womanhood. On the one hand, De Kok (as in 'Road through Lesotho') has to reject her own liberal inclination to play the charitable missus. On the other, she must seek to retain her

sympathies within our flinty social situation. In this, she has to define her own sense of self (an individual who is not narcissistic in her individualism) while stretching beyond the burglar-guarded neighbourhoods to feel kinship with the majority of women in South Africa, who happen to be black. As she concludes her poem 'Small Passing' (about a woman whose baby died stillborn).

> I think these mothers dream
> headstones of the unborn.
> Their mourning rises like a wall
> no vine will cling to.
> They will not tell you your suffering is white.
> They will not say it is just as well.
> They will not compete for the ashes of infants.
> I think they may say to you:
> Come with us to the place of mothers.
> We will stroke your flat empty belly,
> let you weep with us in the dark,
> and arm you with one of our babies
> to carry home on your back.

The motif of the child is a chilling reminder that our long, difficult revolution has in so many costs involved the struggle of the children. It is something that the women understand perhaps more poignantly than the men. Like Sole, De Kok interweaves her poetry with our history. Unlike Sole, she has no clear answers to the question of authenticity. Instead, *Familiar Ground* offers us the on-going and challenging exploration.

Michael Chapman

Report on the Third South African Literature Conference held in Bad Boll, West Germany from 28-30 October 1988

Within three years the conference at Bad Boll has become something of an institution for exiled South Africans and the German solidarity movement. Every year, since November 1986, South African exiles in Europe and elsewhere flock to Bad Boll to renew friendships, to discuss 'home' and chiefly to debate South African culture and literature. The first two conferences were devoted to 'Liberation and the Art of Writing' and 'From Popular Culture to the Written Artefact'. In 1988, again under the auspices of the Evangelical Academy, the conference focussed on 'Literature in a Multi-Lingual Context'.

The main conference papers were read by Vernon February (State University, Leiden, The Netherlands: '''Kuyosala Izibongo

– but our epics will remain,'' the case of Mqhayi and Vilakazi'); Dennis Makhadu (Women's University, Dallas, Texas, USA: 'The Socio-political and cultural significance of Flaaitaal'); Lewis Nkosi (Warsaw University, Poland: 'The Crisis of Representation') and Hein Willemse (University of the Western Cape, South Africa: '''The Goema-Goema beat, tamatiesous en kerriekos'' or Rethinking Afrikaans language and literature').

February in his contribution discussed the neglected history of the Xhosa poets Samuel Mqhayi and B.W. Vilakazi, arguing essentially for a renewed interest in their work by the emergent generations of writers and academics. Makhadu's paper on *flaaitaal* was received with great scepticism from the floor. Makhadu pressed for the recognition of the existence and literary worth of *flaaitaal.* Other participants charged that the uncritical literary use of 'the language of the lumpenproletariat' may lead to ahistorical and naturalistic depiction of reality. Nkosi in a similar critical vein delivered a wide-ranging paper challenging South African literary critics to greater theorization of their subject matter. Willemse's presentation dealt with post-1976 perceptions of the Afrikaans language and literature in the democratic, political activist community, with particular reference to the Western Cape region. The central value of these contributions was the critical and at times unorthodox views which informed them, illustrating some exiles' perspectives on a changing linguistic, literary and socio-political setting.

Shorter workshop contributions were made by Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre (University of Grenoble, France), Vusi Mchunu (from Berlin), Dan Roodt (from Paris) and Ntongela Masilela (Technical University, Berlin).

The compactness of the conference, the concentrated focus and the limited number of major and secondary papers enabled participants to thoroughly engage referents and each other in in-depth and wide-ranging debate. The polemical quality of some of the papers kept many working groups very busy. In some groups, e.g. the one on the current state of South African literature and another on 'Border Literature', deliberations went on for as long as four hours.

The home-made muesli, the cottage cheese, the effective organization of the conference convenor, Robert Kriger and his team made for a congenial mood amongst the participants. In this affable environment Manfred Zylla invited participants to be the literary collaborators to his painting of a young girl with an AK 47: at first the comments were contained and private, written in a shy handwriting: 'love for Diana from . . .' Later, towards the end of the conference comments were written in a bold, aggressive and angry handwriting: 'Why waste this face', or 'the

children shall free us!' – perhaps indicating an increased political sensitivity.

In future the conference could be an important vehicle in reflecting on the developing state of South African literature and culture; providing a conducive space for exiled academics and writers to contribute in a coherent manner to the challenges thrown up by the changing situation in South Africa. However, the rigorous theoretical and socio-political exchange offered by this occasion could be further enhanced by a larger contingent of internal writers, academics and cultural workers.

Hein Willemse & Manfred Zylla

Open Letter to Achmat Dangor

Dear Mr Dangor

I am the 'lecturer from UNISA' who 'posed in the form of a question her unhappiness with the CB' (i.e. the Cultural Boycott), and I am referring to your report on the COSAW workshop on the CB in *Staffrider*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1988. I feel that your rendering of the part of the workshop – a small part – in which I participated by relaying my experience of a boycott is unfair, if not a betrayal of the spirit of a workshop of COSAW.

In your report you state the direction the discussion was to take. Agreeing that the CB *is* a 'tool of liberation' and not 'an act of censorship', trusting that it can be employed in precisely this manner, certain problems come to the fore. How to support the opponents of apartheid and how to spot those who should actually feel the boycott – the 'defenders of apartheid' – is one of them. How to use the boycott to build up a stronger sense and defence of culture, a defence 'against exploitation and appropriation' and against co-optation by the apartheid state was another one.

It must have been a rather strange, if minor, event when, within the community of enthusiastic black artists, still somewhat confused but searching for clarity – which was my impression – up jumps a much more confused white academic who barely manages *not* to say that which was really playing tricks on her subconscious, and which would have been something like the following: 'I have been *boycotted!* and I thought my intentions were *good!*' What the lecturer from UNISA did say was, in short: I work for

an academic department at UNISA which lectures literary theory. Having money at its disposal, this department organized a seminar on J.M. Coetzee's Foe. We wanted to discuss how white writers write in South Africa now, and we wanted to discuss our academic and white ways of talking about literature in South Africa. This, for us, is a cultural problem. So we invited a speaker from overseas who has occupied himself with ways of trying to describe literature in a culturally meaningful way, taking into regard the relationship between what is being written and what the structure of the society in which it is being written happens to be – class divisions, economic divisions, the effects of capitalism, the importance of popular culture, the validity – or not – of the so-called 'classics'. We invited a Marxist. His address would be open. There would be the opportunity to listen to, and learn from, someone who has insights into problems which face those concerned with literature in this country. He accepted the invitation, then declined. I respect and honour his decision for its reasons: he supports the cultural boycott. But how should I, the lecturer from UNISA, interpret this event: we invite someone to support a bid against the system. Furthermore we invite a speaker who could be of interest to black writers, lecturers, students, some of them who do the courses I lecture. The boycott seems to undermine its own purpose, or have I got the purpose wrong? Do I think too narrowly?

This was the question. There was, as far as I remember, little reaction – Sipho Sepamla, you yourself, Curtis Nkondo who gave a straight answer: if it supports the fight against apartheid, it's on, if not, it's out. There was mention of consultation . . . In me, the questions triggered by the discussion of my rather desperate effort to have feedback were, amongst others: should one not invite overseas academics at all? Are they unwelcome? What if they support the fight against racism, as Jameson obviously does? Is academic discussion outlawed, perhaps? Is somebody here in this meeting *very angry* that there was no consultation with . . . with whom? Who should I have consulted, I thought, and realized that no one, including the speaker from the UDF, gave information on this. I concluded that, should I try to consult someone, I would have to come to you, Mr Dangor. Well, then I will do so, next time round. After all, as you will remember, the representative from the UDF clearly stated that he did not represent the cultural desk or, in other terms, any finally formalized policy on the CB by the cultural desk of the UDF. If I consult you, Mr Dangor, *who* do I consult? Who do you represent?

I should like to refer to your report on this on page 92. Although you carefully state my *possible* negative position about the CB as 'unhappiness', you place it against the background of a

'general mood' which you summarize as 'we know what is politically correct, let us find practical ways of making it happen'. This 'lecturer from UNISA', is, obviously, not only out of touch but conspicuously doubtful about . . . 'what is politically correct'? In the next sentence you place the term describing Jameson's convictions in inverted commas: 'Marxist'. Someone is supposed to understand automatically. Let me try: an overseas 'Marxist' from the USA reads his Lenin on a deck-chair crossing the Atlantic for his next visit to the Cote d'Azure. Or: the term 'Marxist' as used by me can only denote a vague, academic, irrelevant position. Or: South African realities demand that 'Marxism' takes note of what this word has meant and still means here and now, locally. I would like to think the latter guess is closest. Then I am learning something and gladly (eventually) take note. (Fredric Jameson, whom you referred to intimately as 'Fred Jameson', is 'Prof.', not 'Dr.' , but I should not think he would care about such details.)

You then suggest that this institution would have congratulated itself on presenting such a prominent figurehead on its platforms to parade him in front of 'perhaps two hundred' people and this would mean, I presume here, some two hundred UNISA intellectuals and some invited or informed academics. Jameson will not speak to the people he no doubt would have liked to address and listen to, this suggests. You have omitted the fact that I mentioned that we would have tried to make such a visit profitable to as many people as possible, to open up meetings, to arrange meetings with him at other places. And *not* because UNISA graciously allows for this, but because Jameson himself would no doubt have insisted on it. Jameson might be less of a 'Marxist' (to quote) than you seem to presume. Would COSAW have invited him, spoken to him, if he had come?

A visit by Fredric Jameson would hardly add 'a kind of exotic lustre to UNISA'. There are a substantial number of lecturers (if regrettably not a majority) at UNISA who attempt to prevent such co-optationary effects of academic activities performed in the name of academia. You cynically refer to Jameson 'liberating' two hundred white people. If anything, Jameson was invited to prevent armchair self-liberation by white intellectuals and academics who are basking in the exotic lustre of their non-restrictable academic activities.

Why, to continue, is the reference to the reason why he did not come, that he 'consulted' someone, ironically quoted in inverted commas? And why does this effect the impression that there was no appreciation for his decision when I had explicitly stated the opposite at the meeting?

In your second paragraph in this connection you refer to a

'quick and vehement' response and to quite a few questions. These questions are important since they provide the understanding that helps one – me in this case – to formulate a clear attitude about the CB (or the AB, i.e. the academic boycott). But my impression was that there was a lot of ignorance about the issue and the questions you quote seem to summarize your summary of the discussion, not the questions and the discussion itself. This, as you very well know, is the case with your reported question: why not invite Govan Mbeki or Raymond Suttner?

Nevertheless, some points were well made, even if they were your points! Discussion of and by Marxism/Marxists, of political concerns or by the politically concerned in South Africa should stop applying a kind of internal censorship and suppression by excluding those who are banned or restricted. You accentuate the irony that South Africans who not even are Marxists are being detained, suppressed, restricted whereas an overseas Marxist has ready access to forums of speech in South Africa. I personally benefit from having this irony brought sharply to my attention.

Finally, you create the impression that I left the meeting before it was closed because I had no further interest in the proceedings and in the broader problems, other than my own, which concerned the vast majority of the workshop participants. As you of course know, there may be many reasons why people leave meetings before they are closed, especially when the meeting starts half an hour late (for which there might also be good reasons). A sentence such as 'she had come to do her ''public consultation'' and left' seems to insinuate that whatever I said at the workshop was a mere empty gesture.

Is it wrong to have genuine questions and concerns and is it wrong to voice them? Are attitudes not being shown – in 'public' – in order to seek answers and correction if necessary? Especially when the speaker suspects that her attitude might not be the most popular one? Surely, these are rhetorical questions. Yet your report on my remarks works at discrediting them in every respect.

Why, I wonder?

Marianne de Jong

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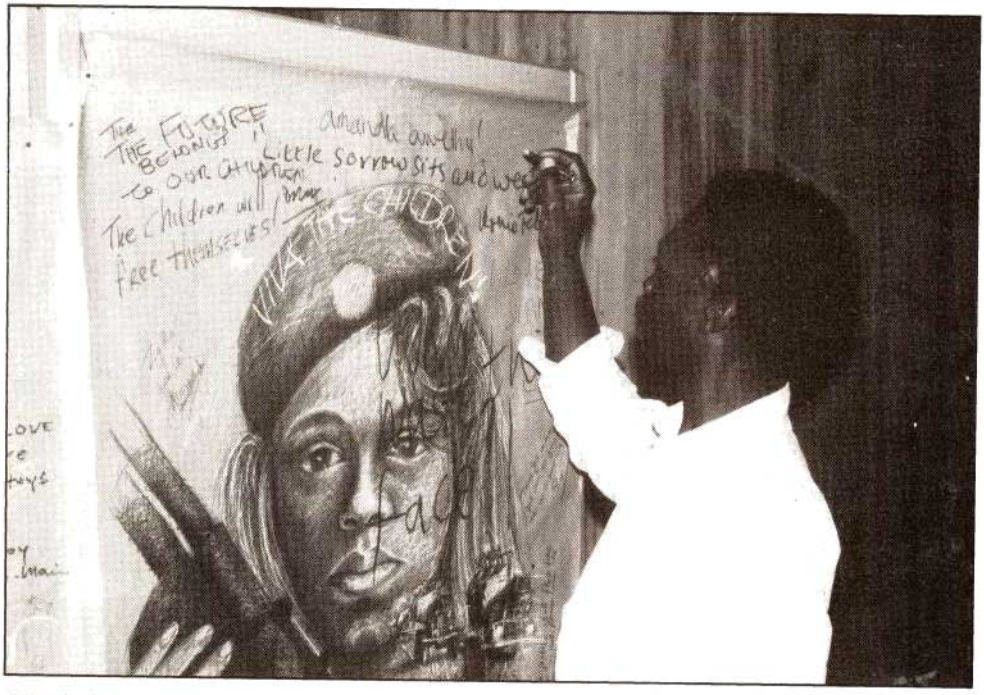

Mandlenkosi Langa *(above)* and Lewis Nkosi *(below)* make their mark at the Bad Boll Conference. See report inside.