

Hein Willemse Es'kia Mphahlele – a doyen
of African literature

Es'kia Mphahlele is one of the doyens of African literature. Throughout Africa, Europe and the United States of America he has played a major role in the development, teaching and promotion of African literature. He has written autobiographies, criticism, works of fiction, poetry, plays and essays. Throughout his career he has brought dynamism, individuality and an unremitting clarity of purpose to African Letters. In a profound sense he has promoted through his own life, his writing and his often-controversial career the dignity of ordinary people and specifically the well-being of black South Africans. Chabani Manganyi, Mphahlele's biographer, in his introduction to *Bury me at the marketplace*, characterises his subject as "a voice in the prophetic mode" (1983: 1). Indeed, from his earliest writings Mphahlele has attempted to grapple with and define the essential humanity of people. In this sense he became one of the most eloquent formulators of intellectual resistance to apartheid. Although he wrote exclusively in English he has through his writings transcended the narrow confines of ethnicity and language to promote what he has called African Humanism – *Ubuntu*, *Botho*, *Vumunhu*, *Vhuthu* – an awareness of African values and the generosity of ordinary human beings, reaching beyond voyeuristic glances through the keyhole – in contradistinction to his own experience: "In Southern Africa, the black writer talks best about the ghetto life he knows; the white writer best about his own ghetto life. We see each other, black and white, as it were through a keyhole" (Mphahlele, 1962: 81).

Ezekiel Mphahlele was born on 17 December 1919 in Cape Location, Marabastad, Pretoria. He spent his early youth as a goatherd for his grandmother in Maupaneng, near Pietersburg. He first learned to read at the age of 13. He attended schools in Marabastad and St. Peter's in Johannesburg and received his teacher's training between 1939 and 1940 at Adams College, Amanzimtoti. In 1949, after studies through correspondence, the University of South Africa awarded him a BA degree.

He completed his Honours degree in English (1955) and M.A. degree in English (*cum laude*, 1957) at the same institution. In 1968 he was awarded a Ph.D. in Creative Writing from the University of Denver, Colorado, USA.

His career as a working man was chequered, bearing the imprints of the previous South African government's unrelenting control over black people's lives and the restless life of the itinerant exile. While studying for his matriculation certificate he worked as a clerk, shorthand typist and instructor to the blind at the Enzenzeleni Blind Institute in Roodepoort. In 1945 he joined Orlando High School in Johannesburg as a teacher of Afrikaans and English. Three years after obtaining his first degree he was banned from teaching in Government-controlled schools because of his expressed opposition to the introduction of Bantu Education. He went into self-imposed exile in Lesotho where he taught at the Basutoland High School. In 1955 he returned to Johannesburg where he worked as a journalist at *Drum* magazine. With increasing government pressure he left South Africa in 1957 for Nigeria. There he taught English at C.M.S. Grammar School and the University of Ibadan. He co-founded the Mbari Writers and Artists Club and became an editor for the pioneering Nigerian literary journal *Black Orpheus*. He continued to work in several other West African countries and France. In the French capital he became the director of the Africa Programme of the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

By 1963 he could not resist Africa's call. He left his position in Paris to settle in Nairobi, Kenya where he took up a position as the director of the Chemchemi Creative Centre. Two years later he joined the University College in Nairobi. In 1966, at the age of 46, he won a scholarship to read for a Ph. D. in Creative Writing at the University of Denver. In 1968, after the completion of his studies, he was appointed senior lecturer in English at the University of Zambia. In 1970 he returned as Associate Professor in English to the University of Denver. Four years later he was appointed Full Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, USA.

In 1976 he visited South Africa on a temporary visa and took the brave and controversial step of returning permanently the following year. Considering the political environment of the mid-seventies, it was no surprise that the Minister of Bantu Education vetoed his appointment as Chair of the Department of English at the University of the North. As an alternative he took up the undemanding position of an inspector of education in the Lebowa homeland. In 1979 he became

Senior Fellow and later Professor of African literature at the University of the Witwatersrand.

His first collection of short stories, *Man Must Live and Other Stories*, was produced in 1946. In 1959 his most important earlier work, his autobiography *Down Second Avenue*, was published to high acclaim, followed by *The Living and the Dead and Other Stories* (1961) and *The African Image* (1962). He compiled several collections of African writing, among others *Modern African Stories* (1964) and *African Writing Today* (1967). His second collection of short stories, *In Corner B and Other Stories*, became available in 1967.

In 1971 his novel, *The Wanderers*, submitted as his doctoral dissertation, came to print, followed by a collection of essays, *Voices in the Whirlwind and Other Essays*. A second novel, *Chirundu*, was published in 1980, followed in 1981 by *The Unbroken Song* (also published in the USA as *Renewal Time*, 1988), a selection of collected writings. The second instalment of his autobiographical writing was published under the title *Afrika My Music: An Autobiography* (1983). In 1984 he published a children's story, *Father Come Home*. During 2002 a selection of his unpublished papers on education, culture, social consciousness, literary appreciation and African Humanism appeared under the title *Es'kia*.

Mphahlele's poetically written memoir *Down Second Avenue* introduced readers of South African literature to a life that was lived in the poverty of rural Maupaneng and the urban slums of Pretoria as well as the uncertainties and restrictions faced by black professionals. During the late 1950s and 1960s, following in the wake of writers such as Peter Abrahams, he became one of the most important South African writers to define the lives of black South Africans living under apartheid. The autobiography also marks the beginning of his exile, beset by new uncertainties: "I'm breathing the new air of freedom, and now, the barrel of gall has no bottom any more. I shall soon know what to do with this new freedom. For the moment, I'm still baffled, and my canoe still feels the momentum that launched it in Second Avenue. But what a glorious sense of release!" (Mphahlele, 1959: 220). When *Down Second Avenue* was published African Literature as an overarching concept was relatively new and autobiographies by African writers were virtually unknown. For these reasons and the book's intrinsic qualities it promptly became one of the classics of African literature and has been translated into several languages.

Whereas *Down Second Avenue* builds up to the narrator's eventual self-imposed exile, the second part of his autobiographical writing,

Afrika My Music, stands in stark contrast to his earlier work. The book chronicles his controversial return to South Africa, when the country was still under the control of the same political party as when he left twenty years earlier. As could be expected, the book rationalises his return to the country, “the tyranny of place”, as he often calls it: “My very return is a compromise between the outsider who did not have to be bullied by place in other lands (and yet wanted a place, badly) and the insider who has an irrepressible attachment to ancestral place” (Mphahlele, 1984: 11). Having made the sacrifice of returning to South Africa and leaving a tenured, well-paying, prestigious position, he found that the place he hankered for still had much of the old sameness: “After twenty years in the international community, where merits counts most in my line of work (...) I had returned to a country where the black has learned to wait, endure, survive” (Mphahlele, 1984: 3-4).

Since he is the quintessential autobiographical chronicler Mphahlele’s work bears the imprint of his life, those of his family and friends and those of people whose lives intersect with his. Overall, inner strength, diversity and complexity marked the characterisations in his short fiction and novels. These works are often set in the well-known environments of rural and urban South Africa where the concept “tyranny of place” takes on an ironic and overwhelming twist or the tensions between African mythology and Western expectations can be felt in a novel like *Chirundu*. In *The Wanderers*, he not only explores the tensions between characters and their backgrounds, but he also uses it as a launch pad for a forceful exposition of the demand for dignity and the promise that African Humanism confers on fellow human beings:

The African sage says nothing belongs to you except what you have eaten: that is the only thing you can be sure of. He says you are a person because of other people. He says share with others what you have and the ancestors will sleep in peace and that will bring you peace. He says what is food that you should refuse to give it to others – what is it but decayed matter that sticks in the teeth? He says stand up and give place to the older man to sit. He says if you do not greet me you must be my enemy. He says a guest has short horns: he cannot take liberties. But you must never throw a visitor out or do him ill. He says a woman is like a calabash: do not kick it around, it holds your water, your milk, it gives generously (Mphahlele, 1971: 344).

The African Image is a seminal work of criticism. Mphahlele was the first black South African to be acknowledged as one of the more important literary critics on the continent. In this collection, as in many subsequent essays as well as his latest collection, *Es'kia*, he has written on the role and place of the African writer and critic, the African intellectual, the challenges of education and the development of appropriate literary models. In his first major critical work he introduced, like Frantz Fanon and Aime Cesaire, what was to become known as the decolonisation of language and literature and he thereby contributed to the development of Postcolonial Studies. He characterised the Afrikaans and South African literature written in English of the early to mid-twentieth century as "gloating literatures", in the case of Afrikaans a literature that is "part of a defensive mechanism" (Mphahlele 1962: 132). But as always he recognised the commonality of the restrictive bonds that enveloped all South Africans: "We are all trapped, black and white, in South Africa. Ours is a history of frontier wars, covered wagon invasions, racial strife. Our literature must perforce record this. Racial strife is our way of life" (Mphahlele, 1962: 133). Notwithstanding these sordid histories, Mphahlele argues that relationships in a democratic South Africa have to be forged across old chasms, finding new ways of communication: "[The traditional nationalisms] may respectively seek a new anchor, a new basis and rationale, a new meaning within the framework of ethnic interaction and, therefore, new modes of cultural expression" (Mphahlele, 2002: 250). To this end the Es'kia Institute was established recently. It focuses on the distribution of literary work to schools in South Africa, with the purpose of promoting creative artistic efforts. This innovation programme also aims to inform, educate and develop skills, participation and an appreciation of the African heritage.

Over the years Mphahlele has received many honours. His life has been chronicled and researched in biographies, such as those of Ursula Barnett's *Ezekiel Mphahlele* (1976) and Chabani Manganyi's *Exiles and Homecomings* (1983). Catherine Woeber and John Read have produced *Es'kia Mphahlele: A Bibliography* (1989), while Peter N. Thuynsma edited *Footprints Along the Way*, a tribute to Mphahlele. In manuscript form *The Wanderers* won the annual African Arts literary competition (1969) of the University of California's African Studies Center. In 1982 the University of Pennsylvania awarded him an honorary doctorate in Humane Letters; the University of Natal accorded him a similar accolade in Literature (1983), followed by Rhodes University in 1986 and the

University of Cape Town in 2004. His *alma mater*, the University of Denver, conferred an honorary degree on him in 1994. In 1986 the French government awarded him the *Ordre des Palmes* in recognition of his contribution to French language and culture. The English Academy of Southern Africa's gold medal, their most prestigious award, for distinguished service to English, was awarded to him in 1994. The World Economic Forum awarded Mphahlele its Chrystal Award for Outstanding Service to Arts and Culture (1998). The South African government recognised his stature with the Order of the Southern Cross in 2000. In the same year he also received the Titan Literature Award as Writer of the Century.

For the reasons set out above the Departments of African Languages, Afrikaans and English, recommend that the University of Pretoria awards an honorary degree in the Humanities and Literature to Es'kia Mphahlele, one of this country's and, in particular, one of this city's most deserving sons.

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Es'kia Mphahlele Different times demand, and bring,
different answers: random thoughts
on intellectuals

A graduation address at the University of Pretoria,
delivered on 23rd April 2004

Not all academics are intellectuals: intellectuals in the sense in which we speak of those who are well educated and enjoy activities in which you have to think *seriously* about matters, e.g. social, political, economic, scientific, cultural and generally what humans are about. Academics who are not inclined to think profoundly merely work like a machine. For sure they dutifully deliver lectures, mark students' exercises, attend committee meetings, give superficial thought to some of the challenging student writing and to the texts they read in preparation for lectures. This kind of person is happy enough to have found sheltered employment such as academic life readily provides.

At the middle level of the enlightened zone is the amorphous mass we call the intelligentsia, only some of whom are intellectuals and or self-motivated apprentices for the status. They concern themselves with what the media passes on to us; they may read a full-length book or two in a year beyond the academic textbook if they are busy upgrading themselves for their career. Among the intelligentsia are teachers, lawyers, medical doctors, nurses, social workers, business consultants, business proprietors, those who manage the public service, do clerical work of various types in administration; engage in functions of distribution, organisation; some of them political party hacks. Outside the professions most of them take instructions and are hardly given the chance to make decisions. Few rise above the rank of functionary and become "direct producers in the sphere of ideology and culture", to quote the English social critic Raymond Williams, even when their work demands mental exertion.

Intellectuals read widely, their thinking powers are constantly grinding, feeling challenged. Thinking is not a pleasant pastime, but intellectuals worthy of the name enjoy it, they are in their element – handling ideas and concepts, questioning motives, the worth of national leaders, the state of the nation, national culture and sub-cultures, and so on. The intellectual distrust formulae except those based on mecha-

nistic processes. Distrusted also is journalistic analysis, where journalism refers to the surface appearance of events and personalities. The intellectual thinks through a proposition or hypothesis, builds up conceptually towards a resolution, working out a reconciliation between the objective and the subjective. Conceptualisation is the paramount agent here, and creativity must qualify one for the status. The closeted intellectual is of no use to his/her society.

The meanings of *intellectual*, *intellectualism*, *intelligentsia* have followed the changes of social attitudes since the mid-twentieth century. *Intellectual* today is often used as a neutral term, without any overtones. Williams observes that "within universities the distinction is sometimes made between *specialists* or *professionals* with limited interests and *intellectuals* with wider interests". In the middle of the 20th century the black working class contemptuously referred to an intellectual, especially the teacher and the vocal commentator on local and national politics as a "situation" (e.g. one of those "situations" that throw in references at branch and national meetings to Frantz Fanon, or W. E. B. DuBois or Chairman Mao Tse Tung, Karl Marx, the dictatorship of the proletariat and so on). The term "situation" featured a lot in conversation and public meetings, orchestrated with a pompous tone. All the same it has become increasingly common to find anti-intellectual sentiments representing those who dislike systematic thinking and scholarship.

Different times demand and bring different answers ... We have come to a stage when intellectuals are no longer a clearly distinguishable class of people, if we consider only those in the Western world since the Enlightenment in seventeenth century Europe through the first half of the twentieth, the Americas emerging in the nineteenth. Perhaps because there are more of them today, living and working in more differentiated departments of life, and performing a larger spread of professions.

Those of the Western world have been greatly influenced by some outstanding intellectuals of earlier times whose writings still stand out collectively as a memorable compendium of ideas; even in cases where the ideas have no longer much practical use for us today. Admittedly, some of those ideas were too contentious. But then that is the intellectual's disposition, and we have over the centuries found it an acceptable trait.

We often speak of someone as a "Renaissance man" to signify his multi-dimensional education, in tune with the learned person of Eu-

rope in the 14th to 16th centuries. Yet learning was circumscribed and often coloured by religious thought. Even the artists seemed constrained to look for themes teeming with imagery drawn from the Bible and the Catholic and Protestant liturgies. I find the opinion of the Indian philosopher Krishnamurti worth taking seriously in this regard. He challenges in his writings the notion that there can be more than only limited intellectual freedom. Because, he argues, we are all socialised masses of people, nurtured on the precepts and guidance of our homes, schools, universities, public morality and so on ...

I am reminded at this point of a highly informative in-depth study of Western intellectuals that I have been re-reading, namely *Intellectuals* by Paul Johnson. He exposes them, questioning also whether ideas should ever be valued more than individuality. The English writer Kingsley Amis calls the book a "rogues' gallery" of "adventurers of the mind". Among some of the characteristics Johnson lists are: "anger, aggressiveness, violence, cruelty, deceitfulness, ingratitude, rudeness, intolerance, misanthropy, love of power, manipulative (tendencies), self-deception, self-pity, paranoia, self-righteousness, sponging, vanity, snobbery." The principal intellectuals he discusses are: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Shelley, Karl Marx, Hendrik Ibsen, Leo Tolstoy, Ernest Hemingway, Bertrand Russell, Waldo Emerson, Bertolt Brecht, George Orwell, Lillian Hellman.

Perhaps by the very nature of the intellectual's mind, such people cannot form lasting cohesive groups, if ever. There may develop loyalties among two or three, but generally the fierce individualism among intellectuals makes them unconsciously or consciously resist the herd instinct outside of the coffee bar.

Among the Western intellectuals George Orwell (1903-1950), British writer of fiction and non-fiction, is one of those that appeal to me most. Paul Johnson writes: "Orwell was an intellectual in the sense that he believed, at any rate when young, that the world could be reshaped by the power of the intellect. He thus thought in terms of ideas and concepts. But his nature gave him a passionate interest in people." The weight of his attack "shifted from existing traditional capitalist society to the fraudulent utopias with which intellectuals like Lenin had sought to replace it." Orwell's most famous books *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) "were essentially critiques of the (...) totalitarian control over mind and body which an embodied utopia demanded", and (as Orwell put it) "of the perversions to which a centralised economy is liable."

Professional intellectuals distanced themselves from Orwell because he had come to recognize that “political behaviour is largely non-rational” – a realisation many of us intellectuals have long acknowledged in this country, at least, I daresay, behind closed doors! We observe today how so many of the functions of national administration in this country are rooted in a tradition in which political sentiment and expediency plays a greater role than the intellect. Or else what intellect may have gone through the pipeline into decision-making comes out corrupted by party political intentions. Political will itself is often a cripple born of perverse sectional interests. But Orwell was prepared to accept that it was right to keep searching for political solutions, “just as a doctor must try to save the life of a patient who is probably going to die”, even while recognizing that political behaviour is largely non-rational and therefore does not rhyme with the kind of solutions intellectuals or reason would prescribe.

I began this short essay ago as a kind of inquiry. Re-reading Paul Johnson something struck me as it never did when I read it the first time. It is now so much more intriguing, I’m persuaded to imagine, to *read* about people who were or are interesting *in themselves*, even fascinating, more than to actually *meet* them in person. Always I suspect that the spell would shatter like a mirror at my feet if I met them. My imagination runs ahead of me, away from the physical reality that comes to me through the sensory perceptions. And yet as a writer you like to dramatise your sensations through what you narrate. You like to taste the environment you are portraying, in a manner of speaking; smell the things that inhabit it, run your fingers over them. You might find yourself inadequate to create a principal character who looked in a sense antiseptic or utterly odourless. You often feel bound to recreate such characters; characters who must be cast with a vividness that helps us connect with the texture of the atmosphere their story commands; they must exude the smells and textures of their surroundings, of the humanity that inhabits its own concourse.

On the strength of what we know about those intellectuals of the western world, it would not be amiss for us to contemplate our African equivalents who were and are rooted in the various cultures and sub-cultures that exist on our continent. Without attempting to delve into the intricacies of indigenous knowledge systems, which would amount to a considerable volume of literature, we can observe a backdrop of various colours, diverse strands of thought and belief. Among the most outstanding were sages and prophets of old. The Prophet Muhammad,

founder of the Islamic faith and composer of the *Qur'an*. In composing this, the Prophet proved himself an intellectual of tremendous ingenuity and creative passion. Professor Ali Mazrui, an African of Kenyan descent, himself a political scientist and an intellectual of immense reputation, has this to say in his book, *Cultural Forces in World Politics*: "The *Qur'an* is the most widely read book in its original in human history. The Bible is the most widely read book in translation. The Bible is also a multi-authored work. But the *Qur'an* is in a class by itself as a book which is recited by millions of believers, five times a day, in the very language in which it was first written." Mazrui proceeds to say that if, as Salman Rushdie (the British writer) comments, the *Qur'an* was the work of the Prophet Muhammad and not the word of God, he is confirming it as the work of human genius rather than divine inspiration: "This would still put the Prophet Muhammad alongside William Shakespeare as the two most influential literary figures of all time."

For generations there has been a long succession of thinkers, opinion makers, educators, learned thinkers among black Africans on the continent and in the diaspora, religious and secular, traditionalists, animists ("black" here is meant to include those traditionally referred to as Africans, the "coloured people", the Indians). Some of the best known thinkers are Frantz Fanon (Algerian black); Senegal's Léopold Sédar Senghor, Mamadou Dia, Cheik Anta Diop, Alioune Diop, Congo's Georges Balandier, Kenya's Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Sudan's Taban lo Liyong, Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Kofi Awoonor, Kwabena Nketia, Nigeria's Nnamdi Azikiwe, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Kole Omotoso, Sierra Leone's Abioseh Nicol, South Africa's (besides the earliest already mentioned) Can Themba, Saths Cooper, Steve Biko, Robert Sobukwe, Livingstone Mqotsi, Mike Stainbank, Peter Thuynsma, Itumeleng Mosala, Andries Oliphant, Siphoo Seepe, Arthur Maimane, Marcus Ramogale, Franklin Sonn, Chabani Manganyi, Njabulo Ndebele, Neville Alexander, Barney Pityana, William Makgoba, Xolela Mangcu, Matshilo Motsei, Lizeka Mda, Don Mattera, Khabi Mngoma. Mzilikazi Khumalo, Aggrey Klaaste, Mathatha Tsedu, Barney Mthombothi, Majakathata Mokoena, Adam Small, John Matshikiza. (To avoid invidious accusations, the writers have mostly been omitted, even though most of them are intellectuals.)

A memorable statement by Fanon goes, "You will never make colonialism blush for shame by spreading out little-known cultural treasures under its eyes." The African leader, he adds, has a duty to transcend his social origins and personal difficulties to spur his people

towards winning the struggle against colonial power. Fanon advocated and justified violence that was aimed at affirming the self as against dependence on literature to do it. Irving Leonard Markovitz writes in his book, *Léopold Sédar Senghor and the Politics of Negritude* (1969): "He (Frantz Fanon) criticised Senghor not for being estranged from the people, but for not realizing the extent of his estrangement. Without this self-consciousness no type of development was possible."

Where do we stand in this country, collectively, in relation to the intellectual movements of the western world and our own beginnings as products of segregated schools and colleges, systems of education that only bounced off each other, by design or chance? Without attempting to delve into the intricacies of indigenous knowledge systems among Black Africans, we can conveniently take up the story from 1826, when the Lovedale Press was established in the Eastern Cape. Literacy and African writing in the vernaculars and English gained a firm footing from then on. Men trained abroad such as Tiyo Soga, a pastor; John Tengo Jabavu, Z. K. Matthews (both academics at Fort Hare); the poet Mqhayi and others were among the early intellectuals. Their intellectual range was defined and constrained by the missionary theologies of the institutions they went to as students – in their case the Scottish church. The same for the cluster of students who were products of the Paris Evangelical Mission at Morija, Lesotho.

Prof. Ntongela Masilela, an extremely conscientious South African intellectual teaching in the United States, has documented in a comprehensive and perceptive essay (as yet unpublished) the vigour with which negro South African intellectuals have been engaging modernity. He reports an article, "The Launch" by the editor in the first issue of *Imvo Zabantsundu* (November 3, 1884), John Tengo Jabavu. The writer explains the aim of the paper which, Masilela reports,

is to be an intellectual forum for the emergent African intelligentsia to express themselves freely since the white Christian missionary newspapers had frustrated these newly educated and modernized Africans from doing so; one of the principal tasks of the newspaper is to bring the uneducated Africans (so-called "Red Kafirs" [sic]) to the "shores" of modernity).

In the twentieth century more and more pastors and educators flowed out of these and many more institutions countrywide. Those who had relatively independent ideas to express did so in the commercial print media, e.g. *Umteteli wa Bantu*, *Bantu World*, *Abantu Batho*, *Koranta ea*

Becoana, Leselinyana, Imvo Zabantsundu, Ilanga lase Natal, especially since the thirties. Much later, leftist papers emerged, which welcomed liberationist literature and ideas, e.g. *Torch, Fighting Talk, New Age*. Jordan K. Ngubane's *Inkundla*, was a powerful, courageous, independent little weekly bristling with progressive ideas. In between were periods of intensive pamphleteering.

Although much of the contents was of little or no consequence in these newspapers except as moments of social history, equally a lot of the material led to lively intellectual discourse that advanced our sense of self and African nationhood. By and large the style, either in English or vernacular, was too conventional to forcefully carry the weight of new political thinking and sensibility when the historical moment would be right, e.g. the forward-looking and challenging ideas of writers and activists such as Sol T. Plaatje, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, Prof. A.C. Jordan, Dr. John Dube, Selope Thema and Jordan K. Ngubane. It was left to the serious journalism of the new outlook of the 1980s and on to give content a fitting prose idiom adequate to the urgency of the time, reviving what the journalism of the "fabulous fifties" did.

As far as the style of imaginative writing goes, *Drum* magazine of the 1950s sounded the knell signalling the end of conventional English prose by blacks. Afro-American literature was responsible for this, as we plundered leftist bookshops and missionary libraries to find the writings. Peter Abrahams, now a naturalised Jamaican, discovered the literary treasure as a schoolboy in Johannesburg, subsequently working the style into his own prose works in his years of exile. The black intellectuals of the 1970s, inspired and driven by the Black Consciousness Movement based on university and college campuses, was responsible for change of stance, theme and poetic diction writers were to adopt, from then to date. Gone was the discursive line of nineteenth-century English poetry. What the writers of *Drum* in the 1960s had done with prose was realised in the new poetry of the seventies. The black intelligentsia had begun to speak the prose and poetic language that were closest to people's speech and consciousness of self.

In the 1950s, the era of papers like *Torch*, and *New Age*, there emerged a group of hard-thinking intellectuals – men and women in the Cape Peninsula who belonged to the then Unity Movement. This was created to formalise the links between Negro Africans, "coloureds", Indians and whites, creating what they conceived as "disciplined unity", unlike the relatively loose Congress Alliance. The "coloured" element was drawn from the Teachers' League of South Africa based in the

“coloured” schools. The Unity Movement attracted a number of blacks from the then largely black Cape African Teachers’ Association. The movement, which had a bright beginning became in the general view dogmatically Trotskyite. This turned out to be unproductive, even suicidal. Within the League were “coloured” men such as Benny Kies, Van Schoor, Maurice, in themselves persons of a brilliant intellect.

Indeed one can rightly say that intellectual activity among all South African blacks has over the years, to a considerable extent, been formulated, defined and disseminated around the politics of race, colour and creed. It came to such absurdity that hardly anyone outside a speaker’s political circle came to listen to his/her speech or to read his/her printed matter. We are still far from snapping out of the syndrome. Only political maturity will take care of that.

In other activities outside the expressive modes of culture, the educated black also discovered that the community’s traditional respect for the person of learning was beginning to wane. Like that of the church pastor. Clearly we need other qualifications, based on humanistic qualities, that need no backing from the individual’s station in life. There are problems we shall have to confront and resolve as we try to consolidate our role as intellectuals. Because of our fragmented society, its racial and ethnic divisions, the latter tied up with traditional boundaries, black intellectuals have largely found meeting ground on university and college campuses. Political parties do not seem to be the home they used to be until the end of the seventies.

The teaching profession has over the years been hamstrung by the racial politics of past regimes: blacks have had to preoccupy themselves with their politically inferior status. There was too little energy left in them to explore and pursue activities that intellectuals in the developed democracies find edifying, because creative, distinguishing them from other intelligentsia. Except meetings structured for the purpose, one seldom finds oneself in a discussion of books, or education or other cultural activity that requires intellectual engagement. Political discussions are mostly about political personalities rather than beliefs or principles or the state of the nation. Because of our traditionally separate geographic locations, the primary reasons that bring blacks and whites together outside the workplace are sport, entertainment and business. Even at this reconciliation time, it would be folly to pretend that bygones are acknowledged to be bygones.

It is no trivial matter that socio-political forces, managed by white rule, and the tyranny they generated, have succeeded in dividing this

society and dragging it through at least a century's programme of grotesque codified lunacy. We have been crippled on both sides: on the one side whites have unwittingly been victims of their own sense of superiority; on the other, blacks consequently find it difficult, even subliminally humiliating, to tell themselves that the victim mentality is no less self-destructive than corrosive hate.

Yet another problem is that we can no longer rely on the media to promote intellectual activity. Especially the print media simply wants to sell papers, advertise the goods that shops sell and entertainment opportunities. There is a long-standing dissociation between the media and intellectuals countrywide. There was lively dialogue between the press and its readers among the black intelligentsia from the twenties through the fifties. Debates were common in the press on a number of social and political issues. Of course, the press moguls will tell us that "some of us – give them credit please – try hard to apportion space to matters that should interest the general reader and those that engage the intellectual types". That last phrase smacks of the smugness you find among the worst of our media types.

From 1960 on, when political moments were banned and the authorities did the next logical thing – ban all political statements in the press that they perceived to be seditious, provoking public discontent. We, the public, also began to be afraid of one another and to talk politics among ourselves. Fear of being banned froze the press to the extent that it has not succeeded even today in breaking out of that self-censoring state of mind.

Another spin-off from this ugly feature of our life as blacks was the rifts that were occurring between "blacks", "coloureds" and Indians. As a result of the Group Areas Act of the early fifties, we among the three groups began to internalise the separatist ideology; we began to believe that we could in fact be independent of one another as separate groups. This further alienated the three groups of intellectuals from one another, only making self-conscious token gestures across university campuses and at *ad hoc* meetings in the trade union movements. Distances, state of mind and sense of defeat continued to keep us apart and willing to consolidate the divisions. It should not come as a surprise that this writer has never been invited by Durban Westville nor Western Cape universities to lecture or as writer-in-residence in all the years I have been back in this country since 1977. Nor would it be surprising that historically black institutions have not invited other academics from the above universities. The apartheid mentality has settled in among us in all "group areas".

Difficulties related to distances between communities will be with us for a long time yet. Add to this, inadequate and inefficient public transport plus the rising incidence of violent crime. Intellectual activity in such circumstances becomes a victim of under-development. The picture becomes even more stark in the rural areas, which have been neglected for generations. These conditions compel us to acknowledge actively the need to master the skills and art of writing on the one hand, and on the other inspire the masses to read widely, and make publications accessible, available.

Although intellectual togetherness should be able to transcend certain social patterns, rituals, political and social stereotypes, and discretion when black meets white, there will have to be, in the beginning, a base: things, events, ideas, ideals, all creations in the arts that we can share across the racial divisions.

Suffice it to say that we have become aware that on the road to normality we can no longer tolerate expedient palliatives in the place of radical correctives. It may be argued that intellectuals cannot be organised like social clubs. But I think that an "Academy" of some sort is required as a concourse for the intelligentsia across the racial divide. We can exchange ideas on how the various constituencies of our society can discover that "Higher Purpose" we must aspire to. It is something that must evolve, even through *ad hoc* get-togethers. In spite of what I say about distances, mobility, let us keep the academy live in our minds as a concept. Bridges are needed by all means, even though eventually they must become irrelevant. The Es'kia Institute (temporarily in Johannesburg), even though conceptually in a black township, exists to become a non-racial centre for intensive intellectual programmes for education, formal and non-formal, the arts, discourse on human affairs that will reach out in all directions within the boundaries of this country and beyond.

It is of immense significance that high-powered black intellectuals are holding positions that were reserved for whites in traditionally white institutions, *inter alia* Professors Chabani Manganyi, Njabulo Ndebele, W. M. Makgoba, Kole Omotoso, Barney Pityana. These men are also accomplished writers of high standing. I would like to think that, as our would-be intellectuals have been herded into college campuses by socio-political circumstances for relative security, curriculum planners can attract students and faculty to interdisciplinary studies and discussions, created to encourage discourse on campuses and in the lecture rooms. Some members of the university community are

bound to find creative satisfaction in these activities. Often, in the early stages, the intellect is blind to relationships between phenomena, things, events and so on, so such arrangement can kindle interest, a passionate sense of purpose.

Indeed different times will always demand, and bring, different answers: a chastening lesson to those who continually strive to live outside of history, heedless of the human drama.

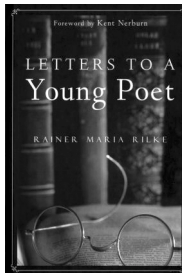
Poësie by BOEKEHUIS: Boekwinkel vir Suid-Afrikaanse en Wêreldliteratuur

BREYTENBACH, WISLAVA SZYMBORSKA, PAUL CELAN, ANTJIE KROG, LINA SPIES, WILMA STÖCKENSTROM, INGRID DE KOCK, FINUALA DOWLING, STEPHEN WATSON, KEORAPETSE KGOTITSILE, TRANSTRÖMER, ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI, MARINA TSETEAVA, NP VAN WYK LOUW, INA ROSSOUW, HENNING PIETERSE, BILLY COLLINS, ANNE CARSON



Wie dien dié woord?
Hoe verstaan ek myself in
die teksgekwelde land?
Hoe onaangeraak huiwer ek?

Lady Anne van Antjie Krog
weer beskikbaar!
R110.00

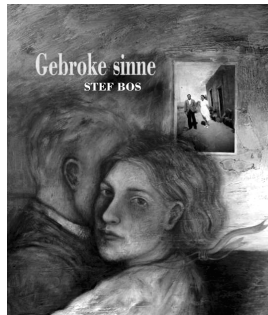


"There is only one way: Go within. Search for the cause, find the impetus that bids you write. Put it to this test: Does it stretch out its roots in the deepest place of your heart? Above all, in the most silent hour of your night, ask yourself this: Must I write? If you can confidently meet this serious question with a simple, "I must", then build your life upon it. It has become your necessity."

Letters to a Young Poet – Rilke
R150.00

as jy nog nie kan sien
dat die einde 'n begin is
as jy dit probeer vashou
wat hom al losgemaak het
as jy so klein word
dat jy saans voor jy slaap
ongemerkt jou hande vou
omdat die werklikheid
groter is
as wat jy gedink het

wat dan vriend
wat dan

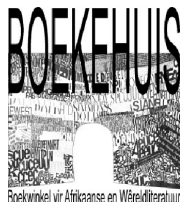


"Gebroke sinne is 'n versameling
songs wat poësie geword het."

Gebroke sinne – Stef Bos
R100.00

die reën maak die jongvrou die hof
terwyl sy in die hut lê
die reën ruik haar en kom na haar
en die hele plek raak mistig
want hy kom na die jongvrou
vanweë haar geur
hy kom as't ware aangedraf
terwyl die jongvrou in die hut lê ...

Uit: "die vrou en die reënbul" deur
/Han=kass'o soos omgedig deur
Antjie Krog in **die sterre sê 'tsau'**
R109.95



Boekwinkel vir Suid-Afrikaanse en wêreldliteratuur, filosofie, kinderboeke en poësie, tweedehandse Afrikaanse boeke en alle kwaliteit boeke.

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