

OKIKE

AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING



NUMBER 9

EDITED BY CHINUA ACHEBE

OKIKE

An African Journal of New Writing

Published three times a year

Number 9 : December, 1975

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Annual Subscription: \$9.00, £3.00, N5.00

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CONTENTS

The Scapegoat—Story	Nkem Nwankwo	1
Poem	B. Bayo	17
Poems	Andrew Salkey	18
Poem	Willy Nnorom	23
Drawings	Chike C. Aniakor	23,37,41,68
Poem	P. F. Wilmot	24
Poem	Tim Lilburn	27
Poem	Jenudo U. Oke	28
Poem	Taiwo Okusanya	29
Poem	Kalu Okpi	30
Poems	Mamman J. Vatsa	38
The Children—Story	Nadine Gordimer	42
Poems	John Pauker	50
✓ Postwar Popular Literature in Nigeria	Bernth Lindfors	52
Poem	Chinweizu	65
Poem	Olayinka Daini	69
✓ Wole Soyinka as a Novelist	Ossie Onuora Enekwe	72
Poem	Melvin Dixon	87
Reviews	Chinweizu	89
	C. L. Innes	106
	John Pemberton	109
	Ezekiel Mphahlele	117
News and Announcements		123
Notes on Contributors		128
Letters		131

Kofi Awoonor Arrested

Readers of OKIKE will be distressed to learn that Kofi Awoonor, our Contributing Editor, was arrested at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, on December 31 and has been held in detention since then. The Ghanaian authorities have not given any reason so far for his arrest and detention nor allowed his family or friends to contact him.

It is sadly ironic that Kofi Awoonor whose outstanding talent and achievement have given Ghana a place of high honour in contemporary African writing should so soon after his return to that country suffer imprisonment without charge or trial.

We of this journal, which Kofi has regularly graced with his writing, do appeal to the authorities in Ghana to restore his liberty to this fine poet, novelist and literary scholar.

February 16, 1976

Chinua Achebe

Nkem Nwankwo

THE SCAPEGOAT

"No, thank you very much," the voice, harsh and depressed, rasped through the cheap recorder, "I am no prophet. No."

"Waitin be that one?" somebody asked.

"The man just de craze" another volunteered.

The proud owner of the cheap recorder fiddled with some buttons to improve the quality of reception but only extinguished it altogether. The curious audience who were seated around a rough table laden with corked bottles of beer, jostled for places near the recorder. Urgent voices berated the owner.

"Abi you no fit play your own recorder?"

"Which kin man ne this?"

"The man na only journalist. They no sabe do anything."

"Give chance!"

"Commot for that place, you hear."

In the commotion, a few bottles of beer were overturned sending the rancid smell of beer to mix with the dead fish odour of the surrounding air. At the same time, cries of anguish announced the ruin of some favorite, shiny party dresses.

The owner of the recorder, wounded by the remarks, had snatched his possession and was angrily slouching away with it when he was halted by a shrill voice.

"Whosai ee de go?" A huge coal black hunchback was standing at the head of the table.

"Since you people no want to hear . . ."

"Shut up!" said the hunchback. "Bring that ting here make I hear."

"Yessir," said the journalist slouching back.

"Shut up!" said the hunchback for the benefit of the crowd, slashing the air with his fingers and finally bringing his right fist to the table toppling more bottles.

The crowd looked at him with great respect for he paid for all the beer.

"Give us more beer!" shrieked the hunchback adding an inaudible curse. A boy ran to him with obsequiously extended hands.

The hunchback dipped his hands roughly into the pockets of his white robes, came up empty and cursed violently. "Get

us the—you with the mouth of a pig," he gestured in the direction of the boy.

The boy stood stiffly obsequious but adamant. Young though he was, he had a vast experience of these big spenders and of their strategies of bluff when they were spent.

The hunchback searched frantically in the caverns of his billowing robes and still came up with nothing. None of the other drinkers offered to help, instead there was an unusually loud chatter as if to drown the embarrassment of the moment.

"Wey madam, you son of a —?"

"I de here," said madam who apparently had been keenly interested from a distance. A huge mass of flesh lumbered from a strategic corner of the pub and stood before the hunchback.

"Oga, wetin?" she asked deferentially.

"That thing with the —" the hunchback made a threatening lunge at the boy who retreated in mock fear and good-naturedly humoured the hunchback from the safety of distance.

"But, oga, we no sell for credit," said madam in as wheedling a tone as she could manage.

"Who want credit?" shrilled the hunchback dipping futilely into the robes again. Finally, it occurred to him to try his trousers and this time his hands came up clutching a few sodden notes which he tossed to the madam. She handed the notes to the boy with a wink of approval, and then instead of returning to her place placidly settled among the drinkers.

The pub which was variously known as Hilton Palace or Paradise was a sprawling shed made of wood and rusted aluminum. The drinkers had laid small rough tables end to end to make a party table, which dominated the long rectangular eating room. It was a busy morning; other customers came and went leaving half-eaten food and wet tables around which flies clustered.

The rest of the building was cut into little cages. In one, a dumb and deaf waiter guarded a huge refrigerator and from it reluctantly dispensed beer. In the next, a blowsy woman ladled out bowls of garri mixed with palm-oil stew.

There were other poky rooms, rented by the hour. Men constantly led sour-looking women into these. They would emerge, a few minutes later, with expressions of sheepish discontent.

The pub had a flaky, temporary look, like a squatters' shack which really was what it was for city government had banned construction on the beaches for fear of floods which had perennially been rumoured to be impending. To continue to operate, the owner constantly bought off city raiders with free beer, garri, and sex. In spite of everything, she had done very well. She had even managed to fence in her property with wooden boards painted in green, festive colours, never mind that small boys and hooligans found these walls ready ground for indecent graffiti (Madam toto na so so water! etc). To clinch her prosperity, she had gone fat. Before she started operating the Hilton Paradise, she had been cuddly. But two years after, she was more than ample: a fact for which many complimented her to her deep gratification.

The boy laid a tray of bottles in front of the hunchback and humorously ducked an unseen blow but the hunchback chose to ignore the gesture.

Scanning the appreciative faces turned to him, he pointed at one.

"Mr. Journalist."

The journalist left his place and came and stood deferentially by the hunchback.

"Mr. Journalist. Mr. Editor," said the hunchback contemptuously—

"Oga, I no be editor yet," smiled the journalist.

"You will. Mr. Editor-to-be, serve us the beer."

"Yes, sah!"

He began happily to fit a can opener to a bottle but stopped abruptly. His young, sweaty face lighted up with wonder. He shrieked:

"The lawyer!"

The cry was taken up by the hangers-on: "The lawyer! Mr. Lawyer!"

One of the gates leading out the compound had cranked open and a squat young man with a severely cicatriced face burst through it.

Deftly keeping a proper distance between himself and his admirers, the man walked up to the hunchback and greeted him:

"S.A.S.!" he roared.

"Hello, Mr. Lawyer," said the hunchback accepting his part in the ritual.

"Senior Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs." The Lawyer followed each pronouncement with sharp bows. "M. A. Oxon! You write it . . . Your pen write it they no dash you, M. A. Oxon."

There was loud applause which the lawyer hushed with an impatient gesture; he was not half done yet.

"P. P. E. Oxon," he recited. The hunchback calmly accepted the homage.

"Politics, Philosophy, Economics, Oxford University. S. A. S. Ministry of Foreign Affairs . . . Father! Bug that eats up books!" The Lawyer's performance went over biggest with him for by the time he concluded his piece, he had worked himself into a paroxysm of enjoyment.

The hunchback took it all with smug assurance and when the lawyer had concluded his recital grandly motioned him to sit. The Lawyer was elaborately preparing a place to sit when he noticed the journalist as if for the first time.

"Hey, you there, Jr. Journalist." He dragged the youth out of hearing. "Wey the money?" he whispered severely.

"I never been to office yet."

"Waitin you de do here?"

"Oga, S.A.S. de give us beer!"

"That's the only thing you journalists know about. Drink and women. Which time your people fit pay?"

"When I get to the office. This na big story. They go pay well, well. Plenty money."

"Sh!" the lawyer looked round guiltily to see if anyone had heard the awful word "money." Reassured, he changed back to an expression of severity.

"Your editor is a crook."

"Hai, oga Lawyer, how can you say that?"

"He is. Pure crook. If you people no pay me you will never receive another story from me again."

"We go pay."

"Where is the tape?"

"The tape—"

The lawyer stared in a way to suggest he had committed murder before and might do it again.

"I kept it at home," the journalist lied.

"But your people will pay?"

"They go pay."

The lawyer hissed sceptically. "Your editor is a crook."

He turned and with new-found sense of importance swaggered back to the table.

The journalist walked back in a subdued manner that suggested he was conscious of the honour done him in being picked from the rest of the drinkers to consult with the lawyer. He searched and found a pair of sunglasses and put it on. Afterwards whenever he spoke he touched the glasses.

The hunchback, still holding court, welcomed the journalist with an explosive shout.

"Mr. Editor!" He made it sound like an oath. "Whereishda-tape?"

The journalist shrunk into himself, darting guilty glances at the Lawyer.

"Play!" The hunchback banged a pudgy fist on the table causing a few of his guests to jump about in mock fear.

"But Oga"—began the journalist.

"We understand," said the hunchback in a tone he used when confounding a junior colleague at the Ministry. "The counsel for the Defense is here. With your permission, Mr. Lawyer."

The Lawyer hastily jumped up as if he had been accused. "I did my best," he stuttered. "It was a hopeless case from the start. I could have won it. But that man was crazy. I told him that in our country it is not what you know but who you know that matters. I told him to stoop to conquer. To lie down and beg for his life but he said no. He said he was innocent. Innocent! Who in this country is innocent? I warned him. It was not my fault."

"Yes, we understand," said the hunchback tolerantly. "Now we want to hear the tape—" "That's right," said the lawyer. "You hear what oga say. Play! Make we hear the man. After all in less than one hour the man go die!"

The Lawyer's eyes gleamed at the journalist with private menace but the journalist, not noticing, started the tape recorder going again.

What now emerged was some gibberish in many languages: *Confiteor deo omnipotenti . . . mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa . . .*

Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen bluhn

Im dunkeln Laub die Gold—Orangen gluhn

Steson, you who were with me in the ships at Mylae. I grow old.

Rhodope, where the mountains had ears to rapture. Confiteor. Mea culpa mea maxima culpa. I am not the lamb of god. I will not carry other men's sins . . . I did not make history . . . I did not make the Manichean world of black and white. I did not create the world. I will not carry your sins. *Confiteor . . . confiteor. Mea culpa, confiteor . . . Mariae semper virgini . . . mea culpa . . . mea maxima culpa . . .* I did not make history. Carry your own guilt of blood . . . I am no prophet . . . Mea culpa! Mea maxima culpa! Mea culpa.

There was general puzzlement and unease among drinkers; some who had a low tolerance level even hissed in discomfort. The hunchback's interjection "straight out of the Oxford Tripos" only added to the general frustration. It was the lawyer who finally provided a clue that broke the mystery. With a self congratulatory laugh he said "The man de pray before the Garden of Gethsemane."

'Prayer' and 'Gethsemane' rang bells to people who were brought up on the traditions of Holy Week, of the Way of the Cross and Palm Sunday. . . . Now they understood what the voice from the tape was about. When next he uttered that cry of despair they responded in unison:

"Amio!"

"Mea culpa."

"Amio!"

"Mea maxima culpa. I am no lamb of god who takest away the sins of the world."

"Amio!"

"Confiteor deo—God almighty."

"Amio!"

"Omnipotenti Almighty."

Ami! Ami!

"I am not the lamb of god . . . I did not make history. I will not take on the sins of the world . . . I will not take the burden of the black man. Your blood be on your own head. Carry your trouble commot. Your bloody deeds, pogroms, fratricide, your treachery and cowardice . . . I will not answer for the guilt of blood. You cannot lay the burden of history on me . . . History is bunk . . . The burden of your sins, of your death wish, of your blood lust. Carry the burden of your own guilt . . . Eat the flesh of your children and carry the burden of cannibalism."

"A . . . ami!"

"I am no Thracian Bard in Rhodope."

"Amio—"

"Mea culpa: Confiteor. Mea culpa . . . Eloi, Eloi! mea culpa."

The ritual was unexpectedly interrupted by the hunchback. A word from the tape had triggered a recollection of the modest intellectual harvests he had made from Oxford. His sensibility, blunted by years of disuse and drink, was ignited for a moment. He took from the voice a line from Milton and completed the quotation.

But drive far off the barbarous dissonance
Of Bacchus and his revellers, the race
Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard.
In Rhodope, where the woods and rocks had ears
To rapture, till the savage clamour drown'd . . .
Both harp and voice,—

The drinkers responded to the unexpected performance with a show of uneasy deference. But one slight, young girl did not care very much for it. She had fallen wholeheartedly into the spirit of the "amio" responses. It was fun, certainly more fun than sitting down solemnly and paying attention to boors. She was irritated by the hunchback's interruption and as is her wont whenever she was irritated she rounded at once on the irritant.

"I beg una wettin de do this oga?" The impact of her act was not so much in what she said as in her manner of saying it. It was as if she held the hunchback to account for a long series of exasperations. Her patience had finally snapped and given over to hatred and contempt.

The hunchback stopped short, staring at the girl with a mixture of shock and incredulity. He had no conceivable response to the girl's onslaught than dumb incomprehension.

The other drinkers reacted to the unmasking of their patron by seeking solicitously to cover his shattered image. The journalist hastily stopped the tape. The lawyer, deep in beer, called out: "Senior Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

The hunchback shrugged away this patent ploy. Perhaps the lawyer wanted more beer. The hunchback was determined not to give him any.

Madam tried also. Dramatically widening her large eyes to register shock, she darted a venomous look at the girl: "You better leave my house, you hear."

"Who want your house. You think say I no get home to go

to." The girl was a little overwhelmed at breaking up the party. But openly she maintained an attitude of scornful defiance. Madam did not really wish to tangle with her. The girl was full of viciousness. But many of Madam's customers fancied her hard adolescent body and Madam was not about to forgo the advantage. "No mine this ashawo," she said turning the full battery of her faded charms on the hunchback.

As if I needed comforting, thought the hunchback, bitterly. And if I did, would I go to such as she. The stupid bitch.

"You will always be my husband," Madame continued in her most wheedling tone. "My own husband. Owner of my vagina—"

The hunchback mentally brushed aside this offensive accusation. He was oppressed by a vague sense of self-contempt. What was he doing reading poetry to these rag-tag. In this seedy shack. And he one of the rulers of the land. No wonder the girl didn't honour him. The hunchback could not take his eyes and mind away from the slip of a girl with her fully developed bosom and large bottom. That kind of bottom he knew from experience went with a bushy mound. He momentarily fantasied the experience of pushing through the bush. Even her vulgarity and emptiness appealed to some gutter instinct in him. Only by fucking her would he have peace. The hunchback began to focus on a number of strata-gems. Before he could evolve something, his party suddenly broke up. There was a sound of a gun going off outside and the drinkers with cries of "they don come," stampeded out the gate.

The whole city, it appeared, had come to what became known afterwards as the "beach show"; the public execution of some reputedly dangerous felons. The crowds swarmed around the few trees that offered refuge from the tiny heat sparks that appeared to be falling from the stark sky. Others stood out, squirming, along the vast expanse of sand and dunes. All eyes were focused—though few really saw the exact details—on the preparation for the ceremony. Four stakes had been set up close to the shoreline. They formed suitably awe-inspiring symbols set against the endless sea, the sea that was such an apt repository for the souls and bodies of those who were to die. As if to complete the solemn cast, two priests, one Christian and the other Moslem, stood in self-conscious piety close by. Ministers of lesser deities, too, the well-known

beach prophets in their off-white robes and ascetic weather-beaten expressions were allowed to wander up and down in the arena set out for the execution. The rest of the spectators were sealed out by a barricade formed by soldiers with their arms linked.

One of the side features of the event that went over biggest with the crowd was the ceremonial march of the firing squad. The squad circled the stakes or simply marched past it all within the narrow arena marked out for the execution. One member of the squad was particularly striking. An old veteran of three wars, sashed in red and gold, he twirled his ceremonial stick to the beat of some imaginary music. He nearly dropped it that time but, there!, he was still in control, thank you. What a sharp old papa!

The squad commandant was roaring his head off, pleased with his squad and at being afforded a chance to show off their mettle. He was unprepared for what happened next. One of the soldiers, in a careless moment, had let his rifle slip through his hands. In attempting to retrieve it he pulled the safety catch and the gun went off.

The report of the gun was variously rumoured as the beginning of the execution by the people who had no access to the firing line. The commandant, temporarily losing control of himself, dashed for the fallen rifle, picked it up and pointed it at the unlucky soldier.

"Beg for your life," he shouted.

"Yes, sir, I beg."

"Tell me to shoot you dead!"

"No, oga, no!"

"You dare to tell me no?"

"No . . . Yes, oga."

"Ask me to kill you, I say ask me to kill you!"

"Yes, oga, kill me quick."

"I will shoot you dead, now, now. Beg for your life. Go on, ask me to shoot you dead!"

"I beg, oga, Don't! Shoot me dead!"

The sergeant was recalled to his duty by being aware of television cameras which had been brought up and of press cameras clicking at him. He hastily rammed the butt of the gun at the head of the prostrate soldier and for the benefit of the crowd and the cameras, deftly changed his manner to an attitude of casual elegance. . . .

The crowds turned their attention to more exciting scenes. A carnival spirit was abroad. Merchants had set up booths and marquees to sell roasted groundnut, ice-cream, trifles and bottled fresh water. A few drummers went from scene to scene soliciting patronage. Pickpockets, too, had a field day.

A woman victim who had lost some treasured trinket was inconsolable. "God go punish them," she shrieked raising her hands in a praying attitude to the skies. Her hair coiffure, fruit of many painful hours of the hot comb, was done up in a fashion which had taken its name from the anticipated public execution. It was called *Firing Squad*. Her long dress, cheaply modish, had picked up mud but the woman was oblivious of this as she wept and tried to elicit the sympathy of the crowd.

"Why you de bring your gold for this place?" one wag threw at her; "You think say this place na church?"

In spite of the heat and the dust, the spectators were determined to enjoy themselves. This was the first public show they were having in years. The three year civil war had almost killed good public entertainment. Many people had almost forgotten what a real civic show could really be with clowns and circuses, and conjurers and masqueraders. To enable the people to make the most of the event the city government had declared a public holiday and offices and shops had closed. The government saw that the people very much needed a diversion from the strains of peace. The civil war had its built-in diversions. There had been a sense of vicarious participation in the martial exploits of the national forces. The papers, radio and television were full of these acts of carnage. By land, sea, and air, rebels were daily wiped out in their thousands. The excitement the citizens felt in these exploits was undiluted by personal danger. The civil war was fought hundreds of miles away. Casualties among the gallant national forces were slight. Only the rebels did the dying and they were of a different race and besides were rebels.

It had been a good war in other respects. Like in all wars, the normal rules of a good life were suspended, rules about not killing people, rules about honesty in business and politics, rules about reverence for life and other people, rules about respecting women. The perennial losers, by the old rules, saw in war a chance to turn the tables. But it did not work out that way. The perennial winners with their strong networks in church, government, the universities, and the army, turned

the war to their own advantage. They were winners before the war, winners during and after the war. They may have indulged themselves in the rhetoric of war but they were too smart to go up to the front and risk their winners' skins. Instead they became armchair warriors whipping up war hysteria at the rear and parlaying it into lucrative war contracts. They made the war look attractive both to themselves and the perennial losers. It was a lovely war and few wanted it to end. But the rebels, blockaded and starved out, finally got tired of dying and starving and gave up. The world celebrated the magnanimity of the head of state in sparing the lives of these half-starved remnants.

However, for perennial losers peace brought disillusionment. They had been had, and there was the conspicuous material consumption of the perennial winners to remind them constantly of it. The amity and goodwill generated by the common front against the rebels disintegrated. There was again the prospect that the perennial losers, who outnumbered the perennial winners by far, might unite against the latter. The perennial winners were suddenly frightened by the smouldering resentment of the losers which found expression in all sorts of odd ways. A successful war contractor would drive by in his luxury Mercedes, past a crowd of ragged people, without really noticing them.

Instead of expressions of admiration and respect which were customary and which the winner would acknowledge as his due, he was greeted with shouts of "thief, thief"! A few stones might even be hurled at him. The contractor would be outraged. Why me, he would ask himself. It was certainly unusual in this normally polite, friendly town to have people hurl stones and shout thief at a man who had done nothing to them.

The contractor would order his chauffeur to move on home. He would resist the temptation to suborn the police to deal with the stone hurlers. For the police themselves were becoming restive and uncooperative. Like every other group, they were finding it difficult to adjust to bland peace-time conditions. The civil war had conferred enormous prestige to their profession.

The glamour of the army had rubbed off on the police.

The army were the heroes and saviours of their country. They became its cultural heroes. It was really remarkable how

high the prestige of the army had risen. Before the civil war, the local name for soldier was the equivalent of lout. Only drop-outs and losers went into the army. In those days, beautiful girls, always an index of status, would be ashamed to admit even a liaison with a soldier. But during the civil war soldiers became the very best matches. So were the policemen.

In an atmosphere of uncertainty and breakdown of all social norms, life was cheap and every civilian's life was potentially at the mercy of the policeman. People were unusually subdued at the mere sight of the man in uniform.

But the return of peace changed all that. People with the resilience of human beings were bouncing back to their former confidence. They began to make less and less of the mystique of the armed forces. A group of motor-park louts even forgot themselves so far as to beat up a soldier. And if they could do that to a soldier what could a policeman expect?

So the police, to their chagrin, had to be circumspect in proceeding against perennial losers at the request of perennial winners. There was one group of the perennial losers who were not content simply to hurl stones and shout "thief!" at their betters; they decided to take desperate measures to gain entry into the charmed circle. In the half-light, before the dawn, the transition from war to peace, when the rules of social life were decreed but not yet established, they made their desperate gamble, still relying on the weapons and rules of war.

The most visible symbol of perennial winnership is one's own car. Losers became winners when they had a car. The war had taught the desperate perennial losers that a quick way of owning a car was to kill a car-owner and seize his car.

In the first two months of peace, hundreds of car owners disappeared. Some were later dug out of shallow graves, others were never found. The acts of the desperate perennial losers set off a wave of terror which permeated the whole society.

So the government, made up of winners, had to contain the desperate losers. A decree was passed setting up special tribunals to try summarily people accused of robbery with arms. Convicts were to be summarily executed before a firing squad.

The beach show as the public execution came to be called was very popular. It felt good once again to be able to identify the enemies of the state and to know that something was

being done about them. For excitement, the beach show topped war communiques. It was one thing to read or hear of thousands being wiped out; it was another to watch, first hand, just one of those lives being snuffed out before one's eyes. It gave one a queer thrill.

The beach was seething now with overcrowding, noise, heat, and dust, and it was only a matter of time before the crowd, exasperated by the long wait, would break out into fights. Still more people were hurrying in. The tree-lined avenue leading into the beach had a two-mile nose-to-bumper car pile-up. Some drivers had baked in the sun for hours and were really in an ugly mood when two highway patrol officers in spruce white and khaki sputtered in on motor-cycles, sirens blaring. The message of the sirens was well taken: clear the road, an important official was on his way. It looked an impossible task but after only a few minutes it was accomplished, simply by forcing the cars into the median strip, where they lay in massed, smoky confusion.

A couple more police motor bike riders dashed up and sounded the all clear. They were followed almost immediately by a dozen uniformed out-riders in perfect four-deep formation. Then came a big Rolls Royce, more out-riders, and a long official motor-cade.

Word spread quickly that the head of state himself had come to conduct the public execution personally . . . that a visiting head of state was with him. Or was it the Red Cross? . . . International Observer Team to bear witness that the execution was humane? . . . As it turned out, it was not the head of state but the provincial governor who was known to enjoy doing things in style. As he stepped out of the Rolls Royce amid the clattering of salutes by armed soldiers and police, there were shouts of "His Excellency!" "showman!" "psychedelic colonel." The provincial governor gratefully waved a spruce fly whisk which he had taken to carrying as a means of reinforcing his flamboyant image. Usually he was dressed in expensive robes of generous folds but this time, because he was expecting to perform a military function, he was dressed in his bemedalled military uniform. He was very proud of this, for he was constantly touching it, pushing down his cap, pulling up his tie and affectionately patting down his military tunic.

The provincial governor, as is his wont, traveled with a

large retinue, who all came in the long official motorcade behind the Rolls Royce. A news report in the city's major newspaper, *The Daily Chronicle* the next day described this retinue as: *Service Heads, Commissioners, Chiefs and Elders, Religious and Community Leaders, Ambassadors and other Members of the Diplomatic Community, Distinguished Dignitaries. . . .*

The governor and the distinguished dignitaries moved on along a route created with difficulty by containing the crowds behind army barricades, unto a special grandstand prepared for them. The crowd became hushed for the first time that morning. As if to break the silence, the governor then rose, flipped his tie, rubbed down his tunic, smiled reassuringly and read a prepared statement. He thanked the people for the moral and other support which enabled the government not only to crush the rebels but to put the country once again on the path of its true greatness. The government, for its part, would ever hold the well-being of the people dear, hence the public execution which was meant to serve as a deterrent to acts of terrorism. The government had carefully reviewed the case of the felons and decided that the law should take its course.

At this point there was unexpected applause. The governor was nonplused wondering if he had said anything funny. When he resumed, after patting down his tunic most affectionately, he recounted the major achievement of the military regime since it was reluctantly forced to seize power. It had preserved unity, contained rebellion, built roads, and set up the armed robbery tribunal. He appealed to all law abiding men to keep the peace and attack corruption in public life.

The governor read dutifully the essay of one of his speech writers but when at the end he waved his whisk to shouts of "showman!" "psychedelic colonel!" all but the most sceptical would have thought he wrote it himself.

The governor's whisk, as it happened, reached a wider audience than the speech, for the beach had not been wired with loudspeakers so only a few people within earshot of the governor heard what he said. But most saw the whisk.

The final stamp of legality had now been placed on the execution. The head of the firing squad started his men on a solemn march. Another military detail hurried on to a Black Maria parked under a palm tree nearby and cordoned off with

soldiers. They emerged later escorting the three robbers. There were several howls of derision from the crowd and a big surge towards the prisoners almost as if some of the crowd wanted to have their scalp first. But the military barricades, between which the prisoners walked, held.

As it often happens, the three men did not quite come up to the expectations of the crowd. After the publicity given them in the press, radio, and television, they had in the public imagination taken on some star quality and were expected to manifest it. But they appeared quite ordinary. The old man, squat and baldheaded, dressed only in dirty shorts, staggered on in an absent-minded way. He appeared half-dead already. He certainly was not the stuff of which vicious robbers are made.

Only the second man had what one might call style. He was of a nondescript build with a pock-marked face but made up for this by dressing himself in robes made of imported expensive lace material and in golden charms and rings. He walked with exaggerated bravado and in response to cat-calls and whistles responded with a V-Sign. There were even perverse elements in the crowd who had the temerity to cheer.

It was really the third prisoner that most of the crowd had come to see because of his background which was academic, cosmopolitan and elitist. It was still a mystery how he came down from such a height to the rat holes haunted by human vermin whose lives were generally thought expendable.

If the crowd sought an explanation in his demeanour, they found none; all they saw was a young, well-fed, clean-cut, man who might have been handsome except that his face was distorted by the most inhuman rage. Spots of foam dribbled down the corners of his mouth and he was shouting what appeared to be a challenge to some forces well beyond the immediate crowd.

The prisoners were led to the stakes and trussed up. The old man submitted wearily. The well-dressed robber danced a jig, taunted his tormentors and finally yielded after a mocking victory sign. As for the third man, the 'doctor' as he was generally known, it required half a dozen men to subdue him, and even then he was still kicking and hurling unprintable epithets at the world. And when it came to the last religious rites he glared so maniacally at the gaunt military priest that the divine moved hastily to the two other prisoners. The 'doctor'

got no last rites.

At last all was subdued except for the sea which, though placidly indifferent at midstream, reared up an angry spume near the shore. The rage, however, blew up before it reached the sands.

The execution, the concerted fire of the firing squad, when it came was an anti-climax after the governor's solemn address. Certainly the impact could not be compared with the drama of similar executions in Hollywood crime or cowboy shows. The guns sounded anemic and one couldn't think of them doing much harm. But the prisoners were clearly dead as the surgeons confirmed.

The television cameras caught the death throes beautifully and the open mouth of the 'doctor,' shouting defiance, when blown up and spread across the whole front page of the *Daily Chronicle*, helped the paper to double its normal circulation.

The story of the man, reconstructed from apocryphal sources, was splashed in the inside pages. Most people came to one conclusion after reading the story.

"Na too much book kill'am."

B. Bayo

I LIVE ON THE TAIL-END OF THE WORLD

i live, i live
 i live
 i know i live
 who says he is not sure i live?
 who says he doubts i live?
 who says he is not certain?
 who says he cannot be sure?

i live . . .
 i know i live
 i live like a piece of rag
 i live like the remnant of hope
 i live like an amputated tail, on the tail-end of life
 eating away at the orange-peels of life
 and its sapless coats of thorny bananas
 pecking away at its stray crumbs of bread
 gobbling away at the vomited mess, of the fortunate friends of fate—

on the tail-end of the world—
 who says i do not live?
 on the tail-end of life?

Andrew Salkey

HOME PARABLES AND TWO POEMS

1. FRINGE BENEFITS

Through the rip in her gingham dress,
a slash of thigh streaked
high across the retina.

Lonely as a mouse, she'd come to town
to work as a servant girl,
in that house, in Stony Hill.

At the back, her shrunken room,
a convenient, early morning lay-by
for the drunken paymaster!

She'd said nothing about her three children
who stayed, at home, in Saint Elizabeth,
because she wasn't paid to talk.

Late that Saturday night, the paymaster
brought his five non-paying friends to her room,
but she refused without saying a word.

Later that drunken Sunday morning,
the paymaster sent her back to the country,
without his wife suspecting a thing.

But the fated girl from Saint Elizabeth
had the last laugh, as she pensively pressed
the bulging pockets of her gingham dress,

thought about her three children
and deliberated on the crisp reparations,
snug in the six wallets she'd just liberated.

2. STOCK-TAKING

She was a barmaid and a half,
caring profoundly for bottle and drinker
with a fierce Kingston pride.

Loss was today's gain of tourists;
profit, tomorrow's small change regulars,
their unbankable dreams and all.

Naturally, the bar wasn't hers,
but she managed like a burr
on a snapped shoe-string.

And then came that sudden strike
and the mouths to ply with credit
and the dreams she had to support.

In the end, the stock ran dry;
the owner refused to believe;
some of the regulars lost heart.

But she found a way round it,
by believing in the strike
and subsidizing it on the sly.

Bottles appeared on the shelves
from cool and unrevealed sources;
the owner turned a blind eye.

But what the louse hadn't seen was just
how far the ownership of the bar had changed;
it was now a repossessed *public* house.

3. FUTURISTIC HISTORY TEACHER

She'll say historically piquant,
conspiratorial things like, "Columbus,
that Genoese, was really a Jew, you know!

"He kept on fooling Ferdinand and Isabella
with promises of gold, but was actually looking
for a new home for the Jews, this side of the world."

Then, she'll sigh an under-celebrated Clio sigh,
and go on to add, "Why, of course, I must tell you
that the Caribbean was never intended for us!

"In fact, we wouldn't have been brought over, here,
at all, had Columbus's clandestine,
clannish plan worked out, all right.

"But, he believed his own story of gold, so much,
that it popped up to the surface
of everything he touched, coldly taking him over.

"There's absolutely no doubt whatsoever that both
Spain and the Jews were tricked; but, so were we
by that Euro-Arab commercial get-together."

Then, she'll hold the approved history text,
pretty far away from her formidable breasts,
and ask, "What's this, anyway?"

We'll know her own reply, so well,
that we'll raise the tops of our desks,
and yell, "Yet another slick conspiracy!"

DANGEROUS SINGER

(In memory of Vuyisile Mini)

*(Note: Vuyisile Mini, popular singer and songwriter,
was executed by the South African government, in 1964)*

The uncertain, collapsing family house
was never the same, again,
after those songs blew over the stunted grass;

the walls pinched the cracks shut;
the doors swung free, wide open
to the inciting wind curving off the cockpit hill;

and your words were good, always real,
repeated over the years, going deeper down
into the ground where dangerous songs live like roots.

SEEING IT THROUGH

"Above all, it [revolution in Africa] is made up of ordinary people. We are not born revolutionaries, just people who could no longer support a situation. You get caught up in a revolution and then you see it through."

—A *Frelimo* cadre talking to Barbara Cornwall, author of *The Bush Rebels*

In our open house
in underdevelopment,
first, saying no to oppression,
then, getting caught up
in the struggle for change,
lasting out
and seeing it through
are really all that matter.

In our broken house
in underdevelopment,
the trampled grass
and the dynamited walls
are the things
that pitch our responses forward
and make forests of our people.

In our new house,
because we've lasted out
and seen the long night through,
because we've humped our pain
and sliced away our self-contempt,
the new land will bind our promises,
sprout tall grass, again,
rebuild our defoliated dreams,
wait for our love, a second time,
and guide our scientific hand.

In our new open house,
all our children will be equal
and their parents will learn from them
those things that will last
and last
and last.

Willy Nnorom

THIS WORLD

Sons of men
frowning
like their mouth is full of quinine
daughters of women
smiling
like they won sweepstakes



P. F. Wilmot

THE PRODIGAL RETURNS

in the garden of the Lesbian Queen
the cat leapt on the toad
which in midflight
thought itself on the way to paradise
we are waiting for Her Majesty
Sir Christopher said
bearing the seals and instruments
of our Independence
isn't this a glorious day
this bright sun of Africa
doesn't this our Africa
have a bright future
like the cooling glitter of fine gold
above the broken land
above the savannah streaked with rust
the herdsman raised his gourd
empty now of tributes to the earth
heroes once walked here
the rich grass flowing
past ankles rough with dew
past memories of their ancestors
and traditions of piety for the earth
but now the plains are empty
of gods
of joy
of grief
and the consciousness of loss
across the tarnished land
the harsh sun brings no life
no saving crops
no witness of the passing
of the guardians of the earth
but is not this bright sun
the Energy of Africa
the sign of Africa's destiny
to which you

prodigal son returning
must give obeisance
raise your chalice
raise your richly-wrought goblet
to the new gods who are arriving
behold Her Majesty cometh
son of Africa returning
isn't it wonderful
she a white woman
coming all the way over here across the big waters
to give us this our Independence
above the empty plain
above this waste of a people
your tired flag is waving
in this chill wind of evening
robbed of substance
by the exhausts of expensive cars
your tired flag is waving
but this is the flag of Her Majesty
Sir Christopher said
our own is the other
of bright gold
streaked with the green of our rich fields
we commissioned the best man
in all Europe
that would do our Africa proud
are you not proud
child of Africa returning
of Africa and her flag of harvest
raise your bright chalice
and your richly-wrought goblet
filled with the sparkling dew
of the White Man
in my village
i did not dream
Champagne
could taste like this
so civilized and so rich and so refined
are these not sockets in your goblet Sir
where are the eyes
plucked from the skull of the hero
is this the skull of Lumumba

of Moumie
 of Ben Barka
 of Nkrumah
 burnished with the gold
 of Lonrho and Union Miniere and American Metals Climax and UAC
 and can you not taste the
 acid* Son of David
 in your expensive champagne
 today you name cities and weep
 for heroes you murdered yesterday
 weeping tears into sparkling Mums and Dom Perignon
 bubbling in the skull-goblets
 you fashioned from their deaths
 across the ravaged land
 across the plains emptied of people
 nothing is moving
 not even the cattle dying of trypanosomiasis
 the souls of children
 dead before the age of five
 the dying hulks which huddle in your squares
 nothing is moving
 except the cranes and bulldozers and steam shovels
 making the parking lot
 for the Chryslers
 the Citroens
 the Mercedes Benz
 and the air conditioned command Land Rovers
 of all the VVIPs
 who wait in the garden of the Lesbian
 to drink from the skulls of the heroes
 she keeps permanently
 on her gilded chest of drawers
 in a still corner of an empty room
 a blind man sings a tale no one can hear
 where are your eyes
 Son of Lucifer
 where are your eyes
 where are your eyes

*Scraps of Lumumba's mutilated body were said to have been dissolved in the sulfuric acid vats of Union Miniere.

Tim Lilburn

EASTER, NSUKKA

Christopher Okigbo, your petals lie
here, grey, returned
from the grave and breathless in the bone-glow
of phosphorous light—ghosts whose faces
fill with wings

Into the sun's ant-
hill you came, a
creature of iron
and teethmark, they
likened you
to a god

Christopher Okigbo.
your petals fell
here, mindflakes,
with worse than the fire
of burning aircraft
and our dreams, we woke
too late to
realize were just moths, seconds
before the stone candle's black mutilation

Jenudo U. Oke

DEAR BROTHERS & SISTERS

Democracy favors majority rule
tyranny enjoys minority rule.

Poverty befriends the majority
and wealth clings to the minority.

Democracy and poverty are twin sisters
and tyranny and wealth twin brothers.

Taiwo Okusanya

FOR MY DAUGHTER

I

The kernels speak
In fingered silence,
Fate unravelled in sixteen odu:
"You are the gift of joy
You are the one who brought
Joy on the edge of a cloud."
White cockerel and white cloth,
Accept my thanksgiving, *Ifa*.

II

The *egungun* who leaves home
Without asking your protection
Does so in peril.
I bring jars of palmoil,
The spattered entrails
Are on the face of the shrine;
Esu, god on the crossroads,
Don't fight my success.

III

Hear my cry
Ela, prime of the gods,
Hear my prayer;
Bless *Ibijoke*.

Kalu Okpi

THE ROAD OF LIFE

Just a little up the road—
 God is waiting . . .
 It is a peaceful road,
 Lined with flowers,
 And trees.
 A hopeful road.
 And I am walking along—
 With bright cheery steps.
 Smiling—
 Singing.
 And happy.
 It is a wide road . . .
 Full of Saints.
 And the angels are playing their harps.
 'Peace on Earth—
 And goodwill in heaven . . .'
 And meantime, I am walking along—
 Up the road.
 The roses are my kith . . .
 And the stars, my kin.
 I am on cloud ten.
 —Oh—
 What a beautiful world!
 Fate is my love.
 And Artemis—
 My darling.
 And just a little up the road—
 God is waiting.
 —Soon—
 We will meet,
 Embrace—
 And smile.
 And then I will Know.
 I will know . . .
 All about all.
 Just a little more.

Any minute now.
—Then—
—Suddenly—
In front of me—
Across my path . . .
There is an abyss.
A horrible dark abyss.
I stop dead.
The smile goes from my face.
And the song dies on my lips.
I stop . . .
And stare,
At the abyss.
I rub my eyes—
And pinch myself.
It hurts.
No doubt about it—
I am awake!
It is an abyss in reality.
So . . .
I can't go on.
I can't cross.
I have to stop.
But God is waiting . . .
On the other side.
I stop and think—
Reason with myself.
I can't go on because of the abyss.
Again, I can't stand here for ever.
So—
I have to go back.
Back the way I came . . .
Away from God.
Towards the other side.
I turn back.
I start going back . . .
With drooping shoulders.
In a daze.
Sorely wounded.
My soul starts dying—
Slowly . . .
But dying all the same.
I start crawling back.

The flowers—
And the trees I saw—
Coming up . . .
Are no longer there . . .
Going down.
No wait!
They are still there.
But they have changed
Overturned.
Now their roots are up.
Their blossoms and leaves are down . . .
In the ground.
Everything has changed.
Even the road.
It is no longer wide . . .
And beautiful.
The saints have gone.
And the angels—
Have tails now—
And horns.
In place of harps, they tote tridents.
I realize—
I am still going down the road . . .
Only—
It's not the same road . . .
Anymore.
I am going down—
Down—
Into, I don't know what.
I don't know it but—
Belzeeb is waiting—
With his three headed bitch.
I don't know it though.
I'm still moving.
Walking along—
Slowly—
I realize very slowly that I am dead.
Dead inside.
I start knowing all—
And all.
Not the all and all—
God would have revealed . . .

But another one.
The big dark truth.
I start knowing the dark truth . . .
Not slowly but in a rush.
And pretty soon,
I know all of it.
Then, I pause.
I stop walking—
I turn—
And look back,
Up the road . . .
At God.
He is far away now—
But I can still see him.
I want to go to him.
I turn and start going back,
Then I remember—
There is an Abyss Down the Road.
In between us.
—So—
I stop again.
And a bitter sigh escapes from my soul.
The tears start pouring.
I turn again.
And the tears stop.
And freeze.
I start—
Walking down the road again.
My footsteps quicken.
—Suddenly—
I realize I am running.
I am racing—
—Towards—
—I don't know it—
But towards Belzeeb.
There is a dark horrible beauty . . .
About the road now.
At first I confuse it with the beauty—
Up the road.
But it is not.
Granted, there is a beauty about the road.
—But—

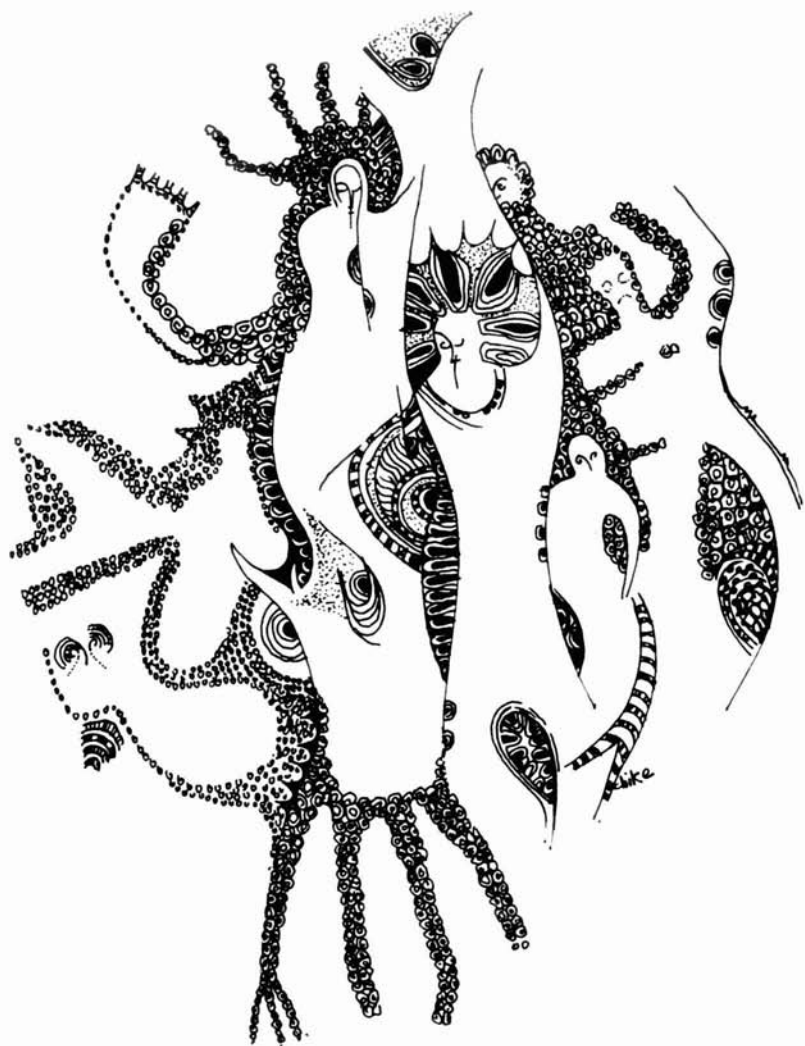
The beauty is ugly.
 Meanwhile . . .
 I am still running down the road.
 Racing.
 —Suddenly—
 I stop abruptly.
 It is the end of the road.
 The dead end.
 I stop and look.
 Then.
 Slowly.
 I begin to see.
 I begin to see through the fog.
 I see . . .
 What is at the end of the road.
 WHO is at the end of the road.
 My mouth falls open.
 I see Belzeeb
 —Because—
 It is none other than Belzeeb—
 Who has been waiting for me—
 Down the road . . .
 All along
 Before I can think—
 Belzeeb steps forward—
 And embraces me,
 Just like I would have embraced God.
 Only this time . . .
 It is Belzeeb.
 He embraces me . . .
 And suddenly again . . .
 I know all and all—
 And all!
 How many truths are there really?
 I know all about the darkness.
 And all about the dark.
 So by contrast—
 I can see . . .
 All about the light.
 But—
 The light is so far away now . . .
 That . . .

Even though I know it is there,
The million miles in between us,
Is just too far.
I start forgetting.
I start forgetting about the light.
Quickly.
Too quickly.
I put in my nationalism papers for Belzeeb's . . .
For Belzeeb's dark and ugly realm.
But then—
I think again.
I have to decide now.
At long last . . .
There are only two things I can do.
I can stay with Belzeeb . . .
In his beaugly abode—
Amongst sweet dark revelry.

OR

I can turn back.
Turn back—
Towards God.
I know though—
That the abyss is still there.
And that . . . God is a million miles away,
And that . . .
Chances are I'll never get there
All the same—
The main point is—
It is possible to go back.
I look around . . .
Around Belzeeb's domain.
Then I turn and strain my eyes—
And faintly discern God far up the road.
Far across the horrible abyss.
Which is it to be?
The choice is mine.
Mine only.
At long last, it is time to decide.
The moment for which I was born . . .
The reason for my existence . . .
Stares me in the face.
What is it to be?

Up or down? . . .
Up—
Or
Down? . . .
Instinctively, I realize that,
I have had to decide on this very question . . .
In other worlds.
And that—
I will have to decide on this very question
In worlds to come.
I know though—
It won't be ad infinitum.
It will only have the chance . . .
For only about . . .
Two or three eternities.
But each decision counts.
I look at Belzeeb—
And I look at God.
The choice is mine—
Once again.
I ask myself . . .
What is it to be old buddy?



Mamman J. Vatsa

POEMS

HEAD NA KING

Head na king
And king no dey
Carry load.
Look man wan
Look me disgrace.
Yi don carry meat
Enter my house for sale
Ebin if na my shokoto,
I go sale buy am all
I go sale buy am all.
Head na king

SATURDAY AT IKOK

Today na big day
Man must drink
From dis funda*
To dat funda
Woman must drink
Man from funda
To funda

*funda—hotel

YAMANKORO*

Big like Cameroon coco yam.
If you wan dry am,
Make you buy alum
Look man wey dey hungry
Dey throw way better meal.

*Yamankoro—Snail

ASEWO

Butu, butu, Cameroon insect.
Man wey no wan scratch him body
make e no look you for face
Like Cameroon man dey say,
butu, butu na our country ting.



Nadine Gordimer

THE CHILDREN

The farm children play together when they are small; but once the white children go away to school they soon don't play together anymore, even in the holidays. Although most of the black children get some sort of schooling, they drop every year farther behind the grades passed by the white children; the childish vocabulary, the child's exploration of the adventurous possibilities of dam, koppies, mealie lands and veld—there comes a time when the white children have surpassed these with the vocabulary of boarding-school and the possibilities of inter-school sports matches and the kind of adventures seen at the cinema. This usefully coincides with the age of twelve or thirteen; so that by the time early adolescence is reached, the black children are making, along with the bodily changes common to all, an easy transition to adult forms of address, beginning to call their old playmates "miss" and "baasie," little master.

The trouble was Paulus Eysendyck did not seem to realise that Thebedi was now simply one of the crowd of farm children down at the kraal, recognisable in his sisters' old clothes. The first Christmas holidays after he had gone to boarding-school he brought home for Thebedi a painted box he had made in his woodwork class. He had to give it to her secretly because he had nothing for the other children at the kraal. And she gave him, before he went back to school, a bracelet she had made of thin brass wire and the grey-and-white beans of the castor oil crop his father cultivated. (When they used to play together, she was the one who had taught Paulus how to make clay oxen for their toy spans.) There was a craze, even in the *platteland* towns like the one where he was at school, for boys to wear elephant hair and other bracelets beside their watchstraps; his was admired, friends asked him to get similar ones for them. He said the natives made them on his father's farm and he would try.

When he was fifteen, six feet tall, and tramping round at school dances with the girls from the "sister" school in the

same town; when he had learnt how to tease and flirt and fondle quite intimately these girls who were the daughters of prosperous farmers like his father; when he had even met one who, at a wedding he had attended with his parents on a nearby farm, had let him do with her in a locked storeroom what people did when they made love—when he was as far from his childhood as all this, he still brought home from a shop in town a red plastic belt and gilt hoop earrings for the black girl, Thebedi. She told her father the missus had given these to her as a reward for some work she had done—it was true she sometimes was called to help out in the farmhouse. She told the girls in the kraal that she had a sweetheart nobody knew about, far away, away on another farm, and they giggled, and teased, and admired her. There was a boy in the kraal called Njabulo who said he wished he could have bought her a belt and earrings.

When the farmer's son was home for the holidays she wandered far from the kraal and her companions. He went for walks alone. They had not arranged this; it was an urge each followed independently. He knew it was she, from a long way off. She knew that his dog would not bark at her. Down at the dried-up river-bed where five or six years ago the children had caught a leguaan one great day, a creature that combined ideally the size and ferocious aspect of the crocodile with the harmlessness of the lizard, they squatted side by side on the earth bank. He told her traveller's tales: about school, about the punishments at school, particularly, exaggerating both their nature and his indifference to them. He told her about the town of Middleburg, which she had never seen. She had nothing to tell but she prompted with many questions, like any good listener. While he talked he twisted and tugged at the roots of white stinkwood and Cape willow trees that looped out of the eroded earth around them. It had always been a good spot for children's games, down there hidden by the mesh of old, ant-eaten trees held in place by vigorous ones, wild asparagus bushing up between the trunks, and here and there prickly pear cactus sunken-skinned and bristly, like an old man's face, keeping alive sapless until the next rainy season. She punctured the dry hide of a prickly pear again and again with a sharp stick while she listened. She laughed a lot at what he told her, sometimes dropping her face on her knees, sharing amusement with the cool shady

