

The DEATH of the POET



Walter Chakela

Worker 1:

(Exclaiming in sudden shock)

No! This can't be true!

Worker 2:

What's wrong now, Kgositsile?

Worker 1:

Look at the eleventh page of the newspaper

Worker 3 looks at the said page, but cannot see anything

Worker 2:

I don't see anything here. What are you talking about.

Worker 1:

That small column hidden in the left corner of the paper.

Worker 1:

(Reading the column).

The poet laureate of the township dies in hospital.

(Turning to Worker 1)

Worker 2:

What are they...

Worker 1.

(Interrupting him)

They are referring to Ingoapele Madingoan. They are referring to the people's poet himself.

Worker 3:

But I thought the people's poet was.....

Worker 1:

(In a sudden outburst)

Nobody is the people's poet but him!

Worker 3:

I was just... never mind.

Worker 1:

(More to himself).

Why now, poet? Why now and not earlier or later. Now was not the right time for your departure. Earlier would have been more tolerable, for those were times of death. Later would have been better, for then, surely, you would have finished your task. Now is too late and too soon. By God, how can we lose you now, poet. It is now that we need you to give us your clarion call: On your marks, get set, ready, go! Run Africa! We need to run poet.

(The others are shocked at the depth of his hurt, and choose to keep quiet as he continues to utter these words:)

How

Do I sum you up

Poet

Do I

Call you names

Couched in flowery language

Extolling the virtues

Of your poetry

You

Frowned upon

Such unpropitious utterings alive

And surely won't

Accept them
In your now
Ancestral abode

Should I
Even
Try to employ
The use of words
Inarticulate words
For
I do not possess
Your eloquence -
To
Sketch images
Of Your life
How
Do I
Begin
To paint
This canvass
In colours
Connoting
Your life
Your extraordinary life
How
Do I
Capture
The cadence
Of
Your thunderous voice
At
Regina Mundi
Or
At
Avalon cemetery
When
The bones
Of a revolutionary
Were interred
For eternal rest
I
Can only say
What I know
I
Can only recount
What my memory recalls
Moments
Events
Of
Momentous significance

With you
a central figure

I remember
That Saturday
At Funda Centre
That Saturday in Soweto
At the height
Of PW Botha's emergency
The occasion:
Readings from
Zimbabwean literature
You
On the chair
Yes

I remember the day so well
We

All of us came
Writers
And

Non-writers
Poets
And Non-Poets
Or

Hope-to-be-poets-one-day-
When-the-inspiration-comes

Yes

We

All of us came

And

Found

A party of

Literature enthusiasts

From

Botha's security police

Armed

Not with aesthetic sensibilities

Like the rest of us

But

Armed to the teeth

With

Machine guns

And armored vehicles

On

Your inquiry

At the reason

For the heavy artillery

Came the answer:

We

Have not come

Like everybody else

To attend the reading

We were all

Stunned

By this incongruous spectacle

And

The equally incongruous answer

I could not help

But be reminded

Of

Goebbels

And

Culture

At the mention of it

He is said

To have reached

For his gun

I

Remember the look

On your face

when you addressed

The packed theatre

This was

Just

Another form of censorship

The reading must go on

We must not

Be intimidated

The reading must go on

You

Said this

Taking your position

At the helm of ceremonies

And

Gaveling the proceedings

Into order

Poet

We

Were all scared

Though maintaining

a steely exterior

Like

An experienced revolutionary

You

Were wise to

The futility

Of prolonging this reading

For more than necessary

Under such provocative conditions

But
 You were equally wise
 To the historical significance
 Offered
 By this confrontation
 Of
 Poetry
 and
 The guns of apartheid
 So
 The reading went on
 The words
 Of
 Our Zimbabwean comrades
 Filled the theatre
 Though only
 For
 A symbolic while
 Before you call it
 To strategic end
 You
 Had made
 The critical point
 You
 Had consolidated
 This moment
 This
 Event
 For posterity


I
 Remember
 Poet
 The spirit
 You instilled in the people
 When you read
Africa my beginning
 I don't remember
 Any poem
 In the history
 Our literature
 That so stirred the people
 As this one
 In that sonorous voice
 You bellowed:
 Freedom
 Is the law of nature
 Justice
 Is deeply rooted
 In the universal order of things
 I am

Because
 You are
 Because you are
 I am
 This
 Was how
 You whipped
 Your audience
 Into a poetic frenzy


 The relationship
 Between
 People and their poets
 Is much distorted these days
 But
 I suppose
 The poetry
 Written by true poets
 Will live
 After them

I remember
 Your deep concern
 Poet
 About our skewed remembrances
 Of
 Our heroes of struggle
 Where
 In the scheme of things
 Are the names of
 Mofutsanyane
 Morolong
 Biko
 And others
 That you named
 In rapid succession
 You asked
 We
 Forget the names
 Of
 Our heroes
 At our peril
 You opined
 You
 Are now gone
 To be
 In the illustrious company
 Of
 Plaatje
 Mofolo

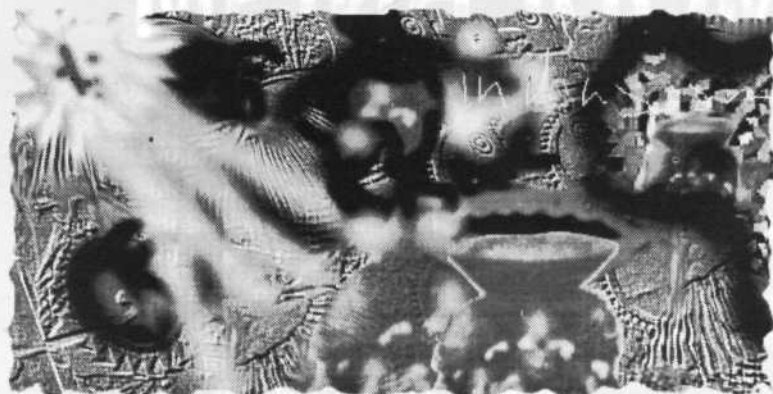
Monyaise
 I
 Can see
 The smile
 On your face
 When you ponder
 The irony that
 We envy you
 The company
 But
 Not the journey
 I
 Have no doubt
 Poet
 That
 You will
 Acquit yourself well
 In that community of giants
 LIGHTS FADE



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