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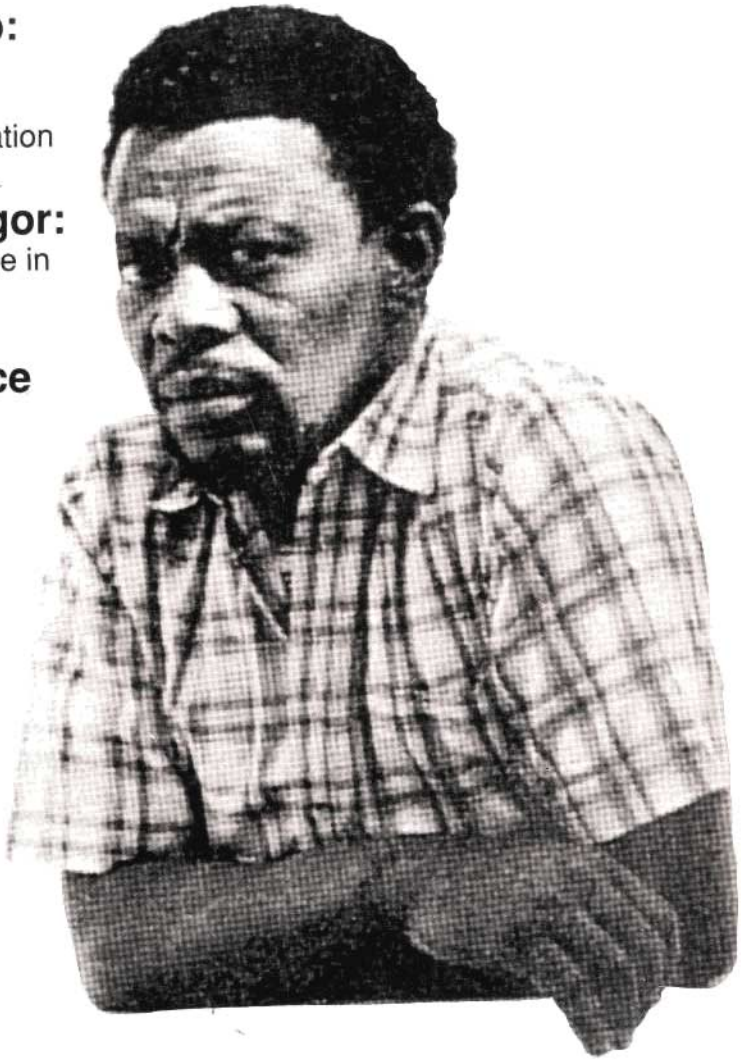

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Photographs of Namibia by Dawn Norton.
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COMMENT

In the recent past, especially since the unbanning of the liberation organizations and the release of Nelson Mandela along with a number of other political prisoners, South Africa has embarked on a new phase in its history. However, apart from the legalization of political groups which have for long been perceived as the legitimate representatives of the vast majority of people in South Africa, the fundamental structure of South African society is still intact. The movement towards the full democratization of this society, which involves the redistribution of power and resources, the unification of South Africa and all its people in a unitary democratic state with universal and unqualified franchise for all, still has to be accomplished. The present climate signals clearly that these tasks now confront the South African people as a whole.

In this changing context, the place and role of culture in the transition from racial domination to democracy in a post-apartheid society is being hotly debated by writers, artists and cultural groups in South Africa as well as in the liberation movements. In this regard Albie Sachs's paper 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom' presented at an ANC seminar in which he called for a re-adjustment of the organization's cultural policy has unsettled the crude and mechanical distinction which has for so long been drawn between politics and art in the liberation movement and in certain sectors of South African society. For decades creativity was subordinated to the politics of liberation. While this subordination was seen as necessary in order to advance the struggle for political, economic and cultural liberation, its rigid orthodoxy served to narrow the scope and freedom of some artists committed to the democratic struggle. Now this is changing.

With regard to advocating change from a socially sensitive point of view, *Staffrider* has been a forerunner. It has called for and encouraged literature and art free from political dogma and rigidity. In this respect Njabulo Ndebele's critical input with regard to some South African fiction made in 1984 is of great significance. Before that, in 1981 Dikobe Martins, now a political prisoner, spoke about the need to develop a rich and complex art which embodies the full range of human experiences. The new *Staffrider* is committed to these tasks. By providing a forum for all South African culture ranging from the cultural production of workers to that of salaried intelligentsia it aims to draw on the diversity of local culture. In *Staffrider* Volume 8 Number 1 I wrote, in reference to Salman Rushdie, about the importance of artistic freedom and the dangers involved in the vulgar aesthetification of politics where slogans are substituted for art.

Some opportunists have, to the annoyance of many, seized on the ideas contained in Albie Sachs's paper to uncritically support books of poetry or to summarily dismiss compilations of art in arguments which are so contradictory that historical and social codes embedded in the works are wished away. It was to be expected that this would happen. This reactive approach, which basically boils down to a re-affirmation of old, sterile positions, needless to say, does not make any notable contribution to the extension of creative freedom or a deeper understanding of cultural practice. It should be clear that literature and art, even in their most propagandistic forms like posters and agitational poetry, cannot be reduced to a single unproblematic determinant. Even where art is enlisted to serve, say, an economic purpose, as in worker posters, there are always other codes and discourses simultaneously embedded in it. This is exceedingly

more complicated in an elusive poem or a metaphorical narrative and even in a story which recounts ordinary human experiences.

So, as we welcome the shift away from dogmatism to freedom in culture this does not mean the social and humanistic role of literature and art must be abandoned. On the contrary, as we move into the phase of working towards democracy the right of all to participate in the humanizing discourses of creativity will acquire even greater importance. And if things go wrong as they have in other parts of the world the importance of art as a site of freedom against tyranny will be indispensable.

This issue carries an essay by Martin Trump in which the debates on liberation, contained in some Southern African fiction, are analysed. The issue also contains an interview with Achmat Dangor, numerous stories, a variety of poetry and reviews, and a series of photos on the recent mass events in South Africa.

Andries Walter Oliphant

African National Congress rally
Mitchell's Plein

CHRIS LEDOCHOWSKI

PLAN Celebrations
Namibia

Grandpa's Rooster

Fred Khumalo

'My rooster is missing, Thami,' his grandfather said. 'Go find him.'

Beads of sweat shimmered on the old man's nose. He gulped the air in deep, greedy gasps. Thami believed that if the size of one's nose were the determinant of one's rank in society, his grandfather would have been the chief of their village; or the district surgeon; better still, the administrator of the Natal province; or the Minister of Health Affairs; perhaps even the Life President of the Republic; or one of the deities of Africa.

The respect their neighbours somewhat grudgingly extended to him supported Thami's suspicion that his grandfather had mystical powers. It convinced him that he had mankind's destiny in his old hands. When he talked people listened and carried out his orders. Thami was no exception to this. But his obsession with poultry irked the boy into a state of private rebellion. He would break into Thami's sleep at ungodly hours. The boy would drowsily go to the fowl-run to fulfil some ridiculous chore.

When he told Thami to search for his missing rooster that afternoon the boy knew that he would not be able to play until he found the rude buzzard who always sneaked out of the enclosure, wandering about freely like an untamed bird.

Thami would comb the nearby bush, go down to the Umhlathuzana River and clamber up the craggy mountain between whose toes their house was ensconced, until he found the rooster. But catching the bird would be another hurdle. He fought for his freedom with hawkish ferocity.

So, when his grandfather barked his order that afternoon Thami resigned himself to fate, like a warrior going to war. He summoned the strength he needed by mentally leaping back to the previous week when his grandfather had bared his heart to him, explaining how he started as a breeder of birds.

Thami didn't always enjoy listening to stories. He was suspicious. He suspected that everyone on the face of the earth was on a campaign to pull wool over his eyes. He distrusted stories. But the story his grandfather related to him the previous week lingered in his mind for days.

Sitting in his easy chair in the sun-bathed porch, his grandfather started, 'I can almost touch the fire of anger that flares up in you whenever I tell you to take care of my birds...'

'Do you want me to help you with anything, grandpa?' Thami asked, regarding his grandfather's utterance as a preamble to yet another assignment.

'All I want you to do is listen,' he said, motioning Thami to a stool opposite him.

He was in his usual outfit: a white vest, khaki shorts, white socks and brown leather sandals. His grey hair was short and his grey feline whiskers danced when he talked. His mud-complexioned face was absurdly small for his nose — like a fish-pond in which a whale was confined. His teeth were snowy white and his lips thick. He was stout and of average height.

After a moment's reflection he had continued, 'I understand your

anger, child of my child. I can't help but provoke it because not only are you the sole child here, but you're also a boy. One day you will be a man. Anger makes a man. Frustration makes a man.

'You have to go through difficulties in life in order to become somebody. The things you hate are the very rungs you have to clamber upon on your way upwards, in your pursuit of success. Take me for example, had I not gone through difficult times I would have cracked under the weight of life.

'When my mama was seriously ill — really on the threshold of death — my father was on the mines in Johannesburg. He signed a two-year contract there and couldn't come back home before the lapse of that period. My elder sisters were attending boarding school far away, approximately a five-day walk from the farm on which we were staying.

'McDonald, the owner of the farm, would not let our family stay for free on his land. At least one of the family members had to work on the farm in return. But with mama on her death-bed, my father in Johannesburg and my elder sisters so far away, there was no one among us who could work on the farm. So we had to move. But where to? I didn't know. So, I asked McDonald to try me. He wouldn't hear a thing of that. "What do you think you are, boy? You are still too young." But I persisted until he gave in, saying, "Okay, tomorrow you start work."

'The next morning, before sunrise I was already in the fields leading a span of oxen pulling a ploughshare. Imagine an undernourished eight-year-old boy running in front of strong well-fed oxen! By midday we had finished ploughing, and I was already milking the cows.I enjoyed this the most.

'Two weeks after that my mother died. Neighbours who were sympathetic to me somehow relayed the message to my mother's relatives in the Transkei, hundreds of kilometres from Ixobho, where we were staying. After the funeral, my mother's relatives took me with them because they felt that I needed parental guidance — I was still too young to be on my own.

'The white farmer reluctantly let go of me. He had been impressed by my work. He said I was a valuable asset to him. By the way, we hadn't heard from pa even though a telegram had been sent to him about my mother's passing away. Oh my dad!

'So, off we went to my relatives' home. They also stayed on a white man's farm. Child of my child, you may be wondering why black people in those days — the 1920s to be exact — were staying on white people's farms and not in their own areas. Eyi,

these white people were too clever for us. Realizing that we were self-sufficient — had cattle and ploughed our own fields — they tried by all means to make things difficult for us. First, in 1913 they had passed the Land Act through which they confiscated large tracts of fertile land, rezoning it for white occupation.

'They dumped us on barren deserts. Because of overcrowding in those "black reserves" the soil was eroded. Crops failed and cattle died. Black people had to find other means of making a living. The only alternative was to go and work for whites on their farms.

'As if that were not enough, the white government passed laws which would make it necessary for us to earn money. Poll Tax was introduced, followed by Hut Tax. There were still some black people who would not work for whites. To earn the tax money they sold their vegetables at markets which had mushroomed overnight in most villages. To counter that the government introduced more taxes — Dog Tax and Cattle Tax. Oh I'm getting carried away, child of my child... The point I'm trying to drive home is, we had no alternative but to work for the white people. This also explains why my father had to go to the mines.

'I then settled with mother's relatives. They really treated me like a child. They offered me the life I had known before my mother's death. I had enough to eat, beautiful clothes to wear. I only went to work with them on the fields when I felt like it. My happiness reached a peak with the arrival of my two sisters on the farmstead at the end of the year. They had come for the vacations. They were much older than me — the youngest fourteen and the eldest seventeen — but I enjoyed their company.

'But my happiness was short-lived because they had to return to school, and I also had to start school on the farm. I was nine years old then. No sooner had I started school than my grandfather on my mother's side retired. At seventy he was too old to work on the farm. His son had disappeared, and was reported to have fled to a squatter settlement near Durban. I was the only other male in our household. I had to replace my uncle on the farm as a worker. My dreams about school thus withered.

'I must have been seventeen when I decided I had had enough of farm life. I escaped from home and headed for Durban. I got my first job as a gardener for a white family in one of the suburbs. Having worked under severe conditions on the farm, working in a garden was smooth sailing. The pay was also better in the city — I earned ten rand per month whereas on the farm I had known family men who were taking home five rand per month. But I was

still an angry young man. Because of the Influx Control laws my movements in the city were restricted, in fact my very presence in the city was illegal. I had to get the right papers that would grant me the permission to seek a better job elsewhere in the city.

'One night my friends and I were coming from a *s'cathamiya* music contest when we were stopped by police. "Pass, ziphi lo pass kawena?" They were demanding our papers. The others produced their passes but I fumbled endlessly in my pockets, pretending to have misplaced my papers. I was ultimately flung into the back of a van. I spent two days in a police cell for contravening the Influx Control Act.

'On my release I went to my place of work. "Phumaphi wena?" My boss wanted to know where I had been. I explained, but he wouldn't buy my story. So I was sacked. After that I went to squat with some of my friends at Dalton Men's Hostel while I looked for work. I finally got a job at a motel. I swept the floors and cleaned windows. I thought the job was for sissies, so I quit. Besides, I wasn't going to toss my future in a rubbish bin — the pay at the motel was a pathetic six rand per month.

'After that my days were split between waiting in the endless queues of work-seekers and shuffling on the benches with those waiting for papers that legalize their presence in the city. I finally landed a job with a horse-owner from Pinetown, a small town some kilometres from Durban. Because of my dedication I learned very quickly to be an efficient horse-groom. I fed the animals, cleaned them and also helped train them. That was an exciting period in my life. I enjoyed working there and my boss liked me, lavishing me with presents, taking me with his family on their outings. He even registered me with a correspondence school.

But, as the Zulu saying goes, good things don't last. My boss went overseas, saying he had had enough of South African nonsense. No, he didn't abandon me. No. He wanted to take me with his family but I declined. How on earth could I turn my back on the land of my forefathers? No, I couldn't do that. Better starve and suffer than cut myself away from my roots. By that time I had secured the papers which legalized my presence in the city.

'I built a shack at Umkhumbane, a squatter settlement on the outskirts of the city. To make a living I started breeding chickens, something I had taken up as a pastime at my previous place of work. I sold the birds at the Indian market in the city. After only six months I was already an institution. I was famous. When you claimed to be a relative of mine, Baba Ngobese, people looked at

you with awe. I was among the first people to build proper block-and-cement houses in Umkhumbane. I was one of the first three car-owners in this shanty-town. Here blacks, Indians, coloureds and some whites lived cheek by jowl. There was no Group Areas Act then.

'I built a shop and got married. It was during those years of my success that your father, my first-born, came into this world. Your grandmother and your father spent most of their time at the shop while I directed my energy towards the poultry business.'

Thami's grandfather paused to take a sip from the tea which his granny had placed in front of them. Thami attacked the mountain of biscuits on the plate.

In between gulps of tea the old man continued his journey down memory lane. 'But I soon realized that the poultry business was no longer profitable, so I dropped it. I went back to my shop. It grew at an enviable pace, and aspiring businessmen occasionally came to my home, seeking advice.

'In the meantime your father graduated from high school and registered for a law degree at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. His younger brothers, Themba and Khulani, went to Amanzimtoti College of Education. Oh, child of my child you're still too young. Maybe you won't understand this...'

'Tell me grandpa. What is it?'

'The government demolished Umkhumbane. They said it was too filthy...'

'And what did they do with you?'

'They resettled some of us in Chesterville township, others were dumped at KwaMashu while others were trucked off to Umlazi. Many of us lost our fortunes in this diaspora. I was compensated, but the money I got was not equal to the effort I had put into that business of mine.

'Your father who had by then completed his studies clubbed together with some lawyers, trying to fight this war. Okay, we had lost the war, our haven had been demolished. But the lawyers wanted us to get as much compensation as we could.

'The lawyers organized countless meetings at which they mobilized the people against the whims of the government. It's when your father started running into problems with the government. I can't recall how many times he was detained for his political work then. He was once charged under the Riotous Assemblies Act, was once charged under the Terrorism Act. Boy I can't recall all of it.

'His activism rubbed off on your mother who became the president of the Natal branch of the Federation of South African Women. We are now in the 1970s and your parents' dedication to the struggle is now keeping them in detention. They are angry, dedicated people. Your eldest brother, Veli, is also in detention. I actually don't know where he got his political education because he didn't spend much time with your parents. He was at boarding school most of the time. His vacations usually coincided with your parents' absence from home...'

'Ngobese,' Thami's grandmother said as she emerged from the kitchen. 'You want this child to go to jail like his parents? You're teaching him politics, huh?'

'I'm not talking politics. I'm making a man out of this boy! I'm teaching him about this world's problems.' His nose twitched and swelled spasmodically like a breathing frog.

While they exchanged words Thami stole away like a cat, his heart heavy with what he'd just heard. For quite a long time he had been made to believe that his parents were working in the city. He didn't know they were political prisoners. Anger flowed in his veins. He felt like smashing everything around him. He wanted to avenge himself on the outside world which had taken his parents away from him.

Oh, if it were possible to claw into the past, drag missed opportunities back by their ears, resurrect the country as it had been then, and clobber all who had been responsible for the demolition of Umkhumbane which had ultimately culminated in the detention of his parents, Thami thought indignantly.

It's that kind of indignation which Thami needed that afternoon as he quickened his step, bracing himself for the tough scuffle with his grandfather's jet-black rooster.

Whose Triomf?

Maureen Isaacson

I should have known that it could never work out, coming to live here with Tiens in Triomf. For the first couple of months we'd sit outside, looking down the rows of box houses, identical to our white one, watching children riding bikes in the street, flying kites, calling to each other in Afrikaans. We'd watch the facades of our neighbours' houses, teeming with ceramic Mexican cacti and sombreros; the tidy green gardens guarded by bright Plaster of Paris gnomes. Compared to the rest of Jo'burg, security was still low key here. The residents of Triomf still believed that their bulldogs could stave off the violence that went on outside. 'Pasop vir die hond,' Tiens would read the signs on the tiny fences, then in English, 'Beware of the dog.'

It was some three decades since the government had 'removed' the freehold suburb of Sophiatown in the Fifties, razing the poverty and crime of its multicoloured residents, and with that, its warm smoky streets, its hot jazz, its cool jazz, its precarious freedom. They painted it White. They built these houses.

I believe that Sophiatown has not died. I believe that in the same way as people who are not ready to die, live on as ghosts, walk the earth, and cling to a place, unaware that they no longer exist, the spirit of Sophiatown persists. Things that have happened here recently make me certain of this.

'What I'm getting at,' I tell Tiens, 'is that you cannot annihilate a place and a way of life and expect it to die completely. There will be repercussions. Don't you remember the way grandpa used to quote Father Huddleston, saying that the basic evil in South Africa was contempt for man?'

It's become clear to me that although Tiens feels the same way about the situation as I do, there are enormous differences between us. And that these have more to do with our basic make-up, than with his being Afrikaans and my being English. Anyway, the house is economical and centrally situated, which is why Tiens moved here in the first place, and I wanted to be with him.

Although I'd always been uneasy about living here, the first six months were fine. I even started to feel like my neighbours, most of whom worked for one or another department of the municipality. My brown carpet slippers were appendages I wore like fins, helping me to keep afloat in the fish tank atmosphere of this neighbourhood. At first I hated weekend sounds of cars revving in

the home garage workshops on both sides of our house, but eventually they blended with the blare of TV and Bles Bridges on the radio, with cries of babies and vrooming of lawnmowers. It sounded the way they say traffic does after a while, when you live near a busy road. I got used to it.

There were compensations, like drinking coffee on the small red polished stoep. In summer the evening sky showed its orange and pink clouds like victory, after it had torn into the afternoon with a storm, then made yet another bold rainbow vow. The ghosts were in my head, and I just had to live with them, I tried to tell myself.

My grandfather, Leo King, spent a lot of time in Sophiatown, when he worked as a photojournalist for a black magazine. He got hooked onto saxophones and syncopated rhythms and certain home brews made by talented ladies in places with names that sounded like songs, 'Back of the Moon', 'The House on Telegraph Hill', 'Little Heaven'. Even though he's been dead for some time now my link with him feels as strong as ever.

I'd come up from the Cape on the Trans-Karoo train with my parents every July, and it would be worth each second of the two-day travel into the grime and soot of Jo'burg, just for a glimpse of grandad in his baggy trousers and slightly crumpled checked shirt. I can still see him sitting up in the East African Pavilion Restaurant in Bree Street, above the rush of the Golden City, treating me to curry, to life.

He insisted that I see the other side as well. People thought it unusual for a white schoolgirl to go into the heart of 'Sophtown', or 'South Africa's Chicago', as it was called. But I was fascinated with what went on there. Sometimes a whole family would live in one room, sometimes as many as two hundred people would share a single tap. Mangy dogs, chickens, go-carts made of wire and wood, children, pennywhistles, spilled out of the yards of houses, and the shacks behind the houses. Smells of drains, sweat and urine mingled with those of fish, chips, beer. Some of grandpa's best photographs were of scenes I was not yet old enough to see at the time. They show how twisted streets and precarious staircases led to wild nights; nights whose darkness touched the bare necks and arms of singers Dolly Rathebe, Dottie Masuka, the Gay Gaieties. In the black and white photos you can almost touch the way the dance heated the night. You can feel the danger.

'You cannot deny that there is definitely evil in the way Triomf has supplanted all that life and joy and pain and colour — there is definitely a kind of justice to be levelled,' I insist.

Tiens thinks I'm silly.

'I'm sure that Sophiatown was great but I have a feeling that you over-romanticize the place, then you add all that mystical crap mixed up with your own brand of morality,' he says, 'you invent it to give meaning to an otherwise meaningless existence.'

Grandpa took pictures of the resistance that people tried to put up before the removals. 'We Won't Move' and 'He Who Comes to Destroy Sophiatown Shall Himself Be Destroyed' were scribbled on walls. Of course neither Tiens nor myself had anything to do with what happened, but somehow we're all part of the system, and white is white, no matter whose side we're on.

The other day, as I was passing the bus shelter up the road from where I live, I saw this black guy, suave as a gangster, dressed American-style, in loose trousers, cardigan, two-tone brogues. Leaning against that bus shelter, sucking on his cigarette, he looked as if he owned the morning sun. A cop appeared suddenly and demanded his ID book, the document that's recently replaced the pass book. As I was watching this happen, I remembered details of the story grandpa once told me about a man called Henry.

Henry was a trombonist grandad knew. He was one of the Americans, a Sophiatown gang that cruised the streets in Cadillacs, rigged out in the latest American clothes. They were as smooth as polish, flash as the knives used all too often in Sophtown's streets. Unless you were a member of another gang, you didn't mess with these guys.

One day as Henry was taking the time of day in the sunshine, leaning against a bus shelter, a young policeman approached. He demanded a pass. Henry slid his hand into the pocket of his wide-legged Macgregor trousers and shook the document under the cop's nose. The cop threw the pass onto the ground and said: 'Now pick it up, you.' Henry covered it with a two-tone shoe, and gave the cop a clean, strong crack on the jaw. As the cop pulled out a gun, Henry drew his knife, and who pushed who, nobody knows. They stumbled and fell and somehow the gun went off and the cop was killed by his own bullet. Henry was hanged.

Now this guy I saw at the busstop the other day, I don't know his name, behaved in much the same way as Henry had done. He flapped the ID book at the cop. The cop threw the pass on the ground, told him to pick it up. The cop drew a gun. The guy pulled a knife, there was a scuffle and the cop was killed.

When I saw the cops arrive and throw the murderer into the

back of the van I wondered what kind of a death he'd have. Henry's brother had sat outside on the pavement all night before the hanging, and in the morning he joined Henry's singing when he began his slow march to death. Henry had at least had that. He also had a motto that was on the lips of all his contemporaries: 'Live fast, die young, make a good-looking corpse.' What did this guy have?

The similarities of the two stories reinforce my feelings — it's as if Sophiatown cannot rest until we've learned our lesson. 'So what?' Tiens asks. He's as obstinate and rigid as the law sometimes, even though he's this supposedly creative architect, the spark behind the latest community development project everyone's talking about right now.

'You'll drive yourself crazy drawing parallels, stone cold crazy. Ellen,' he tells me, 'forget about predetermined patterns. I bet this happens all over the country — you're making the whole thing sound unique. It's not.'

Tiens isn't always so unrelenting. Grandpa met him before he died and he loved him. 'Boereseuntjie', he'd call him. Or the 'new', or the 'alternative' Afrikaner. Tiens objected to this, saying there was nothing 'new' or 'alternative' about him. 'Afrikanerdom' was not something old, like an institution, it was something one happened to be born to. But for Leo King, arch-English liberal, what was new about Tiens, was that in his eyes nobody could have been further from the Apartheid and Baasskap he associated the Afrikaner with. Tiens had suffered for some of the things they had done, the way children suffer the shame of cruel parents, when they see the cruelty directed elsewhere. But he was different. While his family were still nursing the wounds of the Boer War, he was out there, pushing for equality.

He wanted to know details of grandpa's scrapes with thugs and cops. He wanted to hear them in 'Tsotsi-taal', that mad slangy mix of all the country's languages, with its stress on Afrikaans. My grandpa, Leo King, always knew what people were saying everywhere at any given time. He learned it in the jails and shebeens, in Can Themba's home, 'The House of Truth', and in Miriam Makeba's backyard. How could all this die? 'Torch daardie larnie', Grandpa would say, meaning, 'look at that Whitey', and he referred to Sophiatowners as 'Onse town'.

Sometimes I can still hear the voice of Leo King saying, 'At one stage, when no whites wanted to live in Sophiatown because of the sewerage farm that was too close for comfort, anyone was allowed

to buy houses from that greedy Tobiansky. Then one day it was over...' he'd click his fingers, 'just like that — to hell with the resistance of the people. No warning about dates or times. Along came the trucks and you were on, with your kettle, your sofa, your washing, your children. Picked up and flung into townships, the blacks to Meadowlands — with its no-name streets and houses.'

Now all that remains of 'Casbah' or 'Kofifi', other slang names for Sophiatown, is our home — this cheap white suburb with the name that means 'triumph'.

What Tiens had in common with grandpa was his passion. When Lucy, our neighbour's domestic worker was gang-raped the other night, Tiens was as outraged as grandpa was when the same thing happened to his friend Lena. Lena was waiting for a cab to Sophiatown after working late in town one night, when a carload of cops arrested her for not having her pass on her. All five of them raped her, right there in Pritchard Street, cheering each other on, while she sobbed and screamed. Goodness knows what would have happened to her if a car hadn't stopped. A man got out, took the registration of the police car and followed them to the station. When he reported what he'd seen, the sergeant on duty laughed. 'Who wants to naai with a swart ding?' he asked. Afterwards Lena said all she remembered about the incident was feeling as if she was a bottle of beer, in some crazy drinking competition. She didn't want to talk about it.

Tiens is still fuming about what happened to Lucy. He has talked at length about the violence of the act and what can be done to prevent this, but he doesn't want to know how the elements of this story tie up with the other one. How can he ignore such an obvious sign? Even the location in Pritchard Street was the same. The only difference here was that the issue was the ID book, and when the man who stopped in a car reported the incident, the sergeant on duty insisted that Lucy must have been soliciting and that women like her 'got what they deserved.'

'What are people still going on like this about papers for, after all that trouble has been taken to scrap the pass laws?' I shout.

'I feel as helpless as you do about the way things that change stay exactly the same, you know,' Tiens is impatient. 'But you're talking about the police, not just the papers, aren't you? You must remember that cops are cops, all over the world. The ones you're talking about are white, no doubt, but I can tell you the black SAPs can be as heavy as they come.'

'You've got the whole thing worked out, haven't you? Can't you

see what's going on here?' I hear myself screaming.

He puts his hand on my shoulder. 'Ellen, you're far too emotional. How can I get you to understand that there's no mystical link between times and places, between Lena and Lucy? There are simply the bland, ugly facts — no connections. Why don't you leave the past alone? Let go of your childhood, we're grown up now.'

Sitting on the stoep, when I first came to stay, we used to talk endlessly about our pasts, our families, it was a way of connecting the vast stretch that separated us; the further back in time we could go, the closer it seemed to bring us together. That's changed now.

Perhaps it's Tiens's boyhood on the mielie farm in the Eastern Transvaal that gave him the stability he has now. He's often described the sour smell of chicken droppings, the richness of strong coffee in the early morning, and the heat of fresh dung, squelching between his toes, while he milked the cow. These are the things he misses more than he misses his people. Things like staining his hands red-purple with pomegranates and mulberries, and the way the incessant hum of the sun beetle stretched Sundays into eternity.

'Your childhood, Ellen,' he says, 'for all the free thinking of your parents and the glories of Koffiebaai and its stretches of wild coast, hinged mainly on a vicarious experience of life: you lived via your grandad. This gave you unrealistic expectations of how things should be. It has made you think about people too much.'

His detachment infuriates me. Why won't he see?

The fire was the final straw, it happened only yesterday. In the evening the sky seemed to hang lower than usual, it almost touched our shoulders with its pink clouds, then retreated, a kind of tease. I felt like spitting at its damned shades of pastel, at the way it tried to make us believe that it was taking care of us somehow, with its gaping expanse and its feeble sliver of moon that sat up there, waiting for the dark to come so that it could shine.

'Okay, I know grandpa's fire story,' Tiens says, 'off by heart. And I suppose you would say that just because Zakes Kumalo's daughter was playing in a cardboard box in the street here when she was three years old and another kid set the box alight, in 1954, what happened today, 34 years later, is supposed to take on a whole new dimension...'

'But...' I start and he's gone, like a snake whooshing through a winter veld.

'Okay, I know that she spent a year in hospital, recovering from third degree burns. And that on exactly the same date, three years later, Zakes was set alight. Nobody knows why. For God's sake Ellen, you can't go on trying to prove that the spirit of the past is forcing itself on this chaotic present. What is happening is bad enough, and you must know that burnings are very common nowadays.'

'Yes,' I concede, 'perhaps the mystery of Zakes's case is not relevant now, but it's not the mystery I'm thinking about. How can I make you see the importance of what has just happened here? Don't you understand, Tiens, that although today's burning was a repeat of what happened to Zakes's daughter, there were two ominous differences: the three-year-old playing in the box was a boy this time, and secondly, before his skin was frazzled, it was white.' If only he can listen, for once, I think.

'You sound like one of those people who believe that they can predict the end of the world with the aid of Revelations,' is all he can say. But never mind what he says, what is sinister about this, is that the deviation from the pattern means that the next stage is going to be pretty random. Anything can happen now. I'm waiting for the father of the child to have his turn. Maybe they'll choose his mother, maybe it will be someone else, maybe they won't wait as long as three years, maybe it will be me... It's obvious to me that it's no use trying to sit out the possibilities. In Apartheid's grand arena, nobody is pardoned.

Of course I can't prove a thing. I want to tell Tiens to shove his rationalizations and the pretty white house into the same place as the all-seeing heavens up there. I try to get a hold on myself. There's a single impulse driving me. To get out. I know I can't communicate my fear to him, I'm immobilized by it, but I can't get out and 'do something' about the things that worry me, like he says I should. Obviously I'm not made of the same stuff as Tiens is. Too bad. But I still want him to see my point and come with me — that's the part that hurts most.

Probably, and all the odds swing in the favour of this, he'll opt for the convenience and practicality of his life here. And perhaps someone less fanciful than I will share the stoep and not feel defeated by the way the clouds brush you and brush you again in this part of the world, at this time of the year.

Leaf-Mould

Liz Gunner

I do not like leaf-mould very much. When they came from Zimbabwe, when the war was still on, one day we went to Guildford to see friends of theirs who had come away — to find peace. I can remember little of the meeting except that it was brittle, excruciating —

'You can stay here,' they said to her and him. 'If you want to get away, if it all becomes too much for you. There's this little place there at the bottom of the garden. That'll be nice for you two. Really. Think about it.' David smiled his lazy Tom Cat smile, Em smiled sugar sweet, and said,

'You're so kind! And you really would let us stay wouldn't you? But oh, what would we do with the children — still it's a lovely thought!' And she smiled, hiding all the pain, the anger, the disillusion.

Then we found these woods somewhere near the town — beech woods on a hill — and I had bought a spade and black plastic bags and we sat on the brown mushy-leaved ground in the green peacefulness, just for a little. Then I said:

'Folks, we've got to have leaf-mould for the garden, so start digging'.

David was the best, he dug with energy, bending his big body, chucking the rich, rotting pieces into the bags, with the spade. Em wasn't so good; she was more scattered, here and there, bits and pieces. She couldn't take it seriously, and Gordon, well, he tried his best. After all, you don't see rich leaf-mould like this every day. So we filled up the car boot, six bags of the stuff, and when we got back I heaved it out and fed the curling fern in the corner of the back garden, and the orange flowers next to the fern in the corner, and I felt good.

We never went back to those woods. David and Em went back to Salisbury, and the war, Muzorewa, Ian Smith, and the distant sounds and shimmers of Chimurenga. Em went on smiling but not so often because there was more pain and she didn't feel like hiding it. David's Tom Cat smile came very seldom.

For a few years the leaf-mould was amazing — the fern grew enormous. It began to look like a fern in the Amazon, or in one of those dinosaur pictures where diplodocus nibbles at a leaf and huge vegetation, green, lush and curly sprouts all around. The orange flowers, a bit like small glads, grew huge and strong and

bold and I felt really good. But after a while the goodness must have got used up; the fern went back to normal size, the flowers choked up and straggled, like they always do if you don't thin them out and care for them.

David and Em's house in Avondale got great cracks in it. No truly, don't think I'm being symbolic, I'm not. It just got these great cracks. They couldn't get their money back; they couldn't sell, and there were no smiles, only anger, and one night a whip cracking and then a man living in the house alone with the wife and children gone. And the war ended.

Today I went walking with Gordon in beautiful beech woods, not Guildford, Reading way, in the lands above the Thames. The trees were high and slender, looking for the light with the bunched leaves all at the top near the sky. I looked back and saw pale shafts of light cutting across the spaces, and at our feet leaf-mould, firm, not soft and mushy, but I didn't want to dig it up and take it home. It didn't seem right.

School Band, Kaisser Street
Windhoek, Namibia
21 March 1990

Water Money

Steve Jacobs

The lobster crouched on its bed of rice, legs splayed helplessly. But as the pink seafood dressing seeped into its joints, the creature began to lift its heavy body, painstakingly, from the plate.

'Sit jou bliksem!' Attie Labuscagne snarled, waving his knife and fork in tight circles in the air.

Defiantly, the lobster stuck out the stalks of its eyes and with a supreme effort heaved its prehistoric frame, creaking metallically, from the garish mush of rice and sauce.

The diner grunted in annoyance and threw his cutlery down onto the clattering table. He grabbed one thin leg, had it off with a vicious tug, and jammed the limb to his mouth. As he sucked the meat from its cylinder of shell, the lobster squealed in agony.

* * *

Boetie Mulder flinched awake, gripping the sheet with his fat fingers. The lobster's howl of pain interleaved with Attie Labuscagne's aggression, joining two refugees from nightmare into a single searing image.

Wilma stirred beside him. 'What's wrong?' she mumbled, burying her head in the pillow. 'Go to sleep.' Outside, a wind gusted and ebbed, rattling the windows.

'I dreamed...' Boetie searched the dark room but the image was beyond words. All that came out was: 'I hope the shop's okay.'

'Ag go to sleep,' his wife moaned, rolling over with too much of the sheet. But Mulder did not reclaim his share. Attie's scowl pushed him up in bed, squirming like a schoolboy before an irate teacher. His back rested against the headboard, his hands clasped on a stomach that ballooned like a pregnant woman's. He reached over to touch Wilma's thin shoulder and the skin felt clammy.

'It's okay. You sleep nicely hey,' he assured her. 'I'm here.'

But when he closed his eyes again, the lobster was back, sauce dripping from its knobbled hide like blood. Deforested of legs, it lay on its stomach, just a trunk, while shards of shell mounted on Attie Labuscagne's side plate.

Wilma cuddled up to him in the morning, hopefully stroking his thigh muscles, vestiges of his days on the rugby field. But even if he'd wanted to, Boetie could not dredge up any passion. He kissed

her apologetically on the forehead and dressed in his safari suit for work.

* * *

The manager had been wrestling with the maze of projections that Jo'burg had sent down, but he couldn't make head or tail of them. The ring of the telephone stung him out of his bewilderment.

'Hullo,' he said sharply.

'Boetie!' the voice was harsh.

'Hullo Attie.' After his dream, speaking to the man was like picking at an open sore.

'Did you get the report?'

'I'm reading it,' Mulder said testily. 'I'm busy reading it.'

'Well I hope your turnover matches those blerrie figures. It's Christmas soon.'

'But Attie man, there's a consumer boycott.' He hated the pleading in his voice. 'And the drivers are scared. They won't go into the locations. That's why the turnover's dropping. It's different in Jo'burg...'

He glanced across the showroom. Lance was sitting at his desk, a welcoming distance from the door, reading the newspaper; Frieda was speaking on the other phone. Neither had heard their boss grovelling, he hoped.

'Listen my man,' Labuscagne's tone was edged with steel, 'just do your best, hey? Just do your best.'

'By the way,' Boetie ventured, 'I got the water money. I'm going to pay it tomorrow.'

'Good,' Attie seemed to sneer. 'Go ahead.'

He thinks I can't even get that right, Mulder brooded. If I'm so stupid, why did they make me manager? When he put the receiver down, his elbow was stiff with tension. He pulled a pack of Camels from his top pocket and tapped one out. 'Bloody moffie,' he said, lighting it.

Lance was leering at him, and Boetie sucked on his cigarette, returning the stare. But Lance did not meet the challenge. Running his fingers slowly through his thinning hair, he dropped his head and went back to studying the horse-racing page. It was ten o' clock and the shop was empty.

An advertising pamphlet mocked the manager with its sickly pink exuberance and the jingle chimed in his head: 'Your two-year guarantee store...' But no one was making use of the guarantee.

The blacks were boycotting and the whites either could not afford, or shopped at Lillians up the road.

Boetie unlocked the desk drawer nervously, and fingered the white envelope. R239,50. Not enough to steal and risk your job for, but not nice to lose. Mofsowitz would come in tomorrow: he always collected the water money on the 25th. Lance sidled over and his boss made a show of shuffling with the papers from Jo'burg while closing the drawer with his knee.

'Quiet hey?'

'Ja. What can we do.'

Lance moved the R899 sign from a couch and sat down.

'Did you go on duty last night?' he asked.

'No. Why?'

'Someone should teach them a lesson,' he joked, then added seriously: 'You know Boetie, I really admire you.'

'Why?' his boss asked with suspicion.

But there was no sarcasm in Lance's reply. 'Because you actually go into the locations to make it safer for people like me.'

Mulder's face cleared like a rock pool settling after a storm. 'Well you can join up also. We're always looking for more people.'

'Ag no. I'm a coward,' Lance snickered. 'I value my own skin too much.'

'Ja well,' Boetie shrugged. 'It's up to you.'

Mabel arrived with a tray then and the conversation was overtaken by the ritual of morning tea.

* * *

The lobster pulled itself across the kitchen table, laboriously, inch by aching inch, trying to find a way back to the sea.

'Hey Pa, why can't we let him go?' Boetie pleaded. 'He's hurt.'

The fisherman's violent laugh ricocheted around the room, driving the boy's flinching mother further into the corner she had occupied since she had married this man.

'Because this is money, Boetie my boy... money from the water,' and Pa walloped the table with his fist. 'This is water money!'

Roaring with the cheap wine inside him, he picked up the struggling creature, trapping its legs with his huge fingers, and wrenched off its tail. The lobster gasped, bilious from pain.

* * *

The telephone's piercing alarm woke Boetie Mulder from the dingy room of his childhood. He groped, confused, in the darkness and Wilma grumbled: 'Switch it off.'

'Hu-hu-hullo.' Her husband's voice was thick with sleep.

'Hey Boetie,' the words were spoken urgently. 'It's me Henry! They've broken into your shop.'

'What?' Lobsters shrieked as they were dropped into boiling water.

'You've had a burglary my mate. You'd better come over.'

'Oh shit.' Scalded, Mulder jumped out of bed, still holding the phone, and stubbed his toe on the bedside chair. 'Jou moer!' he swore. 'No not you Henry. What did they take?'

'I don't know. They came in through the roof.'

'Okay, I'll be there now.'

Boetie switched on the light. 'I hate that blerrie shop,' he burst out bitterly.

'It's your job,' Wilma answered tiredly, 'and I'm sick of it.'

'Well you know how to spend my money!' her husband lashed back. But he got no further reaction. Wilma buried her head under the pillow.

'I'm the manager and they don't trust me with anything,' he complained. 'I've even got to ask them for the water money...' A shiver went through hime then. 'Even the water money.'

* * *

Boetie Mulder gunned his Mazda into town, taking the corner from Krugerstraat on two wheels. Outside the shop stood Henry's van, bathed in the pink light of the neon sign. Boetie slammed his foot on the brake, bringing the car to a squealing, skidding stop, and barrelled out leaving the door open.

A few meths-drinkers, too far gone to be scared of the police, were peering through the shop windows, craning, as if over huge obstacles, to see.

'Go on, voetsek!' the manager bellowed.

'Ja baas... shame baas,' the ragtag bunch sympathized, peeling away.

Henry, waiting inside, undid the latch.

'How did you know?' Boetie demanded.

'I was on patrol. The door was open.'

Led by his colleague, the manager walked unsteadily down the long diagonal centre aisle between the lounge suites and the

dining-room tables. His legs, which had stood up to countless rugby scrums, were in danger of turning to water and dropping him on the pink vinyl floor. Right in the middle of the ceiling was the hole the bastards had made, and crawled through like cockroaches.

'Must have taken a ladder with them,' Henry mused. 'So tell me, ou swaer, what's missing? They've broken into that case I see. Cleaned out all the radios?'

'Fuck them,' Boetie heard himself saying. 'It's not bad enough they boycott my shop. Now they steal from me also...' He reached his desk, and his biggest fear was realized: the top drawer had been forced open and the white envelope was gone. 'Ag no shit!' he wailed. 'Not the water money.' Behind his back he heard Henry chuckling.

'You shouldn't have left it locked up. That's the first place they go for is the locked drawers. Or you should have put it in the safe. Ja.' Irritably, the policeman scratched the back of his head. 'Come Boetie. You must tell me what they took.'

And the manager, trembling, sat down behind his desk. 'Fuck them all,' he said.

***

It had been a hectic morning, what with the builders to fix the roof and the insurance people, and filling in forms, endless forms. Boetie picked up the receiver and rang Jo'burg. Sweat bubbled at his hairline and was beginning to trickle down his face.

'Hullo Attie, yes it's me again.' The lobster was on its back and the hand was poised to twist off its tail. 'Mofsowitz came to fetch the water money and I said they stole it. He's coming back after lunch. What must I do?'

'Whose fault is it my man?' Attie's tone was so silky sweet he could have been advertising Benson & Hedges. 'I sent it to you. It's your problem.'

'The insurance bloke said they'll only pay in three weeks...'

'You're the manager. Sort it out.'

'Yes sir,' Boetie choked.

Lance grinned as his boss took out his bank book and opened it at the last entry, checking the balance. And when Mulder crossed the road to Volkskas to draw R239,50 from his account, jackal's eyes followed.

The landlord arrived at half-past two, fat and grumbling and short

of breath. He did not even say thank-you when Boetie handed over the small white envelope containing the water money.

***

'What do you mean you don't have any money for our weekend away?' Wilma demanded. 'You promised!'

'Well...' he began, shuffling his feet, 'you know how it is.'

'No I don't!' She thrust her chin at him and jammed her hands on her hips. 'I don't at all. I slave away for you, wash your clothes, make the food, and once, just once, I ask you to take me away for the weekend, and...' her voice caught on a snag that might have been anger or tears, '... and this!'

Boetie could not explain. Her emotion was like thick bush that would not allow in the light of reason. Besides, a deep shame flushed through his body, disgrace at everything he was, despised by his wife and his boss and even by Lance who had no responsibilities at all. He turned abruptly and left her standing, crooked with distress, in the entrance hall.

'I'm on duty,' he muttered. 'I'll see you in the morning.'

'Go on!' she screamed. 'Go with your mates! See if I'm here when you get back!'

'You've got nowhere else to go,' he retorted.

***

'Hey what's wrong?' Louis asked. 'You're quiet tonight.'

'Ag, it's nothing.' She blamed him for everything; she was always moaning. And Attie was always picking at his skin. And the bloody thieves had stolen the water money.

Louis was driving; the dark township street yielded flitting figures, cut into small squares by the mesh of the windows. The radio was on, but only static crackled through. Someone had put a sticker on the back of the van: LOVE A COP. THEY CARE.

'It gives me the fucking creeps to drive in here,' Louis grumbled, and when Boetie did not answer, he added, with an attempt at cheerfulness: 'I suppose someone's got to do it, hey?'

The knives were out, and the lobster was going to get it. Any minute now, stones would spit on the sides of the van, on the roof, would crunch into the mesh. Didn't they throw a handgrenade into Willie's lap the other week, and thank Christ it didn't go off or he'd

have lost his balls that's for sure. Boetie had his 9mm Parabellum ready, just in case.

'You're an idiot! You work for peanuts and you can't even take me away for a weekend!' Wilma howled.

'What did you say?' her husband snapped.

'Nothing,' Louis replied, concentrating on the road. 'Why?'

But the question was left hanging like a sea mist in the air between them. Transfixed in the headlights in the middle of the road was a black boy. Louis jerked the wheel viciously.

'Fuck it...!' Boetie cocked the pistol, aimed roughly at the figure that slid past his window, and pulled the trigger. His wrist jerked with the gun's recoil. When it levelled, he fired again, and again. The explosions packed the cabin with noise and the acrid smell of cordite.

'What are you doing?' Louis yelled as the apparition went down and the police van choked to a stop.

'It's war,' Boetie grated. 'It's us or them.'

Pistols cocked, eyes beginning to burn, they sat, waiting for a move from the darkness. But, apart from a ringing in the ears, everything was deadly still; nothing stirred.

'Better take a look,' Mulder said at last, hefting his weight into the street. His shoes grated on small stones as his torch punched a hole in the night, unveiling the dead boy's face. Two white moons, fixed on something the policeman could not see, threw back the light. A trickle of blood had leaked from the corners of the boy's mouth and was running down his chin. He wore a grey school jersey; he could not have been more than twelve.

'Kom help.'

Louis's door clicked shut, a lonely sound. 'Ag no, Boetie,' he said sourly when he saw the body. 'You didn't have to shoot him.'

From behind the windows of the council houses, eyes followed them and curtains fluttered closed. But the movement could have been caused by the wind from the sea, or perhaps the thin moon, skulking behind shifting cloud, deceived. The police van's twin white headlights bored into the township, but illuminated nothing, ultimately dying in the gravel.

'You take his legs. I'll take his arms.'

The boy was as heavy and limp as a slaughtered sheep; he left a trail of blood and meat on the ground as the two policemen grunted and groaned him onto the cold metal floor of the van. Boetie picked up a few rocks lying at the roadside and tossed them in as well, not caring about the noise. No grieving mother

came wailing out at them, no angry mob seeking revenge.

'He was an agitator,' Boetie insisted to break the silence that had iced over between them. 'Just say he was throwing rocks at us. It'll be all right.'

'It's not all right,' Louis protested. 'After they broke into your shop, it looks bad.'

'Ag man don't worry. We'll make our report. Nobody saw us. And even if they were looking from those houses, it was too far away and it was dark. No one will believe them. Just back me up, okay?'

'Ja... ja sure.'

'Well then shake on it.'

As their hands met, a wild gush of laughter erupted from the blind cabin. 'Hey it's funny Boet,' Louis wheezed. 'You sell them furniture in the day and then you shoot them at night.'

'Ja that's how it is,' Mulder replied sombrely.

Wracked by laughter, Louis managed to start the engine and the van wobbled out of the township, its obscene cargo sliding and bumping at every turn.

'They'll have to get Moses to wash out the blood,' Boetie commented, then added: 'I need a dop. Drive to my house.'

'Okay.'

***

The police van slowed down as it approached the turn-off to the western suburbs. On the corner, a bluegum tree fractured the orange light from a streetlamp. The rays drove luminous wedges into the mist.

'Looks like a picture in a Bible, hey?' Louis said quietly, his mirth exhausted.

'Ja. I s'pose so.'

The van slid easily through the white treeless streets, past cars without souls, stopping at last beside a garden wall punctuated by wagon wheels. Louis reversed to the front gate. Inside the small house a bedroom light was on, dimly, as if the occupant were reading before falling asleep.

'I won't be a minute.' Boetie sniffed noisily. 'Just wait for me.'

'Well hurry up,' Louis urged. He flicked his head towards the back. 'I don't like to sit here with that.'

There was no car in the street to warn him. The policeman scraped his key in the lock and pushed open the front door. Did he

hear scurrying, as if mice were at work in the bedroom? He called out: 'Wilma...!'

'Nee Boet,' she managed in a strangled voice. Her husband's bulk filled the entire space of the doorway. She could not hide the thin strands of hair that belonged to someone else in the bed. A pair of surprised eyes peered out from under the sheets.

Boetie's holster was already unclipped. He wrenched out the pistol and, with a sleight of hand, cocked it. A dull click announced that a bullet had entered the chamber.

'Lance!' He hawked the name out of his throat.

The shop assistant said nothing, but his pale eyes stared into the hole of the barrel, mesmerized like a meerkat in a car's headlights. Mulder's finger whitened on the trigger as he focused the pistol on a point just below the man's hairline. He saw the small wound in the black boy's chest where his previous bullet had played such havoc. What difference did a second death make?

'Jou bliksem!' Pa's voice roared through Boetie's madness.

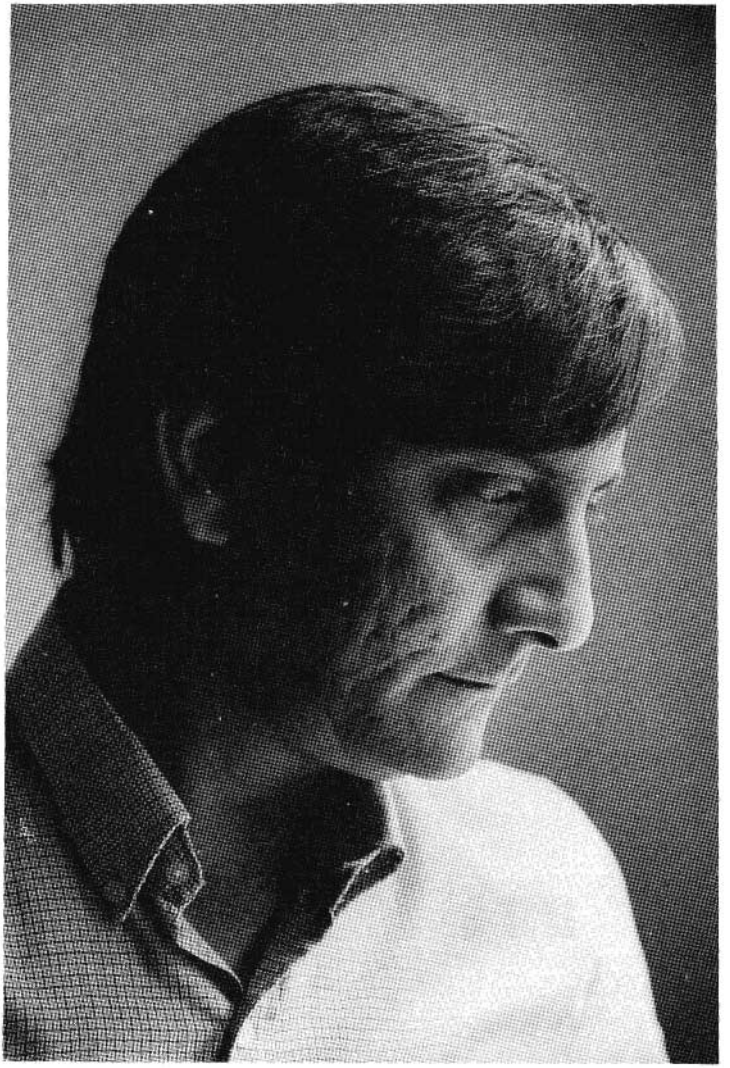
'Nee Pa!' the boy squealed. 'Leave my mother!'

But a vicious blow sent Boetie reeling across the kitchen as the fisherman laid his boot into the bleeding woman on the floor.

Mulder shook his head to repel the image of that raw windswept past. An incessant sobbing was hammering for his attention, demanding to be let in; it came from Wilma. He allowed his arm to drop. They looked so pathetic snivelling in bed together.

Savagely Boetie pulled open a drawer and rummaged among his underwear for the bottle of brandy he kept hidden there. Clutching it by the neck like a strangled gull, he dragged his feet out of the house leaving the front door open.

At the gate, shoulders drooping, he hesitated, weighing up whether to go back or to go on. For a moment he stood perfectly still, balanced, brandy in one hand and gun in the other. Then he teetered forward, and Louis started the engine.



Achmat Dangor

SANTU MOFOKENG

ACHMAT DANGOR: WRITING AND CHANGE

Achmat Dangor has established himself as a fiction writer, poet and playwright through works such as Waiting for Leila, Bulldozer ***and*** Majiet. ***His novel,*** The Z-Town Trilogy ***is to be published shortly by Ravan Press. Here he speaks to Andries Walter Oliphant about his work and aspects of South African literature and culture.***

STAFFRIDER: Could we begin with your personal background and how you began writing?

DANGOR: Briefly, I was born in Johannesburg in Newclare. It was a fairly cosmopolitan township in which all the black population groups including Indians and some Chinese and even white people lived in general harmony during the sixties. It was, however, also a context in which class differences and tensions were evident. There were for instance Asian merchants, coloured artisans, Chinese fahfee runners and affluent African bus-owners. This environment was formative for my social attitudes as well as my writing since race was largely irrelevant in interpersonal relationships. I started writing after the character of Newclare was 'colouredized' to conform to the ethnic and race policies of the State. African, Indian and Chinese people were evicted from the area and there was an influx of people classified as coloured. These people had in turn been evicted from areas in the city such as Doornfontein, Troyeville and Mayfair. This process, which is linked to the Group Areas Act, played an important role in establishing the race and ethnic consciousness which apartheid thrives on. The fact that I experienced a different childhood in which race was insignificant made me very critical of the situation which was forced onto the community by the state.

I began by writing plays taking my models from American playwrights such as Tennessee Williams. I, however, found that writing in a vacuum where there were no theatre facilities led to a situation where nothing significant materialized from my early playwriting. I eventually moved on to poetry. This compact form suited the terse and pointed style through which I wanted to convey the realities I observed around me. I was able to use the immediacy of the form to write about things as I saw them.

I progressed to prose at a later stage when I found myself facing a five-year banning period in which I had lots of time and nothing urgent to attend to. I had time to read and write as well as develop a more contemplative attitude to writing. I started with short stories and attempted the longer form of the novella until I arrived at the novel. Today I mostly write prose although I continue to write plays and poetry. Poetry enables me to write about current issues and politics and other immediate matters while prose is a mode through which I explore these issues contemplatively.

STAFFRIDER: Is there any relationship between the language you use in the

different genres and your social experience?
DANGOR: In my writings I draw on the township patois or lingua franca. I developed a sensitivity to this in the townships and the rural areas of South Africa. I spent some time in rural Western Transvaal and the Cape where I picked up some of the language spoken in these areas. In the absence of books and libraries I attuned my ears to the oral forms of storytelling around me. I used this language of the community for my early plays. I have however come to find this language somewhat restrictive in prose writing especially when exploring philosophical and theoretical matters. What I have been trying to do is to interpret this language in such a way that elements of it are retained through images which invoke the experience embodied in the language without attempting to literally transfer the oral forms into writing.
STAFFRIDER: Your reference to imagery recalls the symbolism in especially the novella *Waiting for Leila* where you focus on social as well as mythological aspects. Do you always strive for multiplicity in your fiction and have there been any literary influences in this regard?
DANGOR: Waiting for Leila was a very important experience for me. The original manuscript is a four-hundred-page novel which I wrote over a five-year period. I started writing it when I was living in District Six. The story grew as I developed. I was reading widely and was especially impressed by the way in which Homer's *Odyssey* utilizes narrative poetry and mythology. The various levels of the narrative, focusing on the travels of the hero in relation to his wife, Penelope, who waits for him, and his son, Telemachus, who also hopes for the return of his father, introduced me to an important aspect of writing. In conjunction with this I was also struck by the outsider figure in Western literature. Here Albert Camus's *The Outsider* comes to mind. I, of course, had to find a social and communal basis for some of these aspects in my own writing.

In *Waiting for Leila* the main character is introduced to different situations in which he is an outsider and therefore must try to find a place. The main character is alienated from his own culture but wants to be part of it. This coincided with my own transition from a disillusionment with a pure Black Consciousness position into an uncertain terrain where there was nothing to replace it as yet. In this sense it reflects my personal as well as a general South African odyssey. I realized that South African history itself is one of a people in odyssey. By the time I had finished *Waiting for Leila* I realized that I had included many foreign elements which clashed with my conception of what I thought I should be writing as a South African. I cut the story down to its existing dimensions, retaining the rebellious outsider and his revolt against his society.
STAFFRIDER: The question of writing and political commitment is currently very controversial. There is a fatigue with sloganeering in literature and a new

openness to diversity. What are your views concerning these issues?
DANGOR: My view is that although our goal is to achieve liberation it is not necessary for us to turn all our writing into pamphlets in pursuit of that liberation. This is a position articulated by Njabulo Ndebele on numerous occasions. While the political role of the writer is important, it is however even of greater importance to stress the intrinsic artistic responsibilities of the writer. Writing in South Africa cannot be reduced to mere ideological, racial or even economic constraints. Its richness is the diffusion of all these aspects.

The debate around South African literature has for a long time been reduced to two simple questions. Firstly, whether it furthers the struggle for liberation and secondly whether it has become hackneyed as a result. For me writing about oppression is not a cliché whereas writing continuously about the known aspects of oppression can become a cliché. In the effort to avoid what are considered clichés we should however be careful not to lose sight of the struggles of our communities. Finding a balance in these matters is the challenge writers are faced with in this country.
STAFFRIDER: The question of politics has divided South African writers into various camps. These divisions are even evident amongst writers who view themselves as opponents of Apartheid. You referred to your involvement with Black Consciousness in the seventies and right now you are a member of the Congress of South African Writers. What are the present and future prospects of writers finding common ground?
DANGOR: We can go back to the fifties when the Freedom Charter was conceptualized and drawn up by the people. Someone closely involved with the proposal of the cultural clause was none other than Es'kia Mphahlele. Some people might now locate him within the Black Consciousness Movement, while he quite conceivably will neither loudly proclaim nor deny it. In a newspaper polemic I had with him, not so long ago, he pointed out that he does not think the ANC is opposed to Black Consciousness. I think he is correct. What, however, is important to me, is the extent to which the crude labelling of people can be harmful. It often creates the impression that there is no historical continuity between the various phases of our history.

For instance, the principle of non-racialism in the national democratic movement is linked to the concept of African leadership and empowerment. Personally I have developed from a position of commitment to Black Consciousness in the seventies to non-racialism in the eighties but I still believe that the values of black self-assertion and emancipation put forward by Black Consciousness are relevant to me today if they do not preclude upholding a non-racial political philosophy. Therefore, I think that the reduction of the debate to simplistic ideological positions is counter-productive especially now when the unity of the oppressed requires that we view all people as equal.

In this regard culture has a primary role to play. If for instance we neglect

the development of a diverse but inclusive national culture it will hamper unity in a future South Africa. The anti-colonial struggles in Africa and their failures to establish common national cultures have led to internal conflict in countries like Angola and Mozambique. The common culture that I have in mind does not mean that the various language groups have to give up their languages. What has to be developed is a common culture that respects and upholds democratic values and the equality of all human beings. This will be crucial for peace and stability in a post-apartheid society. The development of a literature and culture which fosters these values is crucial.

STAFFRIDER: This implies that the culture which fosters racism has to be isolated and criticized. Do you think that the cultural boycott was one way of achieving this?

DANGOR: Certainly. The cultural boycott was conceived in a time when all peaceful opposition had been driven underground. The people's organizations and their leaders were arrested, driven into exile and even the culture of the people was suppressed. The necessity to fight and isolate apartheid and white supremacy on all fronts, included a cultural dimension. In the eighties the blanket boycott was adjusted to accommodate the emergence of resistance culture and to implement it in a democratic fashion. While there have been difficulties, this strategy in relation to the other fields of struggle has been effective and it will remain in place until apartheid is abolished.

It should be remembered that neither the cultural boycott nor sanctions are ends in themselves, but means to an end. The goal of the national democratic struggle is the abolition of apartheid and the establishment of a non-racial democracy which includes a redistribution of power, economic and cultural resources. Although we have made considerable gains we have not as yet achieved our final goal.

STAFFRIDER: Ravan Press is due to publish your latest novel, *The Z-Town Trilogy*, shortly. What does the title signify? Why did you opt for the triple structure and what were your main concerns in the novel?

DANGOR: The triple structure is related to how the story evolved. Basically the lack of time to write continuously played a role as well as the fact that I attempted to combine the self-contained form of the short story or novella with the overlapping and continuous themes and events associated with the longer novelistic narrative which has a beginning, middle and conclusion. Parts of the novel, except for the conclusion, have been published locally and abroad.

Z-Town is an abbreviated reference to Riverlea, where I live, which is often scathingly referred to as Zombie Town. This is a reference to the lack of infrastructures such as lights and proper roads and basic facilities, which led people to suggest that the government placed the inhabitants there because it thought they were zombies. The name Zombie Town stuck and even acquired a romantic aura. I've lived there for the past ten years. In writing about it

I have tried to deal with its day to day struggles as well as infuse it with universal concepts such as love, hatred, jealousy, religion and the humanity of both supporters and opponents of the government.

Some of the material, such as the housing issue, the rent boycotts, the State of Emergency and roadblocks, are drawn from real events, and in some cases real people, but reworked for fictional purposes. I have tried not to submerge the human dimension in this overtly political situation. While I have focused on the poverty of the people and the environment I have tried to avoid romanticizing it by exploring race and class issues.

STAFFRIDER: Your story 'Jobman' has recently been made into a film. How did it come about and what do you think of the final product?

DANGOR: Well, I knew about the project and was given a film script to read and revise where necessary. When I discussed it with the producers I realized that our conceptions of the story differed. I realized that the short story form was quite different from the medium of film. I was, however, concerned that the story should not be turned into some kind of Karoo western or local version of Rambo.

When I eventually got to see the movie I realized that it was different from my story, but not invalid. There were some changes. Mainly, it involved a shift in the focus away from the revolt of the black protagonist to the white farmer in an attempt by the director to expose Afrikaner power. In addition, Jobman's reasons for revolt become personalized. As a thriller I think the film is quite powerful but it is certainly not an explicit political statement. However, I think it has to be judged independently of the story.

STAFFRIDER: What are you working on at the moment?

DANGOR: Well, I've finished another novel and have consistently worked on short stories and poetry. The novel which originated in 1984 deals with the experiences of a white woman who tries to bridge the racial divide. Through the use of various voices speaking over generations I try to explore the historical conflicts and other forces that shaped the history of all South Africans.

Wally Serote
Botswana 1982

GEORGE HALLETT

Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood *and Debates within Southern Africa's Literature of Liberation*

Martin Trump

My main concerns in this essay are the difficulties of populist address in fiction; the degree to which debates taking place within a country's liberation movement are articulated in resistance literature; over-simplifications in resistance literature, which often have troubling consequences when translated into the terms of political discourse; and, finally, the issue of writers being able to articulate incompatible forces within their fiction *and* to recognize them as being incompatible.

In exploring these questions, I will make reference to fiction that describes Southern African liberation struggles. Particularly close focus will fall on Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood*, written between 1975 and 1980 and dealing with liberation struggles within South Africa. I shall compare and contrast Serote's work with Pepetela's novel *Mayombe* written in 1971 about MPLA guerillas operating in the Cabinda province of Angola and Stanley Nyamfukudza's novel *The Non-Believer's Journey*, written towards the end of the 1970s and describing events in 1974 closely related to the second Zimbabwean Chimurenga.[1] The three works deal with roughly analogous historical moments in the struggles against racial capitalism in Southern Africa.[2] However, prior to turning to these novels, let us consider several key features and debates within Southern African fiction.

A major distinction between literary discourse and other social discourses (say, those of history and the social sciences) is the way literature tends to give precedence to the experiences of individuals. Forms of self-reflexive and subjective consciousness are the usual distinctive qualities of literary works. Literary discourse is a useful vehicle for articulating the desires and impulses of individuals. Stephen Clingman notes that 'fiction deals with an area of activity usually inaccessible to the sciences of greater externality: the area in which historical process is registered as the subjective experience of individuals in society'.[3]

Fiction appears particularly well-equipped to make an important contribution to the processes of opposition to oppression in Southern Africa, precisely on account of the record it offers of the everyday experiences and feelings of people. For, as Kelwyn Sole has observed: 'There is a realization in South Africa that working-class people's everyday activities are as important politically as any amount of slogans and rhetoric, and are a force to be reckoned with.'[4] However, as I hope to show, the role and place of fiction within the counter-hegemonic cultures of different Southern African countries is far from unproblematic.

One needs to qualify one's understanding of the subjectivity emphasized in literature. The writer abstracts and, to a certain extent, invents views and experiences of history. Demythologizing fiction frequently involves measuring fictional representations of history against conventional or hegemonic views of history. In the case of much Southern African fiction, the 'distance' between its representations of history and those offered by the racial capitalist discourse is particularly marked. What fiction which forms part of the counter-hegemonic discourse in fact does is to engage in a form of dialogue with the hegemonic discourse and offer a view of society and history which is its opposite in many ways. The terms of exchange within this dialogue are frequently intensely hostile.

How has Southern African writing subverted racial capitalist discourse? In the first place, this class of writing offers a view of history significantly different from that disseminated by the ruling hegemony. Within resistance fiction one sees racial capitalism challenged by a history of the oppressed class, which frequently draws upon oral tradition and records of collective struggle against oppression.

But, how meaningful is it to refer in this *undifferentiated* way to an oppressed class in Southern Africa and to a history of collective struggle against oppression? This approach is particularly prevalent among a radical intelligentsia in Southern Africa – as it appears to be among many resistance writers. The Marxist notion of the ultimately dichotomous nature of class struggle – between the dominant and the oppressed class – has been particularly influential here.[5] As I hope to show, this conceptualization of society can easily lose sense of the specificities and differences within oppressed communities and within the ruling class.

There are a set of recurring features in Southern African history that are frequently drawn upon in resistance writing. The presence of pre-capitalist modes of production in Southern Africa is a critical element in the construction of a coherent, oppositional account of history. The experiences and memories of pre-capitalist, collectivist society loom large in the consciousness of many writers and frequently form part of the basis for a transformed vision of the future. A communalist past and the residual traces of communalism in the present feed into the vision of creating a communalist future. This view of history arises out of a narrative of colonial-racial exploitation leading to the present dislocations of late capitalism.

The consciousness of pre-capitalist modes of production and social organization is most clearly expressed in fiction by an attachment to communal storytelling traditions. In *The Non-Believer's Journey*, as the bus carrying Sam back to his rural home in Zimbabwe rattles to a halt at one of the many police roadblocks, he involuntarily contrasts the current situation of terror with the idyllic world of pre-colonial society described to him as a child by his grand-

mother. Interestingly, even as a child, Sam found these 'stories' of his grandmother difficult to believe (27-29). Nyamfukudza clearly sets out to indicate how remote the idyllic pre-capitalist past (if in fact it existed at all in such an idealistic way) has become with the advent of racial capitalism in Zimbabwe. None the less, a narrative posing a counter-hegemonic history which might ultimately transform existing structures and move society towards the collectivism that characterized traditional African societies is suggested in this way.

The history of oppression in Southern Africa has had a number of effects on the region's writing. The unfolding of exploitation, while attempting to divide the oppressed and often succeeding, has at the same time served as a force to unite oppressed groupings. These trends, namely of division and unity, are potentially irreconcilable. Yet few writers have perceived the situation in this way. By far the most common tendency in resistance writing has been to emphasize the unity of the oppressed. What one therefore sees is an almost overwhelming, and often not unproblematic, identification of petit-bourgeois writers with the oppressed.[6] Almost willy-nilly, writers have been dragged into a necessary commitment to the aspirations of the oppressed. Yet the oppressed class is itself made up of several class fractions (for example, certain strata of the petit-bourgeoisie) and eccentric or dependent classes (such as the peasantry and certain ethnically distinguishable groups). And the oppressed class contains opposing political allegiances. Forms of identification the writers make with the oppressed therefore frequently conflate a set of discordant positions.

There are interesting paradoxes in the choice of languages made by Southern African writers. By far the greatest number of works are written in the languages of European dominance: English in South Africa and Zimbabwe; Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique. The widespread use of European languages by resistance writers can be seen as a gesture of protest at colonial policies of tribalism (the ruling class's 'divide and rule' programmes). This also becomes an affirmation that in each of the Southern African countries the European languages are or have been an element in the move towards the creation of unified national cultures, both as unifying vehicles in the process of mobilization and as likely contenders for becoming at least one of the national languages of the post-colonial state.[7] Writers have also claimed that European languages offer them a means of reaching readers elsewhere in Africa and in the African diaspora.[8]

While all of this is undoubtedly true, European languages in Southern Africa are closely identified with the petit-bourgeoisie. Moreover, the European languages are commonly encountered as languages of capitalist exchange. There is a close relationship between the writers' use of European languages, the forms of their writing, and market forces in Southern Africa that have promoted the use of these languages and certain literary forms and styles among an emerg-

ing petit-bourgeoisie. This is especially evident in the case of tabloids, directed at a literate petit-bourgeoisie. Magazines like *Drum* and *Staffrider* in South Africa are an important part of the history of recent fiction in this country.

Much resistance writing in the European languages, however, includes speech patterns and dialects drawn from vernacular languages. These are used as more than simply a vehicle for social realism in the writing, but also bear witness to the kinds of identification many of the writers wish to establish with the oppressed.

As one of the issues this essay addresses is the notion of writing as giving expression to the voices of the people, I can't resist quoting the following passage from Es'kia Mphahlele's novella of the 1960s, 'Mrs Plum'. The narrator, a domestic servant, reports a conversation she had with her employer's daughter:

> She [the white character] says to me she says, My mother goes to meetings many times. I ask her I say, What for? She says to me she says, For your people. I ask her I say, My people are in Phokeng far away. They have got mouths, I say. Why does she want to say something for them? Does she know what my mother and my father want to say? They can speak when they want to. Kate raises her shoulders and drops them and says, How can I tell you Karabo? I don't say your people – your family only. I mean all the black people in this country. I say Oh! What do the black people want to say? Again she raises her shoulders and drops them, taking a deep breath.[9]

It seems to me that writers in Southern Africa frequently find themselves in a not dissimilar position to the hapless white characters in this extract: desperately trying to speak for the people of their countries. Not all of the paradoxes mentioned above are resolved (or able to be resolved) in resistance fiction.[10]

Much Southern African writing frequently draws attention to differences between the lifestyles of the ruling class and the oppressed. While the former is acknowledged to offer a vast number of material benefits, the latter is clearly depicted as being more desirable in many respects. There is, moreover, a related process of distortion, 'false consciousness', which attends people who fail to associate themselves fully with the broad concerns and aspirations of the oppressed. Tsi Molope is one such character in Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood*. Similarly, in the same novel Susan Horwitz, from her position in the white society, is unable to make any sense of her life in South Africa. After the trial and sentencing of twenty-five resistance leaders, she breaks down: 'I don't want any part of this madness, no, I don't, I don't want to be white, I don't want it, oh my god, I don't want it. . . . I am so mixed up.' (Serote, 1981: 231-232) This is contrasted with the position of the resistance leaders:

'It was said that those men and women were strong, were fearless.' (229) There are clearly a number of problems attached to these kind of fictional descriptions. Apart from conflating the diverse positions and experiences of the oppressed, there is a similar tendency to do this with regard to the ruling class.

Resistance has largely taken the form of mobilization among the oppressed in Southern Africa. However, this mobilization and the strategies employed have rarely occurred without parallel processes of opposition and breakdown taking place within the ruling class itself. Moreover, within the ruling class, there are groups and individuals, and ideological tendencies, which often have a profound influence on the resistance movement. By excluding these in the often one-dimensional portrayals and caricatures of the ruling class, resistance fiction tends to disable itself.

Consider the consequences of this one-dimensionality in Serote's novel. Serote's commitment to non-racialism is undermined in his stereotypical portrayal of characters from the ruling class who are identified almost exclusively in colour terms. More problematically, Serote refuses these characters a positive role in the struggle. As a result, he forecloses on two possibilities: namely, of productive class alliances and of strategies of resistance which mobilize in terms other than those of colour. By portraying the ruling class in the way he does, there is a disquieting reproduction of the racial terms he is (one presumes) setting out to oppose. Further, as the extracts from Serote's novel indicate, he comes perilously close to the position that commitment to the resistance movement serves as an antidote to a host of personal ills. Again, it seems to me that this kind of outlook over-simplifies what are in reality complex processes and issues.[11]

Reversing this coin, there is a large body of fiction which offers picaresque views of oppressed communities. The 'underworldism' forced upon the oppressed serves as a metaphor for people roguishly engaged in conflict with the ruling class. In similar fashion, participation in resistance activities tends to be romanticized. There are obvious ideological purposes for this kind of portrayal. Yet I would argue that these kinds of idealizations, like those we have considered earlier, paradoxically in some respects act against the interests of a democratically-concerned resistance movement. Portrayals of idealized communities are often one-dimensional and exclude many discordant voices. This form of idealization might serve to bolster a resistance mythology which excludes oppositional and critical forces.

In order to justify the foregoing, I would like to look more closely at the three novels. Serote's novel is divided into two parts. The first deals largely with the tormented consciousness of Tsi Molope, a resident of Alexandra township. The second half of the novel describes an ever-widening network of oppositional political activists. Interestingly, most of these activists are drawn from the radical intelligentsia; and although Serote describes the resistance

spreading across the country and affecting workers as well as students and urban intellectuals, there is little space given to explaining the lines of communication between these different class fractions. As Kelwyn Sole indicates, 'The process of politicization is to Serote a natural, unproblematic one. Black people are, with the exception of the functionaries of the system, potentially at one in their political demands and can be easily accommodated under the auspices of the movement, for "the Movement is an idea in the mind of a people" (327).' (Sole, 1988: 78) Throughout the latter part of the novel, Serote naturalizes the liberation movement. The Movement is described as being 'like the wind' (272) and 'the Movement, like the sea, is deep, vast, is reflective' (359). There is no sense of any conflict or discordance within liberation groupings, or of essentially irreconcilable differences on many central issues of strategy and ideology. In short, all disparities, all discordances are subsumed into Serote's organic images of the movement. Idealization or romanticization of the liberation struggle is clearly felt by Serote in a time of intense hardship as necessary in order to inspire change. Despite this imperative, Serote's idealizations are problematic in their own right.

Kelwyn Sole suggestively calls one of the sections of his essay on *To Every Birth Its Blood*, 'The Fixed Movement of Political Struggle'. It is worth quoting Sole at length here:

> The Movement may indeed be a crucial force in any future liberation of the country, and a broad alliance of anti-apartheid forces may be necessary to assure the demise of the present political authority. Yet in many senses – in terms of individual psychology, in terms of democratic practices, in terms of how the damaged society of South Africa can be healed – this will be an extremely problematic process, and Serote's conclusions are (it may be said) somewhat facile. What is eventually noteworthy and interesting about *To Every Birth Its Blood* is . . . the way in which the political and social difficulties Serote attempts to determine escape his ideological programme; and the manner in which what is repressed or wished away returns to haunt the book's less consciously controlled depictions and attitudes. . . . The Movement exists fictionally to absorb and smooth over contradictions of individual and group behaviour and the real intricacies of South African oppositional political history, but ends up generating further contradictions due to this ubiquitous fictional presence. The Movement is, eventually, given a transformative weight it cannot bear, as it is expected to perform on all levels of human intercourse and psychology similarly. It is seen as both the political catalyst which will transfigure the oppressed people of the country and the result of that transfiguration at the same time. Furthermore, and even more damagingly, it is not only simultaneously one distinct political organisation and the combined weight of

> historical resistance to white rule: it comes close on occasion to being conceptualised by Serote as all that is required to solve South Africa's problems: socially, psychologically and politically . . . (Sole, 1989: 27)

Pepetela's novel describes several months in the lives of the MPLA community based in Cabinda and the Congo during one of the most gruelling phases of the Angolan liberation struggle. We learn a great deal about the lives and conflicts of individual guerillas and about what motivates and concerns them. I would argue that there is a much closer weave in Pepetela's novel between the personal lives of the guerillas and their place in the liberation struggle than in the case of the activists described in Serote's novel. In the Angolan novel, personal history and history of commitment to MPLA continually intertwine; to the extent that personal conflicts and idiosyncrasies frequently become central preoccupations for the MPLA cadres. Pepetela is painstaking in his description of the personal and ideological conflicts which occur within the MPLA community. There are innumerable debates in the novel about a wide range of issues; many of these are left unresolved.

The event which catalyses action in Nyamfukudza's novel is the execution of an informer in a rural area of Zimbabwe. Sam, a teacher in Highfield, Salisbury, learns of his uncle's death and goes back to his family home in Mutoko to attend the funeral. There he learns that his uncle's execution was ordered by the guerillas; the man's sons were ordered to beat their father to death; the community was told by the guerillas that his uncle could not be buried with full funeral rites.[12] It is within this bitter context that Sam tries to establish some sense of meaning. His quest comes to nothing. He quarrels violently with one of the guerilla leaders at a *pungwe* and is shot. The novel takes one into the heart of the conflicts that arose during the second Zimbabwean Chimurenga. Nyamfukudza spares us little in his fictional post-mortem of resistance history in his country.

As my comments suggest, I think that the Angolan and Zimbabwean novels offer a more valuable record of the liberation struggles in their countries, than that offered in Serote's novel. It is interesting to note that the Angolan and Zimbabwean works encode future patterns in their countries' histories in ways that Serote's novel does not seem to. In *Mayombe*, the central issue of debate among the guerillas is that of tribalism and the formidable challenge facing Angolans in trying to surmount it. This debate has, of course, proved to have continuing relevance for the newly independent country. In *The Non-Believer's Journey*, one of the most marked areas of conflict is that between the urban consciousness of Sam and that of the rurally-based guerillas, many of whom were drawn from the rural peasantry. Nyamfukudza's novel reflects with uncanny prescience on the kinds of tensions that have plagued the ZANU-PF government of Zimbabwe since independence, not the least of which is the

set of disjunctions that have developed and been exacerbated between urban and rural populations. Serote's novel merely suggests the virtual truism that the liberation struggle in South Africa will drag on for a long time and that freedom will be won at tremendous cost.

What one sees more fully in the Angolan and Zimbabwean novels than in Serote's work are dialogues set up within the oppositional discourse itself. Earlier in this essay I referred to the dialogue between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses in Southern Africa. There are similarly intense exchanges of dialogue within the discourse of liberation itself. The degree of success a literary work achieves in dealing with resistant culture seems to me crucially dependent on the extent to which its writer is prepared to give articulation to exchanges within the resistance movement – and, indeed, within the ruling class.

Serote describes the South African liberation struggle in terms of populist-salvational rhetoric. Here are two typical examples:

> A few well-organized people have to challenge the power of the settlers, while the people watch, and if you convince the people that you know what you are doing, they in turn will lead the revolution . . . (78-79)

> For over four centuries we have fought, man after man, woman after woman, fought with everything we had, for what seemed to us a very simple and easily understood reality: this is our land, it must bear our will. South Africa is going to be a socialist country, this is going to come about through the will, knowledge and determination of the people . . . (330)

There is little sense in *To Every Birth Its Blood* of the problems and contradictions of salvational populism. Offer the people opportunity and leadership and they will rise as one in the creation of a socialist utopia. Pepetela's and Nyamfukudza's novels are not so optimistic. Both authors interrogate millennial rhetoric and recognize the formidable obstacles *en route* to the creation of national unity in their countries. Moreover, they are cognisant of incompatible forces within their societies (say, tribalist interests versus aspirations to national unity, and, urban versus rural consciousness) and articulate these as *being* incompatible. Consider the following examples which contrast strongly with those extracted from Serote's novel. In the first, Fearless, the MPLA commander in *Mayombe,* demystifies much of the rhetoric attached to the aims of the struggle:

> This is the difficulty. In our countries [waging liberation struggles], everything rests on a narrow nucleus, because there is a shortage of cadres, sometimes on one man. How is one to contend within a narrow group? Because

> it is demagogy to say that the proletariat will take power. Who takes power is a small group of men, on the best of hypotheses representing the proletariat or seeking to represent it. The lie begins with saying that the proletariat has taken power. . . . At the end of a certain time, as long as there are not many mistakes nor much embezzlement of funds, the living standard will rise, does not need much to rise. Without doubt that is an advance. . . . But let us not call that socialism, because it is not necessarily so. Let us not call it a proletarian State, because it is not. Let us demystify the terms. Let us end the fetishism of labels. Democracy nothing, because there will not be democracy, there will be necessarily, inevitably, dictatorship over the people. This might be necessary, I don't know. I do not see another way, but it is not ideal, that I do know. Let us be honest with ourselves. We are not going to reach 100 per cent, we will stick at 50. Why then tell the people that we are going as far as 100 per cent? (80-81)

In the following passage from *The Non-Believer's Journey*, Sam suggests that regardless of the outcome of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, forms of neo-colonialism will inevitably prevail:

> From the sounds that filter to us from overseas, those whites out there have a huge stake in ensuring that whatever happens there won't be any real changes. If we escape political enslavement, they won't mind so much, as long as we take good care of their invested monies, go on working for peanuts, exporting all the profits back to them. I can't see any way out of that one, that's the real trap, the one that matters. (53)

There are a set of problems surrounding *To Every Birth Its Blood*. Earlier I indicated Serote's essentially racial understanding of the South African political situation in the novel. Here is Kelwyn Sole on this point: 'Serote's understanding of the forces at work in South African political history remains, arguably, predominantly racial. Pride in blackness is the beginning of individual and political change (*Birth*: 139-140) and . . . the mechanisms of oppression are overwhelmingly understood throughout in terms of race, despite Ramono's injunction to Dikeledi that her generation has placed too much emphasis on questions of race. A class analysis is almost entirely absent from the work . . .' (Sole, 1989: 30)

In part, one can understand this and other difficulties of *To Every Birth Its Blood* in terms of the liberation discourse of the 1970s. To an extent, 'the meanings in circulation [or dominant] at a given moment specify the limits of what can be said and understood'.[13] And, typical of much resistance thinking of the 1970s, Serote's novel reveals a commitment to black populism, virtually excluding possibilities of non-racial, class-alliance resistance. Despite fleet-

ing and admittedly cogent references to limitations of the Black Consciousness Movement (that it does not maintain adequate communication with the people it represents, and that in South Africa colour is not the issue)[14] Serote's portrayal of the Movement is dominated by ideological strains of Black Consciousness, not least of which is black populism. In a fascinating way, however, the set of incompatibilities that arise between the dominant black populist address of the novel and the brief moments of criticism of Black Consciousness, suggest Serote's awareness (possibly ill-defined or even unconscious at the time) of Black Consciousness's diminution of influence within the liberation discourse. *To Every Birth Its Blood* seems to fall uneasily between two ultimately incompatible positions, at a moment (the late 1970s) when a dominant ideology – Black Consciousness – is swiftly being eclipsed.

Apart from its potential exclusion of possibilities for non-racial, class-alliance resistance, there are further consequences of Serote's black populist address in the novel. There is, after all, a fundamental disjunction between the focus on forms of subjective consciousness usually highlighted in fiction and the call to the people as an undifferentiated mass.[15] In the former instance, distinctiveness and individuality are paramount, whereas in the latter if these qualities are not entirely irrelevant then they are at the very least severely underplayed.

Moreover, within Serote's novel, many of the characters tend to be circumscribed by over-simplified notions of 'the people' and the processes of politicization. In this regard, Nick Visser notes that in the novel, the Movement 'overlays individual choice and agency with historical inevitability'.[16] Sole adds to this debate by noting that 'the problem is that . . . the characters who join the Movement begin to blur into each other once they have made this choice. Their correct action – seemingly put forward for approbation – renders them less multifarious in their personal actions and responses, even if they are shown as still beset with familial and other problems. The Movement allows individuals to ''happen'' in an existentially and politically meaningful manner, but at the same time removes their ability to think and act at all differently.' (Sole, 1989: 32)

Finally, Serote's novel gives one little sense of there being debates and discordant voices within the liberation movement. Despite brief criticisms of Black Consciousness (referred to earlier), there is a silence regarding differences in approach to strategies of resistance in South Africa. That which forms the critical centres of Pepetela's and Nyamfukudza's novels – namely, debates about liberation and the different methods of resistance – is virtually absent from Serote's work. And troublingly, this recurs in more recent works of South African resistance fiction such as Nadine Gordimer's *A Sport of Nature* (1987) and Mandla Langa's novels *Tenderness of Blood* (1987) and *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* (1989).

In Serote's case, there are indications that in recent years he has become attentive to the kind of difficulties that I have referred to in this essay. Where he used to conceptualize South African politics in racial terms, he now takes cognisance of the differentiation of class in the society. 'This nation [does not] consist only of workers. It consists of other classes of society as well. . . . We are in a phase in which we should be building a nation, and that nation has a class content.'[17]

With regard to the portrayal of white characters in fiction and the role of whites in the liberation struggle, Serote similarly shows a shifting of ground from positions that were typified in *To Every Birth Its Blood*. Commenting about his colleague Mandla Langa's novel *Tenderness of Blood*, he notes:

> The only failing I [see] with Mandla's novel, which has become very common in black South African writing – and it's not their fault, it's really the fault of concrete political situations and historical experiences – black South Africans have only known two kinds of white people: those who defend the [government] (the security forces), and liberals.
>
> So, because of this, there has emerged stereotyped whites in black literature.
>
> We have to find a way of going beyond this – there are a number of whites who have joined the mass democratic movement; even joined the liberation movement. . . .
>
> We should not leave whites lost in a quagmire, where they have absolutely no point of reference. Our literature should become a point of reference for them.[18]

And, finally, Serote stresses the importance of the writer being able to articulate criticism and debate about the liberation movement:

> It becomes the role of the writer to play a role where, on the one hand, you can look at the under-developed sections of our movement and be able to deal with them truthfully. And look at the highly developed elements of our movement and also deal with them truthfully. . . . So there is also that role which the writer has to play – where necessary, one should be able to say: Look, we are aspiring in *this* direction. To give specific examples: in the sixties we had common aspirations with Frelimo, MPLA, Zanla and Zapu. Today they are in power. They have made major mistakes; they've experienced serious problems. They have learnt from these.
>
> It becomes necessary as a writer to examine this, and be able to look at our movement and say: are we learning from the experiences of others?[19]

It would be encouraging if this critical spirit becomes the keynote of South Africa's literature of liberation.

NOTES

1. Pepetela, *Mayombe*. Transl. by Michael Wolfers. Heinemann AWS, 1983. Stanley Nyamfukudza, *The Non-Believer's Journey*. Heinemann AWS, 1980 & Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1983. Mongane Serote, *To Every Birth Its Blood*. Ravan Press, 1981.
2. The point may be raised that the Angolan and Zimbabwean novels were written about moments in the liberation struggles in those countries where victory was in sight. This was not the case for Serote. Even if one grants validity to this line of argument, I don't think this substantially alters the conclusions I reach in this essay.
3. Stephen Clingman, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside*. Ravan Press, 1986, p. 1.
4. Kelwyn Sole, 'Oral Performance and Social Struggle in Contemporary Black South African Literature'. In *Triquarterly 69 (1987) From South Africa*, p. 267.
5. In relation to the South African situation, this notion has crystallized around the formulation – colonialism of a special type. This, in turn, has perpetuated the sense of there being two 'nations' within South Africa – the black and the white 'nation'. For a critique of this position and the thinking underlying it, see Dirk Kotzé's 'Revisiting Colonialism of a Special Type', a paper presented at the conference of the Political Science Association of South Africa, Port Alfred, 9-11 October 1989.
6. See Kelwyn Sole's essays, 'Class, Continuity and Change in Black South African Literature: 1948-1960'. In: Bozzoli, Belinda (ed.), *Labour, Townships and Protest. Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand*. Ravan Press, 1979; and '"The Days of Power": Depictions of Politics and Community in Four Recent South African Novels'. In *Research in African Literatures* 1988, 19(1), pp. 65-88, for seminal explorations of these issues with reference to South African writing.
7. For discussion of the reasons underlying black South African writers' choice of English as their literary medium and the historical evolution of the language debate, see Ursula Barnett's *A Vision of Order – A Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914-1980)*. Sinclair Browne & University of Massachusetts Press, 1983, in particular, the opening chapter 'A History of Black Writing in English in South Africa'. Also see Sole (1979), particularly where he writes that the use of English 'as a possible cultural unifying force among urban blacks, with political and ideological implications is one which goes back to Plaatje and John Dube' (160). See Es'kia Mphahlele's *The African Image*. Faber, 1962:

   > Now because the Government is using institutions of a fragmented and almost unrecognizable Bantu culture as an instrument of oppression, we dare not look back. We have got to wrench the tools of power from the white man's hand: one of these is literacy – the sophistication that goes with it. We have got to speak the language that all can understand – English . . . (193).

   For a discussion of English as South Africa's national language of the future, see Njabulo Ndebele's 'The English Language and Social Change in South Africa'. In *The English Academy Review 4*, 1987, pp. 1-16.
8. See Ngugi wa Thiong'o's dismissal of this position in *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. James Currey, 1986.
9. Es'kia Mphahlele, 'Mrs Plum'. *In Corner B*. East African Publishing House, 1967, pp. 168-9.
10. The fullest treatment of these issues as they relate particularly to black South African writers' use of English is Michael Vaughan's 'Storytelling and Politics in Fiction'. In *Rendering Things Visible. Essays on South African Literary Culture*. Ed. Martin Trump. Ravan Press, forthcoming.

11. Kelwyn Sole notes that 'political discipline cannot be a cure for psychic disorder: the result of liberation will be a new, better, but still unstable South African society, not the undifferentiated sea at the end of all rivers'. Kelwyn Sole, '"But Then, Where Is Home?": Time, Disorder and Social Collectives in Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood*'. Unpublished paper presented at the Africa Seminar of the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 27 September 1989, p. 39.
12. In her article 'The Zimbabwean War of Liberation: Struggles Within the Struggle', Norma Kriger deals with the violence of guerillas towards the rural population of Mutoko, this being the district in which much of the action in Nyamfukudza's novel takes place. Kriger's and Nyamfukudza's records are remarkably similar. Kriger's article appears in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14(2), January 1988, pp. 304-322.
13. Catherine Belsey, 'Reading the Past'. In *The Subject of Tragedy. Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama.* Methuen, 1985, p. 5.
14. See *To Every Birth Its Blood,* pp. 78-79; 250.
15. In a stimulating essay entitled 'The Novel as Liberal Narrative: The Possibilities of Radical Fiction' (in *Works and Days* 3(2), 1985, pp. 7-28), Nick Visser deals with the overwhelming influence of methodological individualism in the construction of Western liberal notions of the novel. He goes on to suggest that radical fiction tends to replace 'the ordering principles of individual subjectivity with collective protagonists' (p. 19) and foregrounds the collective rather than the individual. These points are persuasive and relevant to a discussion about Serote's novel. However, as I have indicated, one of my difficulties with Serote's novel is that his depiction of a collective protagonist (namely, the Movement) is static rather than dynamic, and this greatly diminishes the radical possibilities of his project.
16. Nick Visser, 'Fictional Projects and the Irruptions of History: Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood*'. In *English Academy Review* 4, 1987, p. 75.
17. Mongane Serote, 'Serote on Politics and People'. Interview in *New Nation,* 8-14 December 1988, p. 11.
18. Mongane Serote, 'The World According to Wally Serote'. Interview in *New Nation,* 24-30 November 1988, p. 9.
19. Mongane Serote, 'Serote on Politics and People'. *New Nation,* 8-14 December 1988, p. 11.

Katatura, Namibia

new coin

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Defiance Campaign march
September 1989, Cape Town

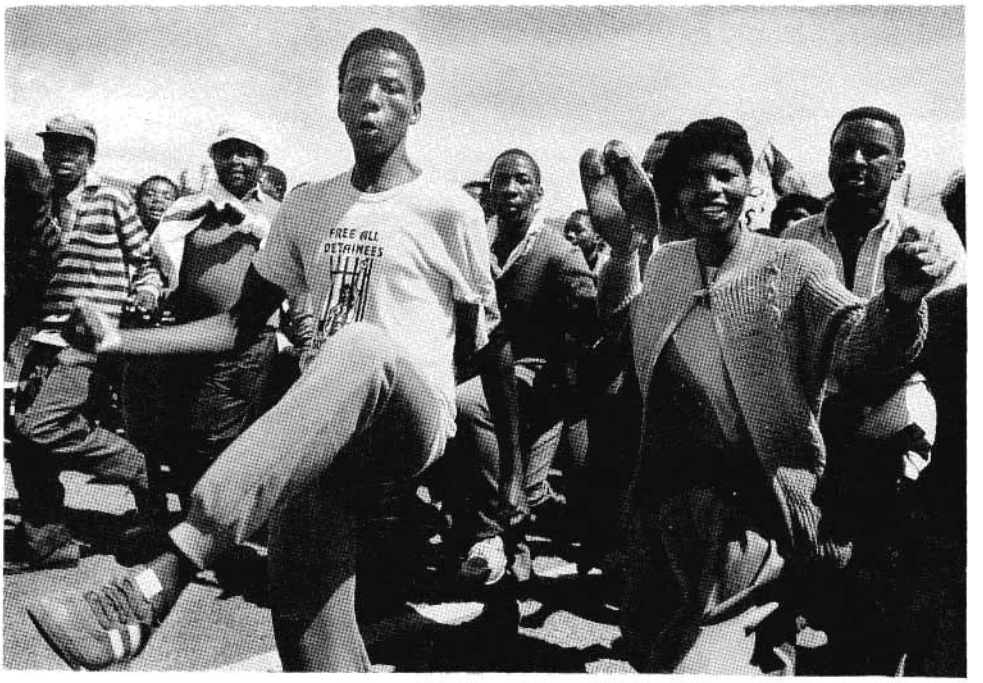
ERIC MILLER

Defiance Campaign march
September 1989, Oudtshoorn

BENNY GOOL

Defiance Campaign march
September 1989, Durban

RAFS MAYET

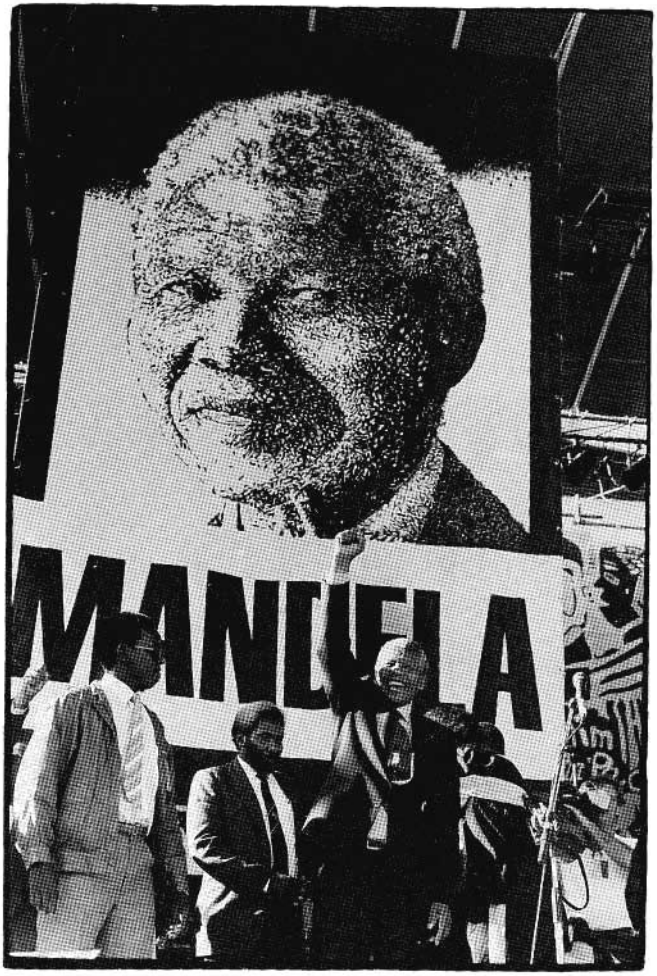


Defiance Campaign march
October 1989, Grahamstown

T.J. LEMON

Defiance Campaign march
September 1989, Johannesburg

PAUL WEINBERG

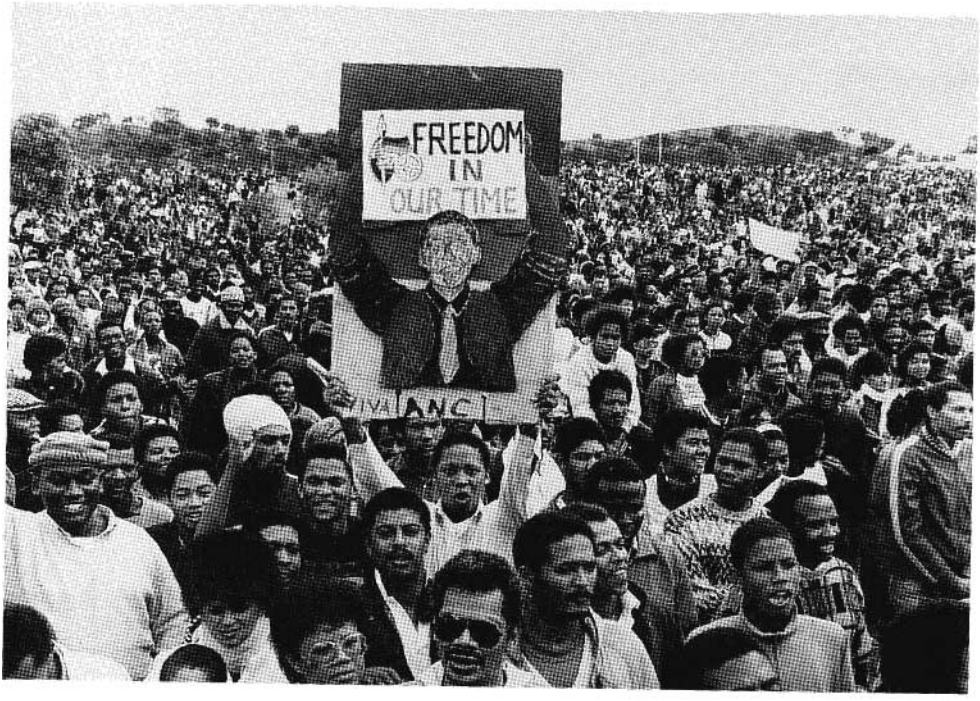


Nelson Mandela at The Human Rainbow concert March 1990, Johannesburg

ANNA ZIEMINSKI

African National Congress rally
March 1990, Motherwell, Eastern Cape

PETER AUF DE HEYDE



African National Congress rally
April 1990, Mitchell's Plein

MIKE HUTCHINGS

The Pied Piper

'Hey, what's that you say, Vusi,
You, you want a sip of my jacuzzi?'

'Out with the spade, Lemming Treurnicht,' she cries;
'There's one here yet free, of a wet demise.'

'What's that you say, you expect me to pay?'
('Darling, pass my cheque book, he's quite au fait.')

Back on her yoga mat, ratta-ta-tat;
The Debt Collector knocks, ratter-to-cat.

'I've come for child liver, open wide your side'
He cackles, drooling, and scrapes his hand inside.

Disappearing into a breast of Earth;
The ectopic echoes of children's mirth.

Lingering, little spindly cripple lad;
Hobbles across the billboard's shadow, sad.

Cloud, stained cotton wool, rinsed with blood;
Horizon of glimmering lemon flood.

And from the mindly tuft, the vlakvoëls flee;
'Oh my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?'

Hot tin ticking 'neath the Son;
Vusi smiles, number one.

Tania Spencer

Varsity Dance

The droning
teaching voice
is drowned
by rising
threatening
human sound,
a slowly growing
buzz and hum
arises,
breaks,
and consciousness
of revolutionary force
awakes.

Outside the class,
through campus grounds,
a solid snake
of solid girth
is winding slow
along the path,
with students
interlinked like scales,
it winds towards
the centre lawn.
With cries and wails
it ululates
and undulates
its massive brawn.

The serpent twists
to form a round,
its head and tail
firmly joined.
It surges forwards,
ebbs and flows,
the high-pitched ululation
grows
and blends
into a rhythmic chant.

With outstretched fists
and solid wrists
the students

twist,
retreat,
advance,

the snake conducts
a formal dance.

And now
onto the central stage
from out the wings
there leaps
a well-trained corps,
an arm of law,
with hands on hips
and costumes blue.

The students' chanting
turns to rage.
'Amandla!'
'Awethu!'

The corps
is very well controlled,
it does not move until so told,
and then it raises
hands from hips,
and in those hands
are rhino whips –
the pliant sjambok
flicks through air –
the breaking ranks
of students
show their fear.

The blue-clad corps
advances –
snake retreats,
twists,
falls apart –
kaleidoscopic feet
beat out
the broken rhythms
of the dance,
then once again
the corps retreats,
and lets the snake advance.

Forward
back
advance
retreat

many feet
beat out
the harmony
and counterpoint.

Finally,
the climax reached,
defences of the snake
are breached.
The corps at last
has played its part,
has shown its art,
and with a stately bow
withdraws.

A few sad scales
lie broken
on the side

for hide of rhino's tough

but snake can slough off skin,
and though much battered
winds away
to work up strength
for yet another day.

And all that's left
is trampled grass.

Sandra Braude

Soldier Calling

Inside the air is warm,
the fire crackles a golden red,
the grandfather clock ticks
as I lie in bed.

The clatter of the phone
pierces the peaceful air
like a ripping rifle crack,
until I answer,
noise like gunshots
Everywhere.

The voice of a soldier,
deep and distant,
mind racked,
voice different.

He tells of the guns,
talks of the dead and arrested,
tells of his friends,
tries to sound unaffected.

The wire crackles,
I listen in silence.
The wire that connects us
screams of the violence.

All is fine,
all is well,
but the boys in the army
are burning in hell.

Some can't drink,
some can't drive
but in time
they'll see men die.

Steven Brimelow

Drakensberg
(the promise that is not fulfilled)

These are our gates –
deep as the sea,
broad as the continental shelf,
fluted by rain and gargoyled by the snow.

What temple would be worthy of such gates?
What acolyte would kneel on such wide steps
and pray for sanctuary?

The answer is a laugh,
the mirth of air,
the jeer of falling stones.

Where berg winds blow,
grass withers
wombs abort
and blossom lies like dung.

George Candy

the mystery of children who revert to flowers

your face at my window
has set fire to my eyes
the children in the market
playing hopscotch are anemones
the vendor of old pots
sings secretive ditties
a crowd gathers at some odd place
then disperses at a trumpet blast
your face is inimical to tin soldiers
on the parade ground
your voice is a little trumpet
that sings sad little fish ditties
of bland forsaken mermaids mermen
and if I strain the vernacular of
fish nets to hear
they are caught in there
and will be canned
the monitor men are gathered
at the hedge
and they build castles in the sand air
I wish that you would speak some commonsense
you who treat peasants and pilgrims alike
and with your box of match would set them alight
you with the stair
under your makeshift arm
and the wind in your blouse

o gather to find me
makeshift and emerald
the porter has a remark to make
the station is dressed in jewels

I fear myself
for your beautiful face
all starstained and radiant
has crept into my disguise

come make a much a' me
woman in the ethereal sea
where the mermaids batter
against the steel of your thrall

a patient merman
gathers his misty web

which is like a sea net
that has caught a flower

I and my stallion
have entered into the concourse
where the trains are running late on time
and demanded my passport

river please return to me
the silent footsteps and the panoply
and the horsemanship of soft regard
that in the concourse hoist my petard

your face is lovely jennifer lee
it is like a broadcast somnambulist fire
and I regard you as a treasure equal to be seen
among queens of glorious and spatial power

the watchman has uttered your name again
and I the somnambulist who walks through the town
in the orb of night have seen and recorded
the mystery of children who revert to flowers

Marc Glaser

Skool 2

Daagliks, maak die kinders se struggle
my banger. Ek konsentreer nie meer
op die Departement se riglyne
vir 'n goeie pass in matriek.
Vergeet die verskil tussen 'n glosseem,
'n metamorfeem.
Sien in elke gesig 'n potensiële vyand.
Barricade myself pouses in my klaskamer
volg die maalmaal van die kinders
se toyi-toyi op die uitgetrapte skoolgronde,
my motorsleutels vasgekluip in my linkerhan
gereed vir die vlugslag
oor die treinspoor
terug na suburbia
waar in elke supermark 'n tydbom
tik. Die Dobermanns knarsend bytgrom
agter veiligheidshekke.

Marius Crous

Observatory by Dusk

The shadows are a fiction
and the voices of dove-people
purple the air

The sloughing elixir
of Whitey's green
redintegrates, exotically,

the sanguine air I blow
through Johnno's plastic piccolo
I am heard by passing smiles

The shadows are a fiction
I am moved by dove-people
proffering roti charity

It is a slow dusk.
Observatory accepts just You
(Barely your car)

But I cease to play
when the tormented man
in the mosque expires

His last breath to the human day.

Etienne de la Harpe

Seeking Salvation

He stands on the edge of a precipice
Clutching a saxophone,
His feet keep the beat as he snakes out a coil of bittersweet sound,
He cries for the lives he's lost,
Wails for his wife and children.

He begs for the breath to draw in the cold,
To shroud him.
His knees are weak from standing to speak against things which confound him
And only the sigh of the sax
Allows him the space to relax.

He closes his eyes in rapt concentration,
Bends in supplication,
And with one single breath, blows a note to sustain him.
It echoes then dies
As he flies
Over the edge, seeking salvation.

E.J. Holtzhausen

In an Exiled Alphabet
(five Fragments)

V
Amid the rejoicing pause (my friend),
bend to gather shards of residual wrath
neglected by the celebrating crowds,
as many as you can from the interstices
of victory ululation and complacency;
save them in the ready skin pouch of our History
(not the crystal casket of foreign pretence)
to the left of bondage the right of liberation.

(anger to be overcome
asks its rightful context
preserved for swift use
against resurfaced causes)

And there will be threats snipers in the pay of
world economy jealous tribalism false words.
Imperialism, losing a tooth, draws shrill knives
against free grins in liberating regions,
but the retrieved spearheads of our defence
will glint broad-bladed in the hands of experience.

W
Twelve years a dozen revolutions
around the sun is more lives
turned to deaths in different towns and rooms.
It is marching beyond Soweto.

I think we know death by now,
thick blood violent static postures;
gravestones are set in saline earth,
above it.

When students have become their own teachers,
also ours and the lesson of death is life,
there are no other possibilities but to fight.

So do not say nothing has changed,
do not mouth the language of the defeated,
of the to be defeated.
Everything changes always.
This is the advantage

of those who force the pace adjusting
words and flames and massed demands.

This year, June 16 reasserts
one clear claim among others
Peace in our lifetime!

X
Night's deliberate mandibles
close down on small time rhythmic
darkened playground of severe ideas,
arachnid patience poised.

Too many half-truths speck flat sight
of flames engulfing once-certain temples,
and youth has fled to inhabit others
where atheists (of any creed) are pilloried.

Open-eyed eighties with idiot smirk,
blinded by the glare of its own stark nothingness,
supereconomy conspiracy downtreading the South;
this is the time, my constant affection,
when a simple love is drowned for witchcraft.

Friends speak of pits into which one falls,
steep-sided electrified cliffs these phantoms hold
against human urge to run fields and hills,
unlittered with the garbage of threatened tyrants.

Y
On marimba mornings
inside this fragile box
disguised as portable home,
mind keen soul recalcitrant,
familiar pressures extrude nervewires
sparking buzzing snaking Southwards,
fleeing the dank flat desert breeds
of rough tongues awkward bodies,
confused meanings mauve thoughts.

Longing too stretching elastic for what?
Not the rasp of fascist teeth
the screech of rusted iron
dull thuds on the soft belly of my birthplace,
not these sounds which echo
in the vacant space of my absence.

How do I define this growing thing,
this eager promise breathing now
in zebra people flowing surely
through cities, across bush and mountains?
This is what I cannot reach.

And how will it be to live to reclaim
a small plot of land for planting.

Z
When the triptych of money, violence
and flies weighing heavy
on two-thirds of humanity,
is closed in on itself,
and the North has learnt to recover
the true meaning of tears,
it will have long been well in the South,
and honest laughter can then be taught.

Now enclosed in a wounded era,
I may discover my own resolve,
a home will be rebuilt,
an end to this dual turmoil
will be sighted.
But apartheid's blunted axe still hacks
at umbilical cords and feet;
scars form slowly.

Foreign towns have unsympathetic ears,
cannot hear the hidden message in
Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika.
Besides it is fires which cauterise
collective sores for future health,
and words at best create small flames.

Laurie Rose Innes

The Only House with a Gate
(After St Wendolin's forced removals)

'The only house with a gate
after Thembalihle Fresh Produce,
that pink store up the sandy road';
That was six months ago
when we met on Hill Street, Pinetown
Your mother was still at Checkers
but my bus was already idling

Some people say
you must have been moved to KwaNdengezi
Some say
you surely must be lodging in Clermont
Ah, I've walked the whole day
looking for the only house with a gate
after the pink store
This is St Wendolin's that once was

Ja, the cattle kraals are still there
standing agape as if to mellow and bellow
Some people say the cattle were scattered
by teargas fumes
The press said the bulldozers worked
in harmonious unison with the baton charges
and teargas
Maybe this is the only house which had a gate
Maybe scavengers took the gate
to the blacksmith or the scrap collector.

Senzo Malinga

Rainy Night in Soweto

dark heavy clouds roll
and gather on rooftops
swathing and smothering the asbestos sheets
till they choke, sputter and spit water over heads

the air is torn by a blast
as lightning skids across the slippery sky
the shock punches holes in the silence
and dogs are sent squealing to door steps

tonight no lovers meet on street corners
no children sing and no dogs bark
no thug tugs a life away
no hippo nor casspir marches the street
there never was such freedom in this town!

Mabuse A. Letlhage

Dissent

boots	brides
buckshot	Sandile's Cave
graves	ancestors
Satan	tagati
Swastika	tribe
Casspirs	friendly spirits
Culture	meaning
Cash	clash

Goddess Ma made tears
flow like rivers
to know the beast
called the Tree of Life;

Or Mama Wosa
Suckling methylated solace
prostrate beneath
the dying pepper tree.

Etienne de la Harpe

ever forward comrades

we seize these times
– *ever comrades forward*
immense mass action
a power inevitable.

these levers will move all
– *people move forward* –
even the most stubborn
boulders of race hate.

creativity of revolt
– *sisters now forward* –
our spear and shields
form this new nation.

consolidate the advance
– *ever forward brothers* –
our freedom is beyond
the frailty of the price.

Barry Levinrad
Copenhagen, February 1989

My Street

There is a row
Of four-roomed houses,
With windows small
As the holes where mice rest.
This is what we call home.
Where our children are brought up.

Dust hangs over the dirty streets
All day long.
Paper and plastic float through the air.
Cars come and go,
Horse-drawn carts
Sell coal from street to street.
Trucks hoot, selling vegetable and fruit.

At night, there is no rest,
With people running about,
Looking for or fleeing from mischief.
Knives shine in the darkness
Like curses of the place.

Regina Maphela

The Khoikhoi

They called themselves men of men.
They had reckoned without thunder and lightning,
To them flashes in the firmament gods fighting.
If only they knew: These could also be an omen.

These could also be portentous rumblings
Relayed through the placid waters of the southern seas
By ancestors who saw sights that did not please –
South-bound, mysterious, with densely-populated railings.

They shielded their eyes to look at the horizon,
Maps of incredulity and awe scrawled on their faces:
What were those that carried whole races?
To the rounded tip of singing seas an alien denizen.

In later years, still men, they fell swooning,
Scarlet veins between heart-clutching fingers,
Cow-stares from eyes in a death that lingers,
A nipple to a bloody land's birth and christening.

Come three centuries and they still fascinate writers
As the most annalistic figures in blood-stained archives
Of a benighted land of the long knives
Where truths die, but not the memory of the first freedom fighters.

Themba Mhambi

The Blood of Poetry

how do i tell you
These poems are not
made of words only
how do i tell you
These poems are
knee-deep in blood
just how do i tell you
These poems have fingers
and can pull triggers
how do i tell you
These poems have ears, eyes too
like informers
These poems have memories too
and remember very well
the murders of our mothers and brothers
These poems can sing songs
and blow saxes
These poems, these bloody poems
are very vengeful too
and are going to write a new black book
of bantus and X's and nxeles
of george jacksons and sobukwes
full kimathis and madibas

Seitlhamo Motsapi

Boy in a Ghetto

Clothed in torn shabby-baggy attire
naked-footed at the icegrip of winter
he bitterlaughs
Pushing a rimless car-tyre
with two sticks
he dashes across smelling ponds
surrounding his mud-crumbling home
with box-fixed windows
Then he stops and jokes
with his mucous-greased friends
because of money-ignored flu
He rushes into the smoke-polluted kitchen
with newspaper mats over smeared cow-dung
He takes a dish
with cooking oil mixed phuthu
then a jam tin mug
filled with mbhubhudla
He stares at the food
as if murmuring
ah!
I'm the human animal!

Mlungisi Mkhize

The Neighbours This Summer

Wild birds pester your pawpaws.
Melon breasts bunched uncomfortably you stretch
For the orange globes
Then, hands full,
You rest.
Holding ripeness close you hum to the unborn child.
(A boy, your husband hopes, he tells me 'please, a son' and every day
He demonstrates across the fence the latest toy:
A truck, a plane, a gun.
Each one for his son.)

Overhead
The avocados bulb to fullness.
Overhead
A jumbo climbs fullbellied into the western sky.

I return to the *Sunday Times.*
Page six:
'First Untag Troops Flew in on Friday.'
'Beer, broads and the Blue Berets!'
Page eight:
'Woman heads the British Squad.'
'Namibia's Midwife is Prem Chand.'
History. Still in the Sunday lull.

Your husband nurses a Hansa, oils a handgun.
Other men down Castles,
Easing Independence on with UN resolve.
Closer to home, a maid begins
To hang suburban washing.
Flapping in the late March sun,
Army browns rise and fall.

Sally-Anne Murray

Mzilikazi, Return Home
(Three Fragments)

I
Mzilikazi son of Mashobane.
One who fled from the fierce
leopard of the Zulus whose roaring
sent other animals to hiding.
A little animal but old and wise
rabbit as you were.
You fled from the razor sharp
claws of the Zulu leopard whose
wrath sent many of your clansmen to
gallows.

So, how could you have returned
to Shaka when you knew that the sun
would have set with you?
You had seen many of the gallant men
getting swallowed into the expanse of
the leopard's belly.

II
Son of Mashobane, I salute you.
You fled like a deer fleeing from
an enraged and fierce leopard.
Even as you fled, all the other small
nations feared you thinking you were
the leopard who was pursuing you.
Son of Bulawayo,
we know that you are still a
hero of our soil because your
umbilical cord and your forefathers'
umbilical cords were planted
here to nourish our soil.
This is why men of the other
clan had to flee from you.

Now I know

Now I know
a cell is not
a basic unit of
life

Now I know
a cell is a
dead domicile with no
life

Now I know
a cell is a
habitat for the
heartless

Now I know
a cell offers
the innocent and the guilty alike
misery

Now I know
only pap and a funny liquid
they call tea are
consumed

I know
pap plus water
are equal to
malnutrition

Yes I know
that's why
I refused to eat

I know
cells generate life

III
In you they saw the skin and
claws of the leopard but failed
to see that you were just a
fleeing rabbit.
The Barolongs fled from you.
We know this from Sam Molema
who told us of Montshiwa's father
who fled from the advancing army
of the Zulus.
Moshoeshoe saw your greatness
when the cloud suddenly
enveloped Thaba Bosiu.

He did not see the rabbit in you.
Mzilikazi, we shall keep our promise
of looking after your umbilical cord
until you are back.

Sipho Nakasa

---

cells synthesize food
but this one!

I know cells offer nutrition
this one offers
malnutrition

Now I know
even the innocent
spend a night even two
in a cell

Yes I know
I know now

Walt oyi-Sipho ka Mtetwa

No More Martyrs

We,
in our quest for freedom
have produced more than
our share of martyrs.
We have written their names
on placards,
composed poetry and music
in their honour,
worn T-shirts with their pictures
and their names
and regarded them highly
as our fallen heroes.

We need no more martyrs now.
We need heroes who will live
and challenge the enemy
yet give him no chance
to destroy them.
We need heroes who
will prepare our people
for the ineluctable repossession
of our land
and the responsibility
that goes with it –
for, if we all become martyrs
who will lead the people
when that inevitable time comes?

Kaizer Nyatsumba

Reflections

the farmers pile up
the good harvest
unburying potatoes
pregnant with labour
the cobwebs crisp
in their rigor mortis
and the sun watches
amicably from the heavens

from the sea emerged
the gasping dromedaris
the prophets had but
seen her from their
distant dreams of wisdom
the great limpopo had
emptied its heart into
the sea to perish
silently and unnoticed

but this was no time
to embrace sorrow
and unfruitful mourning
it was no time
to recall treasures lost
for glittering bangles
nor to brood over
those victorious rocks
rolling down the basotho ranges
time could not decay
as history slowly faded
in their minds
leaving behind scars
that would never heal

Bongani Ndlovu

I Think I Know You

Many months have passed now
since the last time we met
we have grown and matured
with the years now
we have become rooted and anchored
and our wives have mothered freedom
– so long has been the time.

You cannot recognize me?
look at me:
disregard the wrinkles which are writings
of age on my face
they were not there when we met
my face was small and handsome
my now white hair was pitch-black and short
my teeth were still thirty-two
my eyes which now flicker like a candle
could see a soldier coming
my now dull ears could hear
policemen's bullets whispering in the night
and my legs could carry me to safety
– so long has been the time.

I am the poet that chanted
songs of victory when others despaired
I am the man they locked up
at John Vorster Square
I am the young man they shot in Soweto
I am a ghost of Biko
I am Hector-come-to-life
I am all the wounds you sustained
in the war which was never declared
I am a survivor
I am the man who fathered freedom
I am the heart of the nation.

I think I know you
I think we have met before
in the squalor of the ghetto
where the atmosphere was always teargas-polluted
where children became adults overnight
where we had porridge for supper
and went to bed.

I think I know you
I think we have met at the rallies
where we have laid bare our boiling hearts
where we sang freedom songs
shouted slogans and clenched our fists
where we dedicated ourselves to the struggle
vowing never to stop fighting
until our country was free.

Comrade, I think I know you
I think we have met at the funerals
where we articulated our plight
where we evoked spirits of the dead
and prayed to God for deliverance
where we laid our dead to rest
and promised them that freedom was in sight.

Surely I think I know you
I think we have met
at the congested John Vorster Square
where they made us sleep on the cold floor
where they beat us to make us talk
where they tried to turn us into pimps
where they fed us black tea and hard, stale bread
on a hard, cement table
where they killed our leaders
and said they committed suicide.

Yes, I think I know you
I think we have met in detention at Modderbee Prison
where they killed our spirits
and assaulted our minds with propaganda
where they locked us to rot
while they raped our wives and our daughters
in the townships
where they forced a man to make love to another man
where they forbade us to sing
'Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika
where they preached to us
that a white man is a god of Africa
where they spat on our face
and made us shit in buckets.

That is where I met you.

Kaizer Nyatsumba

Rumba

she loved the wine
i loved the wine for her
and she loved me for the wine
and we both hated the sun
not for its whiteness
but it always chased darkness away
chasing us out of bed
leaving the sheets empty and sad
so our prayers we said
hoping the sun would never come
yet from matola it came
hot and fiery
and we abandoned the prayer
and took to the shades of the jungle
where darkness never fails

Bongani Ndlovu

Sewe Dae

God fok rond met Vader Tyd
as God soveel kak kon aanjaag in sewe dae
binne die raamwerk van die ewigheid
kon Hy dalk meer geskep het as net Tien Plae

(I believe more and more that God must not be judged
on this earth. It is one of his sketches that has
turned out badly. – Vincent van Gogh)

Wessel Pretorius

Ntombenhle

Tranquil was the slumber
Tomorrow
Vague
but blinking makes it real
The psalm sang
I believed

Nonchalant was her character
waterfall-luring
nippy breasts alluring countenance
the colours that of a dahlia
imprisoning

She bowed
peasant to the sword
She smiled
mother to the baby
She begged
captain to the raging storm

I rose up arms outreaching
it was a mist
Ntombenhle my beautiful lady
so sweet and carefree
was dead
so impetuous it had occurred
impertinent it had behaved
leaving me in turmoil

Thokozani Nxumalo

treason

light is treacherous
if you clutch at lies to cover
your nakedness
and kill to live in the security
of a hiding place of lies
light is treason
if it shames the force of your lies

they have chained our candle-holders
and sentenced them to be buried
in the sea of the silenced and the drowned

but listen
the blind have their visions
that shame this darkness
and listen to the tide
it thunders with our yearning
to be free

Peter Rule

Khanna Butle

Maseru is like a disco
the lights
robot lights
on and off
during daytime

Cowboy taxis
with bull bars
charge through
potholes
in Kingsway

Computers just on
at work you have just
find your file
The kettle almost
boiling
The telephone stops

Then the disco starts
again:
Hello Ntate
Morning Me
In the streets
the fires are
burning:

The Blanket Brigade
awaits
a new kind of Disco

Wessel Pretorius

Saf' Afika

Hullo, you damn Saf' Afika
Shine, cave of persecution
    the land of one man's laughter
    the place of another man's cry

Hey, you earth of riches
rich with unhappiness
    the home of one woman's joy
    the house of another woman's pain

Saf' Afika, Madam Restlessness
with mountains of no love
    the restaurant of one family's bread 'n fish
    the hut of another family's stone 'n snake

Saf' Afika, the poor escarpment
escarpment of no loyalty
    the playground of one child's privileges
    the prison of another child's ideas

Hele-helele, you ungodly country
cursed by my ancestors
    the parliament of the law-maker
    the court of the outlaw

Smile, you one-eyed Saf' Afika
you valley of hatred
    the Manyeleti of the tourist
    the Vorster Square of the 'terrorist'

Let my right hand not forget you, Saf' Afika
the kraal of no mercy
May God bless you, Saf' Afika
the sty of no forgiveness

Siramo

An Aural Start

Shacklands –
the strive, the jive, the flick-knife glitter of it!
Shacklands –
the rust, the dust, the sparrow-tough vigour of it!
Shacklands!
Shakedown-City!
Shantytown-World!

Delectable as the juice of pilchards found in a tin
on the meadows of a city's rubbish dump by a hungry child;

Beautiful as the newly-washed, sky-blue football jerseys
unfurled on the bushes of a littered stream to dry:

Shacklands!
Shakedown-City!
Shantytown-World!

A Brief Topography

If time's an arrow, that never doubles back on itself,
then shacklands, their origins, have always been with us,
the earth-roofed hut and potato-patch at Eden's gate,
the shanties of Caesar's Rome hinting at a larger progeny:

a sprawl of scrap-iron sheets, motor-car packing cases,
mud blocks and cast-off timber, centred on a market-place
and crowding its horizons; a habitat for the hungered,
the bored, the footloose, drifting in from rural slums;

an eco-niche, Gothic as the tin bowls of sheep's-heads
on candle-lit tables beside the bus-ranks at dusk;
labyrinthine as the twists of its multiple alley-ways,
its musk of paraffin, wood-smoke, sewage and spices;

the terminus of a rapid migration, an exodus sucked
by fierce centripetal powers, away from a past,
from nagging bonds of kinship, from gerontocracies
and monotonous porridge in villages with muddied wells;

Shacklands
Excerpts from the long
published in Chris Zitl
of poems Kites *appear*

By the end of the cent
natural increase within
will have continued un
Third World countries
experienced further m
towards the cities . . .
their worst in the grea
that time they may cor
congested and deterior
vast grey areas of spor
roads or any services,
highways linking encla
residential areas of the
be one but many Calcu
Dwyer D J *(1975) Pe*
***World Cities* p. 236**

ger poem of this name to be
hule Mann's forthcoming book
r between pages 80 to 83.

tury, the present high rates of
n the Third World's urban areas
nchested in most cases, and all
s, regardless of size, will have
assive movements of people
. Living conditions will be at
at metropolitan areas, for by
nsist only of a grossly
rated inner ring surrounded by
ntaneous settlement, without
and criss-crossed by super
aves of business with the
e elite . . . Then there may not
uttas.
ople and Housing in Third

a fantasy, sparked by ads on the catechist's radio,
by books in the village school, by letters and rumours
of football heroes in huge arenas and novel erotica,
of glass-cased shopping malls and walled surburban pools;

the locus of a quest for a shifting mirage, a chimera
of cameras and watches, fast-foods and fashionable shoes,
all kept at a distance, by arcane passwords of knowledge,
by esoteric dialects and uniformed guards with dogs;

its kids that survive, alert and resilient as starlings,
barefoot dancing a tennis-ball round broken bottles,
each crackling out of their laughter a sudden rainbow,
because of the spring-shot car-seat placed at their door;

their rhymes and quarrels, the Babel din of the radios,
the drinkers, preachers, hustlers and bus-queue gossips
transposing languages, inter-bursting syntax and idiom,
melding new metaphors, baroque lingua francas in flux;

its denizens pioneers, discovering as they settle it,
their own terra incognita, new pasture and Jerusalem,
like the hawker unwrapping his oranges from a broken box,
like lovers in the riot-scarred shell of a burnt-out bus;

a time-node from the past, swept aside by the future,
accelerating like rural school-kids into a present;
a time-mode that is the present, that presages a future
lapping over golf-courses and bush-filled railway yards;

o shacklands, skinny and fertile as your wary mongrels,
o paradise delayed, mothering dreams in back-street mangers,
if time's an arrow, it draws us all onwards in its wake:
you're a frontier, a solution, a judgement, a wound;

trokkitta tokka, which language, *muuramo*, one language,
rogohia rechio can only gesture at, arrida ablarrada
words among words, ejeeya vjiya, butjilo butjalaka Motos,
in the murmuring matrix *oteppia taffu* of the lingui-sphere.

The Funeral

Blose, remember him? Wore boots,
chewed a matchstick, boss of the team
that worked on springs, dug out the muck,
packed in clean sand and built squat tanks
to store the flow. We buried him
at noon today, near granite cliffs
with shacks on tops, with rows and rows
of sand-heaps below – like molehills
with crosses stuck, skewly, in them.
Beneath a thorn the priest took word,
men one side, women the other,
the box between, plain, painted white,
dappled with small melting shadows.

Blose got killed, taking the sun,
taking a beer, same hot blue skies,
at a shebeen, the week before.

Prayers. Speeches. A fierce sermon.
Then envelopes, with cash from friends
and messages: "Swallow the stone,
Blose family!" "Sleep on the wound!"

The plastic wreath was taken off,
the lid unscrewed: time for farewells.
We filed past, the women singing.
Nothing tranquil, no mind at ease
inside that small hot ship of wood.

His brow was bandaged tight, but not
the puncture mark between the eyes.
The mouth half-gaped, still crying out.
A black-haired woman shuddered, moaned.
His widow slumped. The box was closed,
the weight heaved up, and slow, stumbling,
sand in our shoes, we reached the grave
and put him down. The sermon's theme:
Be strong; God's will remains a cloud.
Black crows, floating up the cliff-face,
like the hymn-books, looked small and far.

His suit went in, his smartest shirt,
sleeping mat and blanket, to help
when he sat up, to leave that hole.
In spurts, the singing swelled, faded.
We spaded in the grey-white soil.

Never knew much, outside his work,
about the man. Knew that his Dad,
a chief-maker, stopped a bullet
two years before, that his Mother
worked in the city, couldn't be found.

Knew that a schoolboy stoned red-eyed,
an orphan, sheltered by Blose,
beaten by him, a month before,
applied the knife. The rest's private,
not my business, except for springs,
the fact of springs, in that crowded,
urban slum-scape, trickling water
into tanks, grey-white concrete tanks
with bright taps, Blose's monuments.

The Family

Scrubbing the floor of a peri-urban cafe at midnight
a woman in a yellow apron dips her brush in a bucket
and works her way across the orange linoleum tiles.

Bent straws, a pale green sliver of pickled cucumber
occur among the legs of the blue Formica-topped tables.
The soapy water shines on the skin of her young arms.

To call her heroic glamorizes the dullness of her task,
to ignore her demeans a patient resilience at work,
who filters paraffin, bread, blankets and patent medicines

back to a cluster of hutments perched on a rural hill,
who tramps home to a mud-walled dormitory of women at dawn
and seated on the locked tin-trunk which houses her radio,

her savings-book, clothes and spare packets of powdered milk
scoops up a bundle from among the shapes on a sleeping-mat
and suckles a child who beat his fists against her breast.

The fragrance of that mother's brief embrace smells of soap,
the sweat of her midnight walk and the tubs of sunflower oil
where sliced potatoes in wire baskets are turned brownly gold.

.....

Somewhere across the neon-flickered streets of the city
the child's father, in a combat jacket and black beret
steps out the red-stripped pay-booth of a parking garage

and walking a long-handled mirror round and under a truck
yells at the street-kids gambling in front of a bridal shop.
Thin mannequins in veils, with dusty bouquets of lilies,

stand stiffly in the white froth of their wedding gowns.
Their lamé shoes are as silver as the buckle of his holster,
their nails as scarlet as droplets of the cafe's tomato sauce.

Like the domes of clear plastic glass on the cafe's counter
in which the cream doughnuts and chocolate eclairs are stored
the lamp-lit arms of the mother gleam as she cradles her child.

Chris Zithulele Mann

Jenny

Black president up north
tells us his country now is
one big happy family.
    The whites

    I hear
are (as usual) comfortable,
but he razes squatters'
shacks to the ground as
his white predecessor did
    before him

and jails his opponents.
He's a socialist, he says,
and drives out of sight
in a Jaguar bootlaced with
policemen. Their sirens tighten . . .

    I think
of the first girl I saw in
brief pyjamas, who invited me
– sweating – to her room alone
one night when we were both
    about thirteen

    sat me down
and spoke to me unself-
consciously
        until I saw
that women (despite my lust)
made interesting and worth-
    while friends.

    Her ease
and bubbling sense of joy
made me happy, made me slow
to inherit my peer's belligerence
the bequest of our pale skins –
    the lack

    of trust
that formed us all to know-
ledge impervious which strayed
beyond our own imagining.
    Guileless, she

    wouldn't learn.
In her father's sumptuous
home she found instead
compassion for the homeless:
who whispered at her meals
    her prayers

    in secret
always intrusive. Her green eyes
thoughtful as she suffered
the slow rotting of the soul
    of all

    who wish
my country peace and normalcy;
gentleness, like you, like me
to live with no reference to
    any person's

    colour.
Where the mean-minded rule,
have ruled, and will with
bleak sentences of white
words on whiter paper
    indecipherable

to all others.
Found it inescapable but
in flight: and did. And
married, a quiet solemn man
of principle

who shared
her steadfast faith in
humankind but could not
share her laughter. Now
pregnant for the second time
she's ceased to look
about her

without
the whitewashed bungalow
they rent for a pittance.
It's law they keep the
servants they inherit,
for how else

would all work?
A space
there to construct an economy
of sewing co-ops and tea parties
oblivious that the workers who
suffered through colonialism
suffer still

the perfumed
clouds of oratory on Africa
but little of its land to farm
constraints on the right to strike
and whites with guilt assuaged
by the black faces in power.
These days she thinks she's
happy

yet prowls
sometimes about her room
an itching in her mind as
she waits for each tomorrow
she can tell herself again
'life's normal'.

Kelwyn Sole

Dust Rites

1
In the wake of a running crowd;
The liberals.
Cloistered in flight, renouncing the earth,
In free
fall
grasping
at the heels
of angry youth.

2
Meditation in brown:
Vuurenbeweeg dekkingslaan dietoekoms –
'n geweer en 'n penis.
Iemand het gesê korporaal kannie kom as hy nie op gekak is nie.
Paint barbarians on cardboard
Rather than break rank.

3
Bubonic bungalow – Voortrekkerhoogte.
You washed Namibian dust from your hair.
I the dust of Alexandra.
Both trying to wash the dirt of south africa
From our minds.

4
Tomorrow training camps will run and sing again.
Like you, one or two will realize
the inadequacy of renunciation and decide
The time has come for the
turning
of
the
guns.

Michael Titlestad

Letter to a Friend

Say, There is gang warfare
down at Lavender Hill. The kids are still
not back learning.
They will not be earning a living.

Potential is found
in awkward, shy, sad and angry times.
It will not die.

LIFE heaves, is heavy,
laughs on the smurk of front page
photographs of gay men with guns,
lusts, lurks
in iced expressions of the new,
white government angels with guns.

There are blades in the fences
and guns
and guns
and guns . . .

and no one has a chance.
Nobody knows what it is all about,
this Devil work
that drinks the blood of a nation
(like lions pulling apart the sweating corpse of a zebra kill).

Still,
the streams reach the sea
and clouds sketch out a relative freedom.
Day and Night are constant,
and we Love Each Other.

Nicolette Thesen

Gamsberg Pass,
Namibia

Herero Woman,
Katatura, Namibia

Katatura, Namibia

Dear Editor

Staffrider's interview with Ari Sitas (Vol 8 Nos. 3 & 4) contains references to me that require correction.

Sitas suggests that in my reaction to Jeremy Cronin's review of *Black Mamba Rising* in *The Weekly Mail* I behaved as one of those literary anti-egalitarians by whom 'the minute ordinary people attempt to enter the scene, they get clobbered over the head.' However, my letter was not a response to the book, which I had not read. I was provoked by the inflated claims Cronin appeared to be making for Malange, Qabula and Hlatshwayo, but primarily by the aggressiveness of his remarks on other sorts of poetry. Perhaps the best way I can illustrate my attitude at that time is by quoting from a long letter I wrote to him (which, however, I believe, never reached him):

> 'You have chosen to attack poetry — all right, let us say a particular tradition of poetry — in favour of certain oral material. What is puzzling is why you need the attack, why you insist on appropriating the term "poetry" for the performance material, thus incurring the necessity to denigrate the "frothy strivings" etc. The material you are interested in is apparently important and valuable in its own ways. Why don't you get on and describe those ways, instead of confusing the issue? If there are poetic qualities in the material, bring them out, show them, but don't resort to the trick of saying, "THIS is poetry because poetry isn't what you all thought it was"...

'As for what we thought it was: none but fools could have said poetry had to be obscure and elite. What poetry does, inevitably, is **sometimes** difficult, to write or to read. Difficulty incurs the risk of obscurity, and the risk of elitism. To forfend poetry against these risks, you seem prepared to reject difficulty — which would be to emasculate poetry and criticism.

' "... By and large, I do not know the 'worker poets'..." Your review was for me something of an introduction, the passages you chose to quote were the examples I had to go by. If they had appeared to substantiate the claims you were making for them, I would not have quarrelled with you — despite the provocative opening to your review. The failure is yours as a critic: you fail to say anything that convinces me... of the merits you proclaim. "Both of us have a great deal to learn from the new wave of worker poets... " Well, tell me about it. Give me some idea of these "poetic skills" you speak of. So far you don't do it.'

Lionel Abrahams

Resistance Art by Sue Williamson

Published by David Philip Publishers, 1989
Price R49,95 excluding tax

The publication of Sue Williamson's book *Resistance Art in South Africa* is, with an important difference, part of a recent unprecedented upsurge of interest in South African art. This has been accompanied by a sustained re-examination of the various traditions which constitute the history of art in South Africa. This re-interpretation has primarily involved attempts to reclaim the marginalized and submerged forms of the art produced by blacks. It resulted in a number of publications which aimed to foreground visual artifacts and explore the aesthetics and historical forces which shaped this body of work.

Here Matsemela Manaka's *Echoes of African Art* published by Skotaville in 1987 blazed the trail in its attempt to establish the broad historical patterns of black painting, graphics, sculpture and crafts. This was followed by Gavin Younge's *Art of the South African Townships* published in 1988 by Thames and Hudson,

which probes the contemporary forms of art practised by blacks within the context of apartheid. In the same year the Johannesburg Art Gallery mounted an exhibition and published a catalogue by Steven Sack under the somewhat euphemistic title, *The Neglected Tradition: Towards a New History of African Art*. It sought to retrace the history of black art between 1930 and 1988. Related to these general studies is also the recovery of Gerard Sekoto's work by Barbara Lindop in her monograph *Gerard Sekoto* published by Dictum in 1988 and the retrospective of his work hosted by the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1989. This was accompanied by the publication of Lesley Shapiro's catalogue, *Sekoto, chronicles and evaluates* which is the life and work of the artist. A book on the work of Durant Sihlali was published by Skotaville in 1989.

While the importance of these books, especially in the manner in which they have begun to break the repression which affected the visibility and recognition of the art produced in oppressed communities, cannot be over-stressed, they were largely concerned with correcting the unbalanced representation of black artists. Not much has, however, been done to reconceptualize South African art as a whole. This is what Sue Williamson's work, *Resistance Art in South Africa*, attempts to do by deliberately focusing on a specific theme in South African culture and its crystallization in the visual arts. By including black and white South African artists her study has a wide scope. Because of the focus on the theme of resistance, the impression which a superficial glance at the book is likely to create is that the study suffers from a narrow political perspective. This would be mistaken. It is nevertheless an error which some reviewers, operating from the assumption that the author of the book is somehow in error, have made.

What is significant about Williamson's book is that it squarely addresses the fact that South African culture as a whole, including the visual arts, given the historical framework of the past four hundred years, cannot be adequately grasped without bringing into play the codes of repression and resistance and the manner in which these are woven into the sensibilities of all South Africans. In this regard it goes much further than the patronizing attempts to ameliorate what is regarded as the neglect of black art. Williamson does not view art as a passive activity, nor does she fall into the reactive habit of thinking that only black culture and art has registered dissent to cultural domination. As a painter Williamson understands that the production of images which reveal the erasures and contradict the representations of domination, are active and creative participations in the symbolic processes which assert the universal values of creativity and freedom.

Far from narrowing her purview, Williamson's selection of images and brief texts constructed with the co-operation of the artists traces the deeper forces which have infiltrated the aesthetic modes and social awarenesses and attitudes of individual artists. She establishes the 'roots of the conflict' in South Africa in the history of colonization and finds appropriate and complex visual responses to this in the work of such diverse artists as Paul Grendon, Jules van de Vijver, Josef Manana, Pippa Skotnes and John Muafanjejo. A comparison of the divergent styles of representation in Penny Siopis's 'Dora and the other Women' and Azaria Mbatha's 'The Ladder' reveals how opposing visual, cultural, moral, and sexual traditions have given shape to the deepest conceptions South Africans have of each other. In Paul Emsely's work the interpenetration of personal, historical and environmental dimensions is finely fused in haunting images.

In subsequent chapters she traces the visual manifestations of the transformations, changes and mutations which South African society and the sensibilities of its people have undergone over time. Here the work of William Kentridge, Helen Sibidi, Deborah Bell and others yet again reveals how divergent styles and content are drawn together by social forces ranging from privileged decadence to oppressed deprivation. These works display how individual artists have sought and found ways of conveying the contradictions which pervade their society. The mutations of traditional doll-making and beadwork evident in the work of Thandi and Sizakele Mchunu represent symbolic responses to regional pressures which, in many respects, reflect a wider social milieu. Related combinations of traditional forms and contemporary themes are also at work in the sculptures of Nelson Mukhuba, Johannes Segogela and Noria Mabasa.

The third and fourth sections of the book deal with responses of artists to exploitation and the various popular forms of art. This includes the politically explicit art of murals, graffiti, posters, T-shirts and cartoons, as well as the abstract and metaphorical sculptures of Gavin Younge, the highly inventive constructions and exploratory drawings of Angela Ferreira and a host of works by individual artists and collectives. This juxtaposing of popular, mass forms of visual communication with conventional fine art traditions is one of the most commendable features of Williamson's study.

In the chapter 'Confrontation and Resistance' the uprisings of recent years find expression in the detailed and expressively distorted graphics of Manfred Zylla, the woodcuts of David Hlongwane, the impressionistic paintings of Mandla Sibinda and in the naive but socially saturated images by children. These images capture the tumult of social unrest and the vicious

repression which accompanied it. In Paul Stopforth's graphite series, done in the late seventies, the sinister and dark realms of police interrogation are made visible. In relation to these political forms of repression, private ones are linked and artistically probed through indeterminate and elusive images.

This is not a dehistoricized or apolitical perspective on art. It reveals the superficiality and shortsightedness of the wish to detach visual images from the forces which have been decisive in shaping their very forms, contents and thematics. This book demonstrates how the aesthetics of form and subject matter are inscribed with social references. Far from reducing art to any singular notion of politics she probes the diversity of responses by a cross-section of South African artists who work within different artistic conventions and traditions. This establishes a rich play of contrasts, overlaps and associations. If a weakness has to be identified in the book then it is, ironically, not any simplification of South African art, but the fact that Williamson has allowed the artists and their work to speak without making any systematic attempt to theorize in greater depth and consistency the art-historical patterns and conventions operative in the work she selected for the book. It is in this meta-pictorial area where much work still has to be done in South African art.

It is a well-produced book which demonstrates how South African artists have utilized, questioned and transformed disparate conventions of representation in relation to their personal understandings of the forces at work in South African culture. Although it is by no means an exhaustive or definitive study, it deserves an important place in the as yet unfinished search for an all-inclusive conception of South African art.

Andries Walter Oliphant

Abduraghiem Johnstone

Poems from the Valley of Amazement
Cape Town: Buchu Books (1989)

There is a striking vision — again and again. The *Revolution* 'will tear / Away at the scab / Showing a gaping wound.' (7) And in the *Township* 'Dongas of Blood / Turned into cesspools of hate / The future / War.' (7) Reading Abduraghiem Johnstone one wants to rewrite Gilles Deleuze's dictum: 'We only have a choice

between a mediocre life and crazy forms of thinking' into 'We have no choice between an alienated life and violated ways of mad thinking'. Having 'kissed / The sweetness of alienations' we stand with Abduraghiem Johnstone 'with a clenched fist / In front / Of a burning body.' (9) The alienation and meaninglessness — caught in one of the condensed stanzas of this volume — is a powerful moving force in the violence of those who have been violated: 'I saw a man / Syphilitic / His hands / Fondling his balls / Gaping into a void.' (10) Johnstone experiences life in an apartheid state and in a capitalist society as brutalizing himself: 'You brutalize / Cocoon me in ignorance / And angst / I have gaped / at the barrel of your gun.' (22) The temptation 'To scorch / The South African picture' (12) is great. So is the reaction – to become brutal oneself towards the enemy to restore a more livable life: 'Now / I am the assassin' (22); and the assassin, like the 19th century anarchist, hopes to shock society into an acknowledgement of his humanity — by being inhuman.

Admittedly, the writer, as Thomas Brasch has said in his *Sleeping Beauty and Pork*, is an unstable entity: 'He who writes remains / Here or away or where / He who writes drifts / so or so.'[1] Admittedly, there is always friction in writing, friction between what is said and what language wants to say. Writing is disorderly and untidy, a disturbing discourse. All the more so when the mind of the poet is 'Emblazoned with violence' (12) in a violent society. Writing displays structures of suddenness, creative irruptions, flashes of insight which illuminate like lightning to leave us in the dark again, insights in the wrong moment, the discontinuity of creative thinking, the inversion and subversion of what has been written before, the volcanic eruption of love and hatred, of the affect groping for understanding, which is not inherent in the affect.

There is, as Botho Strauβ has seen, a paradoxical dialectics between these eruptions and the 'idea', the understanding, wrought from the fluid material with which the poet works before it has solidified into cold basalt and black print: 'And yet, it is only the moments of weakness, negligence, the turbidity of the mind, in which we can hope to perceive the call of a great new enticement. Only where thought can go astray, can the idea be discovered.' In Abduraghiem Johnstone's volume there is much turbidity, not always resulting in an 'idea' discovered. All too often the spark refuses to bridge the gap and the en-lighten-ment fizzles out. 'Tears and smiles / Poetised / Suicidal / Cathartic' lag far behind the experience which one vaguely senses. But vagueness is not poetry: least of all can the poet depend on the reader to imbue the empty gesture with a meaning.

Tears and smiles 'poetised' are not Johnstone's forte. Tears,

where they still appear in his poetry, are a source of strength rather than weakness: 'I saw a man / Crying –, / Tears / Of energy / Pouring / From his eyes' (17). Of course, this is not protest poetry, and Johnstone never lets us forget it: *Senzenina* (what have we done) has been replaced by *dubula* (shoot), and the luggage in the freedom train is 'Makarov / Limpet mine / Grenade / Pangas / Bombs / Molotov Cocktails' (20). In Johnstone's poetry, words and guns are interchangeable: 'Words will serve as guns.' (39) And guns speak the truth more often than words. Both are weapons and both are intellectual tools. Nowhere is there a reflection on what this violence will do to the violator, to the freedom fighter, the hope of the future. Is he not, as Serote has intimated, violated, brutalized by his own violence, dreamt up as words, even if the experience is real enough?

If one reads the lines — 'Sometimes the necklace of fire adorns / When it's kind / It exorcises dybbuks [Imps] / The acrid smell hollowing from gaping nostrils / Relentless orgies of mechanical eyes / Carves quantum leaps into non utopia' (23) — against Serote's *A Poem on Black and White*, in which Serote is attempting to understand the violence himself — 'I wonder how I will feel when his eyes pop / and when my nostrils sip the smell of his flesh' — but is 'touched' by the imagined scream of the tortured white child, and fully aware that turning the methods of the oppressor against the oppressor may have its hidden dangers, one understands how recklessly Johnstone falls for the seduction of being a violated violator. 'Blasting the assassins into smithereens' (22) is of course a reaction which one can understand — but one becomes an assassin oneself, even if an assassin of assassins. The uncritical affirmation of such violence, however, becomes a praise poem to undifferentiated violence as such, not that different from a praise of Rambo, that tool of imperialist violence.

What disturbs one is not so much that poem after poem is an orgy of blood and violence. After all this country is involved in civil war, brutal beyond imagination, after all, this country comes very near the killing fields of 'Vietnam, Hiroshima, / Nicaragua, / Nagasaki, El Salvador' (33). The poetic imagination which would avoid the image of that violence would of course discredit itself as covering up the truth. What disturbs one is the readiness with which the poet relishes violence, the way in which it seems to be an inner rather than, or as well as, an outer necessity. What disturbs one is the way in which the violence of the struggle evokes his own aggression. Even in a conventionally introspective poem like *Ego* one discovers that blood and violence, as a means of dealing with the nauseous alienation of the isolated individual, are only vaguely connected in the end to oppression and the

revolution: 'Alone / Only daylight looking in / My walls empty of ornaments / My heart bleeds / Congealing / Into / Flowers of revolution' (34). The bleeding of the Ego cannot be divorced from the bleeding of the nation, of course. But the unconsciousness of the roots of the revolutionary fervour does not augur well for the future.

Reading the volume one becomes aware more and more clearly of the image of the violated child. That in itself would not be surprising in a society where children bear much of, if not most, of the brunt of state repression and violence; and one is concerned with the poet about 'mutant children' (30) of state violence, who have themselves become violent. If he is truthful 'The poet paints streaks of blood / On the infant's face' (13), because that is what the civil war does to even those in the cradle. What is noticeable, however, is that this violation of the child is not one only of the children the poet observes outside. It is essentially the kernel of his own experience: the child he was and the child which is in him has been violated by a world which has shattered his self image. Such a fundamental shattering expresses itself in a basic distrust for the world which one cannot call paranoia as long as the imagined persecution and oppression is very real indeed: 'The fascist man / Blows a bubble in my mind / He eye-balls me out of town.' (13) Even the most far-fetched paranoic dream has become a Star Wars Reality: 'It is the moon / From where he [Uncle Sam] conducts his cold war.' (33) So what is the realistic limit of our imagination when childhood fears and terrors become daily reality?

Just as violence is related to the presumed 'innocence' of children, so is the 'healing', the utopia, an event which will be noticeable amongst the children: 'The children will once more sing / Songs of merriment / Songs of naïveté.' (30) Healing will only be healing, if the child (and that is the child in all of us) is made whole again, because only 'The child is beyond fantasy' (31). In order to achieve this end, even the workers are given a new duty: 'Labour will repaint the children's picture.' (32)

The open door policy of Buchu Books has one danger to the writers themselves: while editorial intervention can and does sometimes stifle the very originality of the poet who has not yet acquired a reputation, while the predominance of certain paradigms of poetry would seem to make it virtually impossible for Johnstone's poetry to appear at all; yet, editorial intervention can also be comradely and constructive, and prevent the needlessly idiosyncratic and the unnecessarily opaque, as well as the careless and thoughtless: when the prison cell remains 'vacuous' (42) instead of vacant, empty, bare, barren, void, hollow, when culture is 'effervescing into' flames of revolution

(7), one suspects a lapse of the poet's self-criticism. Such lapses unfortunately abound in this small volume. Unsupported, apodictic statements like 'Cult of the personality died' (40), which do not really add anything to the poem, meaningless jargon like 'Teacher... animator became' (40) spoil a lot of the poems in this collection. The metaphor of 'Port Jackson sapping life' — to be read as a political-ecological statement (in the light of the dedication) — appears three times, the repetition not making it any more insightful. There is little evidence of self-critical selection, and the absence of editorial advice allowed poems to appear in this collection which would have better been left out: Incoherent poems like *Colonialist* (9), and *Knock* (40); poems which just meander through a series of unconvincing metaphors like *Time is Growing Old* (40) and *Shams* (41); poems in which one or two convincing lines are submerged in the conventional surrounding, like *Ntabeni* (43); poems which fail to develop like *Rylands* (8), *My Friend's Mother* (9), *Remembrance* (45) or *Song for the Condemned* (45).

The reader as critic is always engaged in his own text-project, and interpretation and criticism is undoubtedly a form of the will to power: The will that there be one kind of discourse rather than another. His will to power in the end, however, requires the assent of his readers and the poet's readers, provided he has not aborted the reading of the poetry by his critique.

It is my opinion that this volume, although it clearly shows a possibly powerful, if eccentric poet in the making, has exposed him prematurely to the sharp light of public scrutiny. I would agree with Johnstone when he says 'Claim no easy victory / Until the word is wrestled / From the bourgeois / And black intelligentsia' (39). But this wrestling is a struggle in which skill is indispensible. It is not sufficient to occupy the printing presses. One needs to feed them with something which is worth the effort of printing and reading. To turn his own lines against him — poetry may erupt with the power of volcanoes and strike with the force of lightning; but that is not the whole story; if it is not to be an egocentric pastime of the poet, it also needs to communicate, and to communicate well it needs reflection and shaping and 'for this we will need / Patience / Love / Ideas / Tactics / Strategy / Vigilance and Care / For they own the machines of poverty' (33). What one would like to see eventually is a volume of the power of the strongest poems in this collection and without those which are not really up to this standard which the poet himself has set.

Peter Horn

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