

One Saturday afternoon a few months before To Whom It May Concern was due to be published, a young black artist visited me to sell me some of his charcoal drawings. I decided to buy one and it became the cover drawing for To Whom It May Concern. The artist was James Moleya and he knew Mongane Wally Serote, whose first volume of poems, Yakhali' Inkomo had just been published by Renoster Books. A week later James knocked on my door, accompanied by his friend Wally Serote. Wally said he was working on another poetry volume and was looking for a publisher. I said I was very interested and a few months later Wally, who was at the time working for an advertising agency in the Carlton Centre as a copy writer, phoned to say he had the manuscript ready, and he came to my office to hand it over. It was the first of many poetry volumes by Serote, and recently we took over Yakhali' Inkomo from Renoster Books, reprinting it in our poetry series. The three poems selected are from the volume Tsetlo (1974) and together reveal the imagery, rhythm and acute human observation which have established Serote as one of the leading poets of the decade.

MONGANE WALLY SEROTE

Amen! Alexandra

Alexandra,
 i, and many others who know you,
 we who have seen you firm on your feet
 like the earth
 your back soaking the chilly winds and rains,
 and we stood beneath your wings,
 having learnt the sacred secrets of silence
 as the winds and rains
 the tears and last gasps of those we knew and loved
 fell on our flesh
 like shock falls on the heart;
 and Alexandra you are a thunder clap,
 that froze in our hearts
 like a moment which becomes a cruel memory,
 now that you form clouds of dust in the sky,
 above roars of a bulldozer,
 we nod,
 like we have for so long ago in time,
 we nod,
 for we have nodded for worst moments,
 but beneath these nodding heads,
 droplets of tears as big as eyes,
 fall to the ground.

A Poem

Who can say brother
who — ?
the glow in your eyes flickers
touches the heart
to a glimmer
this red-hot glow of the heart
which —
otherwise must have been hope
but the glow in your eyes brother
that glow
brandish a glimmer
for —
you may be an ant destined for the sole of a shoe
an ox
to fall on the field-track
puffing this dust.
brother—
that glow in your eyes

(for Moji, Montshiwa and my younger brother,
Thabo)

A Friend — Zuma

So many days have passed,
Many times has the soil soaked water, dried to dust;
Many times have the leaves coloured,
From green to brown and fallen;
So long since we met; now we meet again.
A friend

He sits there on the sofa, reptile style,
Long and flat with indifference
His head and eyes askance all the way throughout
our talk.

Hope talk to him is mockery
But humour now and then blooms out of him,
Like the pink flowers of a peach tree at the right
time.

Like day and night and other times,
The combination of nose and eyes, lips and face,
Set, low, lower, high, higher, low.
And I stand up to go, curled up in silence;
Wishing
He's alive, he's died.

Anthologies reach a wide public and help promote the work of less-known authors. I felt we should also publish an annual for new writing. I discussed the idea with Walter Saunders and Lionel Abrahams in 1975 and it was Walter who suggested the title Quarry. The first volume appeared in 1976 and since then four issues have been published. Works by well-known writers such as Nadine Gordimer and Peter Wilhelm were published, but many unknown writers first saw their stories or poems in print in Quarry.

Besides poems by Wopko Jensma, Robert Berold, Michael Macnamara, Geoffey Haresnape, Patrick Cullinan, Mike Nicol, Chris Mann, David Farrell, Mannie Hirsch, David Wright, Essop Patel, Fhasel Johannesburg and others, the remarkable poem, by a then unknown black poet from Pretoria, Motshile Nthodi, 'South African Dialogue', appeared in Quarry '76, and indicates something of the kind of writing which this annual tries to promote.

MOTSHILE NTHODI

South African Dialogue

Morning Baas,
Baas,
Baas Kleinbaas says,
I must come and tell
Baas that,
Baas Ben's Baasboy says,
Baas Ben want to see
Baas Kleinbaas if
Baas don't use
Baas Kleinbaas,
Baas.

Tell
Baas Kleinbaas that,
Baas says,
Baas Kleinbaas must tell
Baas Ben's Baasboy that,
Baas Ben's Baasboy must tell
Baas Ben that,
Baas says,
If Baas Ben want to see
Baas Kleinbaas,
Baas Ben must come and see
Baas Kleinbaas here.

Thank you
Baas.
I'll tell
Baas Kleinbaas that,
Baas says,

Baas Kleinbaas must tell
Baas Ben's Baasboy that,
Baas Ben's Baasboy must tell
Baas Ben that,
Baas says,
If Baas Ben want to see
Baas Kleinbaas,
Baas Ben must come and see
Baas Kleinbaas here,
Baas.
Goodbye Baas.

Baas Kleinbaas,
Baas says,
I must come and tell
Baas Kleinbaas that,
Baas Kleinbaas must tell
Baas Ben's Baasboy that,
Baas Ben's Baasboy must tell
Baas Ben that,
Baas says,
If Baas Ben want to see
Baas Kleinbaas,
Baas Ben must come and see
Baas Kleinbaas here,
Baas Kleinbaas.

Baasboy,
Tell Baas Ben that,
Baas Kleinbaas says,
Baas says,
If Baas Ben want to see me
(Kleinbaas),
Baas Ben must come and
See me (Kleinbaas) here.

Thank you
Baas Kleinbaas,
I'll tell
Baas Ben that,
Baas Kleinbaas says,
Baas says,
If Baas Ben want to see
Baas Kleinbaas,
Baas Ben must come and see
Baas Kleinbaas here,
Baas Kleinbaas.
Goodbye
Baas Kleinbaas.

Baas Ben,
Baas Kleinbaas says,
I must come and tell
Baas Ben that,
Baas says,
If Baas Ben want to see
Baas Kleinbaas,
Baas Ben must come and see
Baas Kleinbaas there,
Baas Ben.
Baas Ben,
Baas Be-ne . . .
Baas Ben.
Goodbye
Baas Ben.

Mafika Gwala is not a prolific poet. I had read some of his work and met him in 1974 in Diakonia House in Braamfontein, where he was working on a Spro-Cas report. I suggested he should try to put a volume together, but heard nothing from him until, a year later, he came from his home in Natal to my office in Craighall, bringing with him a black binder with poems stuck in, handwritten on half-torn pages. It took our editor a lot of time to prepare the manuscript for the printer but Jol'iinkomo, his first volume, appeared in 1976, and included the following poem.

MAFIKA GWALA

The Shebeen Queen

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

on him.'

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

Sipho Sepamla had only published a few poems in various journals when I first met him in Cape Town at the conference Poetry '74, where he was reading his work. A week later at a two-day conference at the University of the Witwatersrand we met again and I asked him if he was ready to publish a volume. It took over a year before he came back to me, and in early 1975 he submitted the manuscript of Hurry Up To It!, his first volume, which we published the same year. It was the beginning of a long association and many books.

The poems selected are from 'The Blues is you in me (1976).

SIPHO SEPAMLA

Sixpence!

Mma lona wee!
What have they done to Sixpence?
'Took him away, you know
(And Tickey for that matter)

Replaced him with Watch-me-call
Five-cents

Now tell me
What can one do with that piece?

I used to buy mangola¹ for sixpence
And I'd live for six days

Gots! what can Five-cents do
Buy five days of labour?

Ha! Where's this relation from
Cost-of-living?

He's a no-good
If you ask me

I wish they take him away
And return to me Sixpence Mqombothi!²

1 Polony

2 Beer

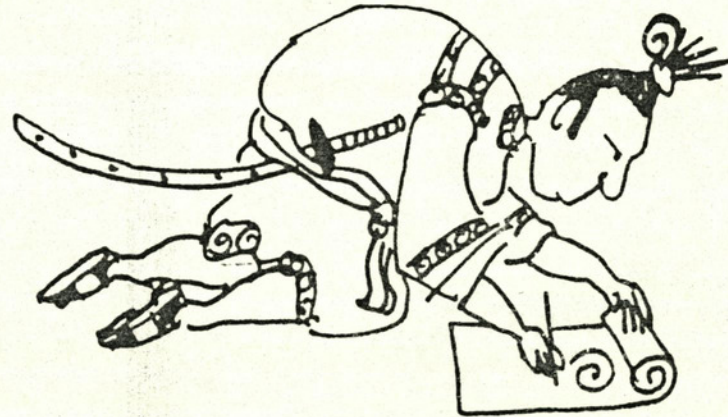
Double-talk

I was here when the windswept dust dunes
rose in the streets
each footfall of sweatstained man standing up dust
and minedump clouds were rising into the air
galloping like an army of ghosts
tickling the ear with whispering sands
teeth grinding grit on dry tongues

Now that long concrete necks crane and
are craning so impetuously into God's den
straining steel muscles that they may glimmer
in the rising and setting sun
I've watched expectantly. Not in vain. For I have
been

reading the message from the drums
a low-toned moan
that now rises into a delirious desperate cry
of forsaken purposes and discarded promises
ever said never seen

And so where I stand
I can barely hear people whisper
they hurry and they jostle
their voices a murmuring hum
over a huge enforced silence
while tattered heads have begun to nod
as if to say
it is all very well . . .



He fell from a piece of soap while slipping
 He hung from the ninth floor
 He washed from the ninth floor while slipping
 He hung from a piece of soap while washing

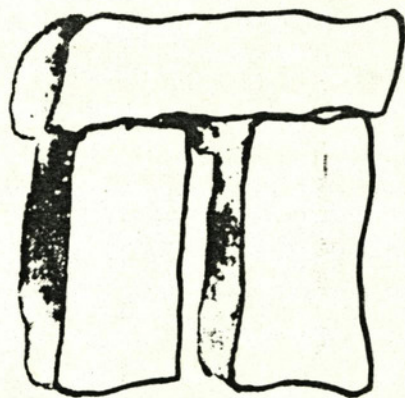
GUS FERGUSON

Cornerish

In ancient Greece a baker man
 Devised inventively to plan
 Euclidian eclairs & symmetrical shapes
 For sausage rolls or plane canapes.

His customers, it must be faced,
 Lacked basic mathematic taste
 Until he made, one day, a tasty
 Quadrilateral pasty:

Pythagoras passing, stopped and stared,
 "My Gosh!" he cried. "This pie are squared!"



MBUYISENI OSWALD MTSIALI

Pigeons at the Oppenheimer Park

I wonder why these pigeons in the Oppenheimer
 Park
 are never arrested and prosecuted for trespassing
 on private property and charged with public
 indecency.

Every day I see these insolent birds perched
 on 'Whites Only' benches, defying all authority.
 Don't they know of the Separate Amenities Act?
 A white policeman in full uniform, complete
 with a holstered .38 special, passes by
 without even raising a reprimanding finger
 at offenders who are flouting the law.
 They not only sit on the hallowed benches,
 they also mess them up with birdshit.

Oh! Holy Ideology! look at those two at the crest
 of the jumping impala, they are making love in full
 view of madams, hobos, giggling office girls.
 What is the world coming to?
 Where's the sacred Immorality Act? Sies!