Poetry and Exile: The Case of Arthur Nortje

Jacques Berthoud

I

I propose in this paper to examine some of the relations between poetry and exile using Arthur Nortje as a paradigm case. In so doing, however, I find myself at a double remove from my project. After sixteen years’ absence from South Africa, I can no longer claim to be attuned to the critical discourse of that country. This sense of disqualification does not arise from elementary ignorance. To be sure, outside a narrow circle of refugees and expatriates, Nortje is scarcely known in England; but he has been very little studied in South Africa either, where the absence of an even passable edition of his work continues to hamper serious research.¹ Nor does it arise from a lack of experience of the decades that produced him, for, having left South Africa over two years after he did, I too was part of that tragic history, and like him saw it with my own eyes. My sense of extraneousness comes from the fact that, since criticism is not merely an abstract discipline but the product of a dialogue informed by a complex of social, cultural and political determinants, and since its intelligibility rests on a system of codes and signals often invisible to the foreigner, an attempt to insert oneself into a local critical scene may produce little more than equivocation and inconsequence.

This first alienation (if that’s not too grand a word) from my project is doubled by a second and even more serious one. As a white ex-South African I am, if not actually disqualified, then in some degree disabled from speaking with any kind of appropriating assurance about the sufferings of a victim of apartheid. I cling, of course, to the liberal view that it is not necessary to assassinate a monarch in order to read Macbeth or to become a woman before sympathising with Virginia Woolf. We may be defined, but we are not programmed, by our history, our colour, our sex. Nevertheless, the fact is that the production of poetry presupposes the institution known as literature which, in its material forms in South Africa, is entirely under the control of us, the whites; so that a ‘coloured’ poet like Nortje, whose every line declares that he suffered under Verwoerd, has ironically to

English in Africa 11 No. 1 (May 1984)
depend on white sponsorship, white publication, white distribution and white reviews.\textsuperscript{2} Let me be clear. I am not saying that this disability makes it impossible for me to respond honestly to the poetry of a fellow human-being; what I do say is that Nortje’s poetry involves me in a contradiction whereby the expression of my concern for his deprivation is to some degree a perpetuation of it. This has nothing to do with my intention, but with the way things are. Subjective sympathy, however disinterested or sincere, cannot spirit away objective privilege. I have to beware, therefore, lest imaginative identification betray me into the bad faith of counting myself among the persecuted. Above or below the colour-bar alienation is our lot. But it is plain that we have already entered upon our theme: for Nortje made this very alienation his mastering, indeed his obsessive, concern; so that in approaching him we discover, if we are careful enough, that what we took for an impediment is in fact an opening.

II

One of the reasons why Nortje’s exile poetry is of general critical interest is that it raises in an acute form the question of the use of literature. Professor R.N. Egudu provides a direct illustration of this. In an essay on responses to apartheid published five years ago, he says of Nortje’s verse that it is “mainly concerned with self-pity resulting from loneliness in exile and general racial discrimination”, and that its final effect is to “sap the energy for action”. That this objection is not only political but also critical Egudu makes clear by placing Nortje with those poets who have, as he says, “merely sung their sorrows”, and whose singing sounds “like a weak-limbed dirge”.\textsuperscript{3} If Nortje’s poetry slackens the springs of action, it is the genre to which it belongs that is partly to blame. Nortje’s case would seem to require us to call into question a whole conception of poetry dominant in post-Romantic Europe, of which the confessional lyric is the type.

This matter is sufficiently important to warrant the examination of an example.\textsuperscript{4} The poem entitled “Waiting” which Nortje wrote in London in July 1967\textsuperscript{5} would seem to merit Egudu’s strictures well enough. It exhibits a number of stylistic procedures associated with modernist rhetoric: lexical ambiguities, narrative juxtapositions, metaphoric density, intertextual allusiveness and emancipation from iambic metrics. But it has certainly not retreated into a self-referential world.

The isolation of exile is a gutted
warehouse at the back of pleasure streets:
the waterfront of limbo stretches panoramically —
night the beautifier lets the lights
dance across the wharf.
I peer through the skull's black windows wonder what can credibly save me.
The poem trails across the ruined wall
a solitary snail, or phosphorescently
swims into vision like a fish
through a hole in the mind's foundation, acute
as a glittering nerve.
Origins trouble the voyager much, those roots
that have sipped the waters of another continent.
Africa is gigantic, one cannot begin
to know even the strange behaviour furthest
south in my xenophobic department.
Come back, come back mayibuye
cried the breakers of stone and cried the crowds
cried Mr Kumalo before the withering fire
mayibuye Afrika
Now there is the loneliness of lost
beauties at Cabo de Esperancia, Table Mountain:
all the dead poets who sang of spring's
miraculous recrudescence in the sandscapes of Karoo
sang of thoughts that pierced like arrows, spoke
through the strangled throat of multi-humanity
bruised like a python in the maggot-fattening sun.
You7 with your face of pain, your touch of gaiety,
with eyes that could distil me any instant
have passed into some diary, some dead journal
now that the computer, the mechanical notion
obliterates sincerities.
The amplitude of sentiment has brought me no nearer
to anything affectionate,
new magnitude of thought has but betrayed
the lustre of your eyes.
You yourself have vacated the violent arena
for a northern life of semi-snow
under the Distant Early Warning System:
I suffer the radiation burns of silence.
It is not cosmic immensity or catastrophe
that terrifies me:
it is solitude that mutilates,
the night bulb that reveals ash on my sleeve.

In his polemic against Lukács, Brecht defends popular realism as follows:
"In view of the immense sufferings of the masses, concern with little difficulties or with difficulties of little groups has come to be felt as ridiculous, contemptible". For all its manifold brilliance, Nortje’s poem may seem designed to substantiate Brecht’s proposition. What possible bearing can the poet’s private pain have on the vast sufferings of the “multi-humanity” of his xenophobic land? Is there not something indecent in setting up one’s existential anguish against the prospect of nuclear war, or one’s self-destructive dissipations against the imposed brutalities of Sharpeville and Robben Island? And is there not something indeed contemptible about a poem that so obviously asks to be admired as it refers to a whole nation languishing in illiterate penury, utterly beyond the pale of European high art? Nortje might begin to seem guilty of that bad faith lying in wait of the unwary white reader: that is, of assuming that the intensity of personal nostalgia can compensate for inattention to the plight of others, or that the torments of private neurosis can release him from the need to act.

The critical perspective that provokes these questions is of course familiar in our profession in the form of post-modernist scepticism about the ‘real’ existence of literature. Its most recent English instance is Terry Eagleton’s *The Theory of Literature*, which attempts to challenge the received view that there is more to the literary text than the decision to regard it as literary. But this challenge has been around for several decades in the form of an attack on the alleged autonomy of the author and critic (a stance variously described as ‘humanist’, ‘liberal’, ‘empirical’ and even ‘common-sensical’). Its classic formulation is George Lukács’ *Studies in European Realism*, whose basic position has been aptly summarised in the statement that individual life is not a metaphysically given, or part of a common human condition, but a social-historical construct. But even this is not as transparent as it looks. The rejected alternatives do not help us to focus the proposition. I readily accept that what I am cannot be understood independently of my social-historical co-ordinates, but I cannot see why that should exempt me from the constraints of conditions I can only describe as universal: for example, the condition of mortality, or of plurality, or of consciousness, or — at least indirectly — of labour; or why it should render either less or more rational the act of faith on which any metaphysical affirmation must rest. Let us, however, take Lukács’ general point: the rejection of the individualist fallacy that seeks to free the subject in exactly the wrong way — by abstracting it from its history. To what extent is Nortje in the grip of this fallacy?

One way of getting clear about this question is to ask how the self
is presented in the poem — which means, given its confessional mode, attending to its formal properties. Of these, two seem to be immediately relevant. The first, noted by Alvarez-Péreyre as generally characteristic of Nortje's work, is that he usually presents his subject as located in time and place, achieving this by a subtle manipulation of depth of field, regularly shifting focus from background to foreground, and from present to past. "Waiting" offers a further refinement of this effect. The warehouse, the waterfront, the wharf, the ruined wall of the opening lines, like the semi-snow and the early-warning system of the conclusion, are simultaneously images of environment and notations of inner state. It is impossible to decide where the world ends and the self begins. The second of these formal properties, which Nortje may have learnt from Dennis Brutus, and which he deploys with great freedom, is to treat patriotic and personal love in terms of each other. Thus we cannot be sure how far the fourth stanza ("You with your face of pain...") is addressed to a lost land or a lost lover, or to what extent the cry "mayibuye Afrika" is summoning the nation or recalling the exile.

What these non-mimetic or non-realistic procedures convey is a highly realistic sense of the interpenetration of the private and the public. In this poem the community and the self are involved in each other at the deepest level. Indeed, the self does not appear as an autonomous given, but as something unstable, dependent and at risk. The art which seemed self-regarding, as the poem imaged itself rising in the mind like a Paul Klee fish, is not merely aesthetic, but therapeutic. Floating up through some basic fracture of the mind, it is hailed as the only thing capable of checking the disintegration of a subject sundered from its origins. I am not denying, of course, that Nortje's art generates delight; quite the contrary. But this delight, far from being a mark of self-deception, is proof of the poem's efficacy as a preserver: reading or writing poetry as a chore has never saved anybody.

III

I have suggested, so far, that we will not get anywhere with poetry that claims to be more than a statement of opinion unless we are prepared to consider its formal properties. Failure to do so in this case will prevent us from doing justice to the conception of the self implied in the representation of solitude. I would like now to substantiate a larger claim: that in Nortje's expression of the chronic mutilations of exile — the endless procession of departures, depressions, dissipations and disgusts that drives through his verse — what we will discern if we are able to look beyond the neuroses is
nothing less than the pressure of history. In other words, I propose to measure Lukács’ axiom — that the individual is a social-historical construct — against the reality of a test case.

In his recent book, *Writers in Exile*, Andrew Gurr has remarked that the first reflex of the expatriate writer is to rebuild the absent home in his fiction.12 Nortje is no exception. The central stanzas of his “Waiting” show this process of nostalgic reconstruction under way — but with the significant difference that here it can only abort. The home that he must re-imagine is an inexplicable “violent arena” where, as the imagery insists, rebirth turns into decomposition and utterance into strangulation, and where the longing of the exile can only find a repetition of its own desire. Nortje is pre-eminently a poet of the sixties; his work seems to me to be a classic expression of the character of that decade — of that interval of immobility and silence between the collapse of liberalism and the rise of black consciousness, when the might of the state seemed everywhere unchangeable and unchanging.13 We may recall the well-known poem “Autopsy”, in which the ‘mother’ country turns her son, the state, against her stepchildren, the blacks:

Who can endure the succubus?
She who had taught them proudness of tongue
drank an aphrodisiac, then swallowed
a purgative to justify the wrong.
Her iron-fisted ogre of a son
straddled the drug-blurred townships,
breathing hygienic blasts of justice.

Rooted bacteria had their numbers
swiftly reduced in the harsh sunlight of arc-lamps,
the arid atmosphere where jackboots scrape
like crackling electric, and tape recorders
ingest forced words like white corpuscles,
until the sterile quarantine of dungeons
enveloped them with piteous oblivion.

In the towns I’ve acquired
arrive the broken guerrillas, gaunt and cautious,
exit visas in their rifled pockets
and no more making like Marx
for the British Museum in the nineteenth century,
damned: the dark princes, burnt and offered
to the four winds, to the salt-eyed seas. To their earth unreturnable.
The world receives
them, Canada, England now that the laager
masters recline in a gold inertia
behind the arsenal of Sten guns. . .

This is not protest poetry, but the poetry of nightmare: the poet is
altogether too implicated in what he describes. We know, of course, that the
despair of political impotence tends to turn society into nature. This is an
effect of projection: it is to be doubted whether the political refugees whom
Nortje thinks of as burnt offerings were as "broken" as he represents them
— whether, for example, they renounced praxis as thoroughly as he
suggests. The poem images South African history as a perverted process of
nature: yet even this cannot be dismissed as mere capitulation. For one, it
permits a mimetic vividness that becomes diagnostic: the rotting townships
and sterilised police-stations are rendered in terms of a perversion that turns
people into an epidemic and government into a surgery. But beyond this,
what is so disturbing about this representation of repression is that the poet
thinks of himself as contaminated. The townships which nurtured him are,
like him, "drug-blurred" in earnest as well as in metaphor. Treat human
beings as infectious for long enough, and they will end up by becoming
infected.

"Autopsy" brings into explicit focus what "Waiting" only glanced at:
the radicality of Nortje's conception of exile. The victim of exile is usually
thought of as amputated from a healthy body to which he longs to be re­
attached; for Nortje the condition is altogether more Original: the parent
body is diseased, its offspring are born into a state of alienation. Once one's
roots have sipped poisoned water, one will carry the effects wherever one
goes.

Nortje's poetry, then, is a symptom as well as a diagnosis; to this double
office it owes a good deal of its status as an expression of the consciousness
of his epoch. Its ambivalence cannot be understood outside its author's
history as a so-called coloured; by virtue of its location in his personal
biography, his neurosis has public resonances. Unlike the black, or for that
matter the white, who have access to their own myths and who can distance
themselves without loss of definition from an equally distinct opponent,
Nortje sees himself as the inheritor of both traditions. In "Cosmos in
London", a fine poem on the ambiguity of transplantation (it carries its
theme in its title), he counterpoints the names of the heroes of European
culture — Yeats, Shakespeare (Macbeth), Bach — against the names of the
heroes of African resistance — Brutus, Mandela, Lutuli. But the memory of
the latter does not merely make more distinct the character of the former:
it “disturbs the order of the song”. Even in this the product of the multi-racial hopes of the fifties, Nortje cannot disentangle himself from such contradictions as easily as some of his successors in the seventies — ‘coloured’ poets like James Matthews and Don Mattera, for example, who are very much more in possession of themselves because far less in possession of what they cannot but see as the culture of repression. In an extremely disturbing poem entitled “Dogsbody half-breed”, he begins by passing in vivid review the fatal seductiveness of a South African irresistibly drawing blond settlers into itself, either to mix with the native blacks on the coast or to convenant against them in the interior. His gaze is uncompromising but comprehensive; and when, as the poem proceeds, it turns to the living present it remains free of the censoring simplifications of partisanship. Neither black nor white, Nortje sees it all; the helpless grief of comprehension does not blur the scene, but focusses it, like a visionary lens:

Yet glittering with tears I see you pass
in armoured cars, divided from yourself
by golden fortune, natural largesse,
forgetting quite in the siren or the bell
pealing your sanctity, wailing a daily violence,
your bastardies, abortions, sins of silence,
those marooned, dragooned, those massacred or shackled
by your few chosen from the many called.

But such lucidity, being the product of a division that cannot be relinquished, has to be paid for. As the final stanza of the poem makes clear, not to choose is to forgo the plenitude of being that is the privilege of those who are fully one thing or the other. So Nortje seems to recognise and accept that he will have to do with a relatively diminished life. But does he?

Bitter though the taste be, it is life somehow.
Despite the dark night of long ago, in spring now
looking from Lion’s Head or Devil’s Peak,
your delicate nooks and moments noble-gentle
bud-open both to blond and black
and I hybrid, after Mendel,
growing between the wire and the wall,
being dogsbody, being me, buffer you still.

The “blond” and the “black” stand on the majestic mountain like heraldic flowers; he grows like a weed on a derelict city site, without intrinsic value or use, being at best a “buffer” between the antagonistic racial opposites. The self-contempt expressed in these concluding lines goes far beyond the
needs of the ostensible argument. The sense of degradation seems to have compounded with the body, and the humiliation turned into flesh. The pride of race seems to have gone into reverse.

Are we not given here a glimpse of the final truth of Nortje’s condition? As “Waiting” tells us, the “isolation of exile” is no mere nostalgia, no mere pang of deracination and identity-loss: it is “a gutted/warehouse at the back of pleasure streets”. Nortje’s frantic pursuit of alcoholic, narcotic and sexual stimulants is fuelled by an obsessive, intimate, quasi-genetic self-disgust:

- white trash
coursing through my blood
for all the unalienable seasons,
and I have an incurable
malaise that makes me walk restlessly
through the sewers of these distant cities.\(^{14}\)

In a remarkable doctoral dissertation on Nadine Gordimer recently submitted to the University of Oxford, Stephen Clingman proposes a concept which may help to define the political significance of Nortje’s malaise — that of ‘deep history’. Partly derived from Fredric Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious*,\(^{15}\) this notion holds that the historical process which the subject seeks to confront consciously may have already entered his mind unconsciously, and be signalling its presence in the contradictions that define the limits of his discourse. In this view, Nortje’s ontological nausea cannot merely be a matter of moral weakness or individual neurosis; it is also a kind of plummet measuring the depth of his engagement in South African history. If the activist makes history, and the intellectual defines it, the poet experiences it — that is, makes it real to himself. In the ignominies and lacerations of Nortje’s elegies, we can sense the movement of the deeper currents of his age.

IV

I have never liked the conception of the individual as a social-historical construct. I hope it will be clear that my objection is to the ‘head’, not to the ‘modifier’ of the phrase. I share Lukács’ conviction that the individual does not invent himself, that he is not, so to speak, the “boss of his imagination”,\(^{16}\) operating beyond history and society, owing nothing to anybody else. But to describe him as a construct is misleading in ways that are symptomatic of Marxism in its more reductive forms, for it suggests that he is a mere construction site, an empty space awaiting the occupation of the socio-historical environment. What I have been assuming is a more dynamic alternative, in which the self is not a vacuum but a potential, to be roused, energised, transformed and emancipated — and not only disturbed, distorted and mutilated — as it acquires historical density. Walter Benjamin
is alleged to have said somewhere that the empty individual is the most
determinate subject;\textsuperscript{17} taking my cue from this formulation, I would wish to
argue that the ‘full’ individual — the one most receptive to his time and
place — is the least determinate subject.

To adapt Sartre’s famous epigram — Arthur Nortje may be a coloured
South African, but not every South African coloured is Arthur Nortje. Any
theoretical position that makes it logically impossible to distinguish
qualitatively between the work of one writer and another must be fatal for
literature. In some of the alternatives challenging the pieties of the English
literary establishment, for example, literature has been volatilized into post­
structuralist ‘absence’ or class-war ‘strategy’. Of course literature is not an
abstract concept definable in terms of a set of necessary and sufficient
conditions; but it is not adequately defined in terms of social and historical
‘forces’ (or any such alternative abstraction) either. This brings us to the
edge of what may be the major theoretical problem of modern criticism:
how to relate \textit{langue} and \textit{parole}, culture and the poem, history and the poet,
without allowing one term to absorb or cancel the other. It would be absurd
to try to do justice to this problem here; but Nortje’s case — more exactly,
his conception of his task as a poet — can help to focus one of the forms it
takes: how to relate Nortje the writer with Nortje the South African.

The climax of the poem that has been sustaining our discussion is marked
by the line: “I suffer the radiation burns of silence”. In “Waiting”, not
only is speechlessness the occasion for articulateness (the poem is a structure
of words about the failure of words); but — ironically in a poet who has
been accused of aestheticism — failure of language registers as isolation: “it
is the solitude that mutilates”. He has lost both a loved one and a country;
that is to say, he has been deprived at once of intimate words and public
speech. That he once had them together, albeit imperfectly, only serves to
underline the fact that for Nortje language counts above all as
communication.

On the subject of poetry I will venture one overtly dogmatic statement. It
is impossible to be a poet without being possessed by an abiding love for the
language — I mean the language as action, English as it has been used,
English as it could be used. This love Nortje had to an unusual degree. His
poems to the teachers of his youth echo with memories of their “golden
syllables”. He regards political repression as a suffocation of natural
utterance. In “Waiting”, he recalls “all the dead poets who sang of
spring’s/miraculous recrudescence”; in “Autopsy” he fears that, as a
consequence of Brutus’ persecution, “The luminous tongue in the black
world/has infinite possibilities no longer”.

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2009).
The nature of this love of language is disclosed in the paradox, almost obsessive in Nortje’s work, of making poetry out of silence. This paradox is not a post-structuralist logical trap; it is simply the result of censorship, whether psychological or political. In the silence that follows the banishment or imprisonment of his friends, Nortje finds himself reduced to monologue. In the early poem “Soliloquy: South Africa”, which hauntingly begins: “It seems me speaking all the lonely time”, he elaborates the paradox as follows:

All one attempts is talk in the absence
of others who spoke and vanished
without so much as an echo.
I have seen men with haunting voices
turned into ghosts by a piece of white paper
as if their eloquence had been black magic.

It is impossible, in Nortje, to dissociate delight in language as a form of play from dependence on language as a form of solidarity. In this stanza, the wit that weaves a pattern of references to speech (“talk”, “spoke”, “echo”, “voices”, “eloquence”), or that insinuates a conceit (“haunting”, “ghosts”, “magic”), or that invents revitalizing puns (“white paper”, “black magic”) cannot be abstracted unreductively from the statement it makes: that the deprivation of speech is the destruction of the community.

An easy way of explaining this conjunction of verbal brio and verbal address is to say that language presupposes a form of life, so that the livelier the exploitation of language, the richer the affirmation of the form of life. But this is not a formulation that would recommend itself to a man inwardly and outwardly sundered from the community of his audience. For Nortje, the emphasis falls less on those collective norms that make language usable than on the activity of the language user. I trust that I do not have to insist, at this stage in my argument, that in referring to such activity I am not invoking a naive — that is to say, an abstract — notion of creativity, or that I am denying that one can command language only to the degree that one is already possessed by it. (Indeed, one of Nortje’s lighter verses describes the poet as a thin man trying to get out of a fat poem. 18) What I affirm is that, whether one gives birth to language or, as it were, language gives birth to one, a poem is something achieved. 19 He ends “Asseverations” with: “There is never work without resistance” — the pun on “resistance” neatly aligning the tasks of the liberator and the writer. And whatever the liberator’s effort may be, Nortje does not consider his avocation an easy one: “I exorcise the stigma of my own inexactitudes”. To produce a poem out of one’s inarticulateness is to rise against inertia and make meaning where meaning was not. For the exile to produce a poem out of his desolation is to perform an exactly analogous task: to make possible a
community where a community was not.

Of the half-dozen poems touching upon this motif among those during a brilliantly productive period in Toronto during April-May 1970, one entitled “Poem South African” stands out for its awareness of its own procedures. Characteristically, it constructs a victory from the materials of defeat, making out of the fragmented communications of exile which it so poignantly evokes, and which its irregular typography scatters over the page, the ordered speech of a recovered community. Nortje begins by rehearsing his customary paradox: that silence is a necessary condition for speech: from the immobility of nostalgia he “can rise/midmorningmute/ and sing through its shroud”. And this in turn gives rise to the next paradox: that what he has so passionately yearned for (“goldrich once the world was / far away”) is “the shattered faces” and “scarred landscapes” of his “raped . . . earth”. As silence is necessary for speech, so perhaps is suffering for love.

In “Poem South African”, however, these preparatory paradoxes are treated to a quite unexpected transformation. While travellers crowd the ports, the poet can keep only a remote and flickering contact with his native land. . .

But these broken sentences
stumble to heaven on the hill despite
the man with the whip who beats my
emaciated words back
they die but
at last
get us all together as a vision
incontrovertible, take me as evidence.

In this miniature modernist’s Pilgrim’s Progress, the visionary Jerusalem at the top of the hill of inarticulateness can only be attained through the martyrdom of the ascent. The “vision incontrovertible” is no self-sufficient trans-historical ideal: it is achieved by dint of a frail individual’s resistance to the agony of the effort. Nor is this vision a merely personal one. Nortje’s climactic phrase — “take me as evidence” — which cites the poet’s history as proof of the poem’s authenticity,20 shifts its register into direct address, and turns lyric monologue into an act of communication. The vision of concord dissolves into the solidarity of completed expression; the poem achieves its goal, that is, itself. Indeed, only thus can it “get us all together”, for only thus can it begin to assemble the future community of its readers.
I have argued in this paper that poetry is neither a help nor a hindrance to political action, but complementary to it. In Nortje's famous epigram: "some of us must storm the castles/some define the happening". In this view his experience of exile acquires dignity and meaning because he has not falsely abstracted his personal pain from his historical predicament. A poem must be a product of its past before it can secure a place in the future. I hope that it is not too soon to claim that in articulating an individual fragment of his country's tragedy, Nortje has started to construe the meaning of what is to come.

NOTES
4. I offer no apologies for developing my argument with reference to a quoted text. Only a very naive theorist would interpret this procedure as a commitment to 'obsolete' new critical doctrines.
6. Nortje's texts have not been examined with any degree of precision. It might therefore be of some use if I briefly indicated my reading of possibly disputable passages. — "I peer through the skull's black windows" (I.6): I imagine the poet, metaphorically shrunk into his own skull, looking outwards for rescue, which finally comes from within and below. — "the withering fire" (I.20): a standard phrase for a murderous fusillade, such as at Sharpeville; the context suggested by the quotation of the ANC slogan and the forced labour of Robben Island makes this the natural reading. — "pierced like arrows ... bruised like a python in the ... sun" (II. 26-8): see Ovid, Metamorphoses I, ll.434-444. — "ash on my sleeve" (I.45): see T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding II.
7. From information supplied by the Davis dissertation mentioned above, this person can be identified as Joan Cornelius, a South African girl whom he met in 1963 when she was still
at school, and who emigrated to Canada in 1964, where she became a physiotherapist.


10. I owe this summary to Stephen Clingman's doctoral dissertation, *The Consciousness of History in the Novels of Nadine Gordimer*, submitted to the University of Oxford in June 1983. For further references to this outstanding study, see p. 9 and note 17. The special strengths and limitations of Lukács' criticism of the thirties and forties are brilliantly exhibited in his essay on Balzac's *Illusions Perdues*: "... individual destinies are always a radiation of the socially typical, of the socially universal ..." (*Studies in European Realism*, trans. Edith Bone [London: Hillway, 1950], p. 55). The concluding sentence of that essay shows that Lukács did not confine this claim to fictional characters. Referring to Balzac's successors, he says: "Their artistic decline was socially and historically unavoidable" (*Studies*, p. 64). In a later essay, "Russian Democratic Literary Criticism", he is even more explicit: "In every period of history these social forces produce certain types of men whose characteristic traits manifest themselves in the same way in every sphere of life and human activity, even though in different directions, with different contents and with different intensity" (*Studies*, p. 121). I confess to finding the notion of a 'type' as the nexus of the social and the individual quite devoid of explanatory force.


13. Even after his emigration to the U.K., and subsequently to Canada, where he showed himself exceptionally responsive to the permissive and experimental character of that decade, he never became a partisan of life as fiesta, but treated it as a means only, in a vainly repetitive effort to exorcise his imported sense of impasse.


17. Stephen Clingman refers to this idea in the Gordimer dissertation identified above; but I have not been able to trace it.

18. "Words", *Dead Roots*, p. 107. This deft poem (its wit is partly typographical) suggests not that the poet is Society's ventriloquist but that his unconscious is a reservoir of language. Hence the unpredictability of the new (see next note).

19. Cf. Brecht on Lukács and his school: "They are, to put it bluntly, enemies of production. Production makes them uncomfortable. You never know where you are with production; production is the unforeseeable. You never know what's going to come out." Quoted in *Aesthetics and Politics*, op. cit., p. 64.

20. This is not a covert retreat into the intentional fallacy. It would not contradict my analysis to construe that final phrase: "they — my words — get us together, and take me as evidence", with the implication that the self is realised and released by the accomplished poem (see "Words", note 18 above, for corroboration).