



**Universitat de Lleida**

Vice-rectorat de Relacions Institucionals  
i Serveis de Campus

Rambla d'Aragó, 37  
25003 LLEIDA  
Tl. 973-702000  
FAX 973-702062

See ~~in~~ NKosi file

Bernth Lindfors  
English Department  
University of Texas  
PAR 108  
Austin  
Texas 78712-1164

03 April 1995

Dear Bernth,

I enclose a complete copy of my entry on Lewis for the Third Series of *Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers*. As you will see, I have made one addition on page 6 and there are some major corrections on pages 38 and 39. Otherwise, there are a few details which I have changed or added to.

7



I hope you find these changes in order, Bernth, and I look forward to receiving proofs between early May and early July as you mentioned in your letter. Did you manage to see Lewis in Ohio?

All best wishes, Bernth,

Yours,

Brian

Brian Worsfold

PS. My address in April, May, June and July is:

Partida Mariola, 29  
25192-LLEIDA  
Catalonia  
Spain

## DICTIONARY OF LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

### LEWIS NKOSI

(5 December 1936 - )

Brian Worsfold

University of Lleida

Catalonia, Spain

**BOOKS:** *Home and Exile and Other Selections* (New York: Longman Inc, 1965; London: Longman Group Ltd, 1965; enlarged edition, London: Longman Group Ltd, 1983);

*The Transplanted Heart, Essays on South Africa* (Benin City, Nigeria: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1975);

*Tasks and Masks, Themes and Styles of African Literature* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Group Ltd, 1981);

*Mating Birds* (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1986);

*Underground People* (~~to be published end of 1993~~). (1994 - Dutch edition).

**MOTION PICTURES:** *Come Back Africa*, screenplay co-authored by Lewis

Nkosi, directed by Lionel Rogosin, 1959.

**PLAY PRODUCTIONS:** *The Rhythm of Violence*, London, 1963;

*Malcolm*, London, ICA and Bush Theatres, 1972-1973;

*The Red Rooster*, commissioned by NOS, Holland, 1976;

*The Black Psychiatrist*, Lusaka, Lusaka Theatre Playhouse, 1983.

**RADIO SCRIPTS:** *We Can't All Be Martin Luther King*, radio play by Lewis

Nkosi, written for BBC Third Programme, 1971.

**TV SCRIPTS:** *Malcolm*, television play by Lewis Nkosi, commissioned by

Swedish Television, 1967.

**OTHER:** "The Prisoner", short-story by Lewis Nkosi, published in *African*

*Writing Today*, ed. Ezekiel Mphahlele (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd,

1967);

*The Chameleon and the Lizard*, libretto in Zulu written by Lewis Nkosi,

performed by the London Bach Society, Goldsmiths' College, London, 1971

and in Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, 1976;

*Lalela Zulu*, a cycle of Zulu songs with texts written by Lewis Nkosi,

commissioned by Halle Music Society, (Manchester) for The King Singers,

performed in Manchester at the Manchester Trades Hall and in London at the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Royal Festival Hall, broadcast on the BBC and recorded by EMI Recording Company.

"Under the Shadow of the Guns", short-story by Lewis Nkosi, published in *Colours of a New Day, Writing for South Africa*, eds. Sarah Lefanu and Stephen Hayward (Great Britain: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990; revised edition, USA: Pantheon Books, 1991; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1991) pp. 272-288;

**SELECTED PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS - UNCOLLECTED:** "Individualism and Social Commitment" in *The Writer in Modern Africa*, proceedings of the African-Scandinavian Writers' Conference, Stockholm, 1967, ed. Per Wästberg (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968), pp. 45-58;

"Sex and Politics in Southern African Literature," in *Papers on African Literature*, Sheffield Papers on Literature and Society N° 1 (1976), ed. Christopher Heywood (Sheffield: Sheffield University, 1976), pp. 1-12;

"Culture in Another South Africa" in *Southern African Review of Books*, Vol. 2, N° 6, Issue 10, August/September 1989, pp. 3-5;

"A Country of Borders" in *Southern African Review of Books*, Vol. 3, N° 6, Issue 16, August/October 1990, pp. 19-20;

"Crisis and Conflict in the New Literatures in English. A Keynote Address" in *Crisis and Conflict Essays on Southern African Literature*, proceedings of the XIth Annual Conference on Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in German-Speaking Countries, Aachen-Liège, 16-19 June, 1988, ed. Geoffrey V. Davis (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 1990), pp. 19-26;

"Schrijven onder een nieuw Teken" ("Writing under a New Sign"), in *Het Kantelend Wereld Beeld (Toppling World-View)*, eds. Judith Herzeberg et al. (The Netherlands: Uitgeverij De Balie-Novib, 1992), p. 153.

Additional entry # 1

"And ah, how I miss that angriest Angry Young Man, Lewis Nkosi!"

Casey 'Kid' Motsisi's poignant lament was written in March 1963 following the departure from South Africa into exile of many of his *Drum* colleagues, among them Lewis Nkosi. Throughout the second half of the 1950's Lewis Nkosi had worked for *Drum* publications in Johannesburg, one among that outstanding pleiad of journalists who made *Drum* the principal vehicle for African literature in English in South Africa during that period. It was while working for *Drum* that Lewis Nkosi first made his mark as a writer. His name ranks alongside those of Bloke Modisane, Can Themba, Nat Nakasa, Todd

during the 1960s, Lewis Nkosi has become an acclaimed African literary critic and essayist. In the 1970s, he consolidated his knowledge and skills as a critic in academic qualifications which opened up opportunities in university departments in Zambia, Warsaw and most recently Wyoming, USA. Parallel to this development has been his move into creative writing, notably short-stories and long prose fiction, which, together with his university lecturing and participation in the on-going South African literary discourse, has become a major pursuit for him.

Lewis Nkosi was born in Durban, South Africa on 5 December 1936. With both his parents having died in his early childhood, responsibility for his upbringing from the age of eight rested with his maternal grandmother. Living first at Hillcrest, where he received his first formal education, and then at Hammersdale, the loss of family property forced Lewis and his grandmother to move to his uncle's house near Durban. He went to primary schools at Claremont and Chesterville and began his secondary education in Durban,



commuting each day by bus from Cato Manor. At High School he studied English and began to read extensively, in particular English translations of the novels of Alexandre Dumas, Gustave Flaubert, Honoré de Balzac and Victor Hugo. It was at this time, too, that he started to write. Then, in 1952, at the age of sixteen, Lewis Nkosi was admitted to the Zulu Lutheran High School, a boarding school at Eshowe where he spent the next two years. Thanks to the Zulu language teacher at this school, he became immersed in Zulu history and culture, an experience he found particularly powerful and memorable.

On leaving High School, Lewis Nkosi worked for one year for a construction company in Durban. On one occasion, he spent a whole week's wages - £2 10s - on Peter Abraham's recently-published *Tell Freedom* (1954). Later, he worked for a fertilizer manufacturer and lived in a single-men's compound in conditions which were not conducive to reading. He left the company and began to write freelance for the Zulu newspaper, *Ilanga lase Natal* (*Natal Sun*). Before joining *Ilanga*, however, during a brief period spent

working in a paint factory, Lewis Nkosi learnt of his grandmother's passing away. Lewis Nkosi had been closer to his grandmother than anybody else up until that time and her death made him determined to cut his ties with Durban.

Lewis Nkosi began working part-time for *Ilanga lase Natal* in 1955, while studying for the matriculation examination at the M.L.Sultan Technical College in Durban. In 1956, at the age of eighteen, he took up a full-time position on the newspaper's staff, becoming the youngest journalist in South Africa with his own opinion column in a city newspaper. Soon after, Lewis Nkosi received an offer from *Drum* magazine in Johannesburg. He made no mention of the *Drum* offer at *Ilanga*, however, until R.R.R. Dhlomo, who was later to become *Ilanga's* chief editor, took him to task for publishing a letter supporting non-racism between African and Asians in a rival Durban newspaper. Lewis Nkosi seized this opportunity to resign from *Ilanga lase Natal* and moved first to the *Drum* office in Durban and soon after to *Drum* in Johannesburg. He was then nineteen years old.

From 1956 until 1960, Lewis Nkosi worked as a journalist on *Drum* magazine and for *Drum* publication's Sunday newspaper, *Golden City Post*. A resident of Sophiatown until it was razed to the ground by bulldozers in 1958, it was there that he came into contact with Athol and Sheila Fugard. Together with Bloke Modisane, Can Themba, Nat Nakasa and Lewis himself, Athol Fugard formed an African Theatre Workshop and in August 1958 Lewis Nkosi participated in the production of the first performance of *No-Good Friday*, Fugard's first 'township' play, at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg. It was also during this period that Lewis Nkosi came into contact with Jack Thompson, a University of New York professor and representative of the Farfield Foundation, an organisation dedicated to supporting culture which, unknown to Lewis Nkosi at the time, was receiving funds from the CIA.

Lewis Nkosi met Jack Thompson through Nat Nakasa, a *Drum* colleague and childhood friend, and was invited to apply for a scholarship. He

accompanied his application with some of his writings and was offered a scholarship to study a one-year course in journalism at Harvard University. However, the decision to take up the offer was a difficult one since it would mean leaving a position in South Africa at the top of the Black journalist's profession. Then, in 1960, together with Nat Nakasa, Lewis Nkosi covered the massacre at Sharpeville, Nat for *Drum* magazine and Lewis for the Sunday newspaper. Lewis and Nat helped transport a wounded person to a hospital where they saw bodies - some of them still alive - piled on top of one another. Later they drove off to make their reports to their respective newspapers. That same evening Lewis was invited to dinner at the home of Harold Wolpe, a left-wing lawyer and leading member of the Communist Party in the Congress of Democrats. As Sophiatown resident, *Drum* staff-member and a bright young Black intellectual, Lewis Nkosi had been frequently fêted by Johannesburg's White liberal intellectual élite. Moreover, *Drum* journalists had developed a self-conscious code of behaviour which presented an image characterised by toughness, cynicism and a refusal to exhibit self-pity. So at dinner, in true

*Drum* journalist fashion, Lewis told Harold Wolpe how he had 'witnessed some shooting' during the day. Soon after, Wolpe learnt from the *Rand Daily Mail* the true extent of the massacre. He then persuaded Lewis to take up the scholarship in the USA.

Lewis Nkosi was able to leave South Africa thanks to a law dating from the Union of South Africa which Harold Wolpe had discovered in the statute book. However, the fact that he needed a visa to enter the USA meant that he had first to go to London where officials in Harold Macmillan's Conservative government obtained a visa from the American Embassy for him on the condition that the United Kingdom would accept him back once his scholarship had expired. So, in 1961 he took up a one-year Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts to study journalism, having left South Africa on a one-way exit permit. From then onwards, his name was added to the list of banned persons in South Africa which meant that his

writings could no longer be published and his words no longer quoted in that country.

*The Rhythm of Violence* (1964)

While studying at Harvard, Lewis Nkosi wrote *The Rhythm of Violence* as an entry for a play competition to be put on at Harvard University's Brattle Theatre. Written just after the first Johannesburg bomb incident in 1961, the theme of the play develops around the relationship between Tula, a Black student, and Sarie Marais, an Afrikaner. The two university students meet for the first time at a party in a Hillbrow flat in which members of an underground cell who have planted a bomb inside Johannesburg City Hall wait nervously for midnight, the time it is to be detonated. A strong, mutual affection develops between Tula and Sarie and tension is heightened when Tula learns from Sarie, who does not know of the plot, that her father, a repentant National Party supporter, has gone to a National Party rally in the City Hall in order to resign

as a member. Tula, who is infatuated with Sarie, realises that her father is about to be killed and makes a last minute attempt to stop the bomb from being detonated. Tula is killed as the bomb explodes and Sarie is arrested as she weeps over Tula's body and is taken off for interrogation.

Lewis Nkosi's intention with *The Rhythm of Violence* is not to condemn violence *per se* or to recommend, as Wole Soyinka's interpretation in *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976, pp. 70-72) appears to maintain, that multi-racial love be considered as an alternative strategy to violence in the achievement of the goals of 'the Struggle'. The point of the play is to show that, caught between Black aspirations and the forces of apartheid, the young Black student will always be the victim in the race war as it develops in South Africa and that individuals like Tula and Sarie who are caught up in emotional relationships will always be destroyed by race-group conflict. In *The Rhythm of Violence* there are two rhythms beating simultaneously, on the one hand the rhythm of the background jazz which provides an empathetic *basso continuo*

to the growth of the mutual infatuation between Tula and Sarie, and on the other the ticking of the clock which signals the relentless momentum towards the tragic conclusion.

Lewis Nkosi returned to London in 1962 at a time when the city had begun to vibrate with the music, the images and the life-styles of the 'swinging 60s'. He became acquainted with writers such as Len Deighton and Robert Hughes and frequented the haunts of writers and journalists around the Soho district. It was the time, too, of the London performances of Todd Matshikiza's jazz opera, *King Kong*. Soon after his return to England, both Random House and Longman offered him £200 retainers for a first book. At the time, Lewis Nkosi was rapidly making a name for himself as literary critic and as television and periodical journalist. Between 1962 and 1968 he worked as editor of the South African Information Bulletin. Between 1962 and 1964, drawing on his extensive knowledge of African literature, he recorded a series of interviews with numerous African authors, including Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi



and Richard Rive at the London Transcription Centre. The Centre also collaborated with National Education Television (USA) in the production of the series "African Writers Today" for which Lewis Nkosi was moderator and interviewer. As a BBC television interviewer, he was responsible for programmes on the life of Sir Learie Constantine (1901-1971), the Trinidadian cricketer who received a life peerage in 1969. Lewis Nkosi also participated in the documentary "Three Writers in London" with Olivier Todd of *Le Nouvel Observateur* and Australian art critic Robert Hughes among others.

Between 1965 and 1968 he worked as Literary Editor of *The New African* in London. During this period and subsequently he also made numerous contributions, many in the form of book reviews, to *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Présence Africaine*, *The Observer*, *The Guardian*, *The Spectator*, *The New Statesman*, *New Society*, *Africa Report*, *The Classic*, *The New African*, *Black Orpheus*, *The New York Review of Books* and *The Southern African Review of Books*, among others.

*Home and Exile and Other Selections* (1965, 1983)

Pressed by the Longman representative, Lewis Nkosi began to think seriously about putting together a number of essays and articles in a single volume. The result, *Home and Exile and Other Selections*, was first published by Longman in London and New York in 1965. This collection of wide-ranging, insightful and at times prophetic essays presents aspects of life both within South Africa's racially-segregated communities and, from the vantage point of exile, in cities such as New York and Paris. Included, too, are critical essays on the works of several South African writers, among them Alan Paton, Athol Fugard, Alex La Guma, Es'kia Mphahlele and Nadine Gordimer. Nkosi's wide reading and personal experience provide the base for his sound, at times controversial opinions which are powerfully expressed in carefully-crafted texts.

Two of the essays written especially for this collection have become basic texts on their respective subject matter. The first, entitled "The Fabulous

Decade: the fifties", derives from Lewis Nkosi's experience working on the popular *Drum* magazine. Rejecting along with the rest of his generation the character of Stephen Kumalo, Alan Paton's Black South African protagonist in *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1948), Nkosi remarks on the lack of rôle-models in the literature of the 1950s with which young Black South Africans could identify. In an attempt to compensate for this deficiency, the *Drum* journalists developed their own rôle-model whose code of behaviour exhibited "a unique intellectual style; usually urbane, ironic, morally tough and detached:" (Nkosi, 1983, p. 9). Moreover, Nkosi goes on to observe that "A DRUM man took sex and alcohol in his stride ..." (Nkosi, 1983, p. 9) and never shied away from danger. Part and parcel of 'the *Drum* ethic' was the shebeen culture which thrived in Johannesburg due to the cultural vitality engendered by the city's large Jewish community. Nkosi goes on to argue that, far from being a decade of despair, the performing arts, in particular Todd Matshikiza's jazz opera *King Kong* and underground African jazz in which both Black and White South Africans participated, made the 1950s "a time of infinite hope and possibility"

(Nkosi, 1983, p. 16). However, racially-mixed party-going and musical soirées made Black South Africans aware of the sterile nature of White South African life-styles which in turn led to contempt for White South Africans. Nkosi writes:

"I think we began about this time subtly to despise white South Africans."

(Nkosi, 1983, p. 23).

The second essay, "Fiction by Black South Africans", constitutes a provocative young man's perception of the current state of South African literature during the 1950s and early 1960s. Designed to stimulate discussion, it is a plea for Black South African writers to take their craft more seriously. Nkosi finds journalistic presentations of life under apartheid and the use of 'ready-made plots of racial violence, social apartheid, interracial love affairs which are doomed from the beginning' (Nkosi, 1983, p. 132), written without taking into account the literary techniques of writers such as Dostoyevsky, Kafka or Joyce, to be too crude and unsubtle. Nkosi cites Richard Rive's novel, *Emergency*, as a case in point and expresses a preference for a novel

such as Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* which, in his opinion, provides the key to a far more effective way of presenting the iniquities of racial discrimination to the readership.

Critics continue to refer specifically to this essay and to develop and expand on points first raised in it. While agreeing with Nkosi that Black South African writers have tended to present political themes in a journalistic style at the expense of literary form, Njabulo Ndebele believes the writer should develop ways to handle information more effectively. On the other hand, in an essay on Black South African oral forms published in Landeg White and Tim Couzen's collection (1984), Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane has complained that Nkosi's position ignores "the African communal ethic which has given rise to the 'political tale'." More recently, Piniel Viriri Shava has concluded in *A People's Voice* (1989) that, as long as Black South African writers are expected to support 'the struggle', the division between theme and literary form is bound to continue.

Other essays in the collection refer to the impact of European culture on African art. In "A Question of Identity", for example, Nkosi assesses the impact of European colonisation on the Black individual in Africa and argues that African artists have been too self-conscious, allowing themselves to be swayed in their crafts by European critical perceptions. Condemning perceived European anxiety for African culture as misplaced self-indulgence and rejecting *négritude* as a misguided African response to colonial attitudes, Nkosi maintains that an African perception of African society derived through art will lead to an African identity. This argument is reinforced in "Robinson Crusoe: Call me Master" in which Nkosi, like James Joyce, sees Robinson Crusoe as a prototype Anglo-Saxon colonist " ... hacking out of the wilderness a mode of civilized existence". (Nkosi, 1983, p. 155) For Nkosi, the whole colonising enterprise is fed by " ... that extraordinary belief, rejected again and again by the native races, that what is good for Robinson Crusoe is good for Man Friday." (Nkosi, 1983, p. 154). In the last essay of the collection, "Literature and Liberation", Nkosi suggests an African response to the impact of

European culture on African art. Criticising Black South African writers for producing propagandistic, tub-thumping prose, he argues that a Marxist approach to literature is complex and allows ideologies to be expressed through literature without producing simple propaganda, as the works of the Latin-American revolutionary writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Mario Vargas Llosa have shown. More recently, in a book review in *Southern African Review of Books*, August/September 1989 of Willem Campschrueer and Joost Divendal eds. *Culture in Another South Africa* (London: Zed Books, 1989), Nkosi has agreed with one of the contributors that a return to a pre-colonial traditional African culture in the new South Africa is untenable and that at the moment there exists in South Africa a ruling-class culture " ... which is no longer 'European' or Western in any significant sense but is not yet African", with the only way forward being " ... to join in the building of an alternative and free democratic culture." (p. 5)

In three essays in the collection Nkosi describes his experiences in New York. In "Encounter with New York I (1964)", he recalls his first arrival in January 1961 and his return there during the Harvard summer vacation when he stayed in Greenwich Village, shared the company of James Baldwin for whom he has a lasting admiration and listened to Sheila Jordan for the first time. The second essay, "Encounter with New York II, Portrait of Sheila Jordan" recalls a visit to New York in January 1965 on his way back to London from the southern states which he had toured for the *London Observer* to collect data for a series of articles on the Civil Rights Movement. The essay, a tribute to the jazz-singer, Sheila Jordan, whom he is overjoyed to find still appearing at Page Three, reveals Nkosi's passion for jazz and his appreciation of the White singer's sensitivity. In April 1971, on his way to take up a three-month visiting professorship at Irvine, California, Nkosi stopped over in New York once more. The third essay, "Out There on a Visit: American Notes" records his surprise and sadness at the apparent decline in the quality of life and diminished vitality among the city's intellectuals, a fact which is reflected in



the duller quality of literary publications such as *Commentary* and the *New York Review of Books*.

At once witty and compassionate, the essays in this collection capture the spirit of the times they refer to and, insofar as the essays on South Africa are concerned, remain unsurpassed in their vivid, detached portrayal of some of the personalities and events of the apartheid era. With no attempt at persuasion or the slightest hint of demagoguery, Lewis Nkosi puts his craft as a journalist to masterful use and provides his readers with a feeling for Black South Africa, a more perceptive understanding of the Black South African writer in exile and a deeper appreciation of African literatures. In 1965, he was awarded a prize at the Dakar World Festival of the Negro Arts for *Home and Exile and Other Selections*.

Exile status and problems with documentation did not prevent Lewis Nkosi from travelling extensively during the 1960s. From his London base, he

attended the "African Writers of English-speaking Africa" conference in Makerere, Uganda in 1962 and in August 1963 he returned to Africa to interview several African writers, stopping over in Paris for the first time. In September 1965 he visited Paris again, this time accompanied by his wife. Staying in a friend's apartment near Montparnasse, Nkosi became enamoured with Parisian café culture with its artistic, bohemian, multi-racial clientele. It was at the *Café Select* that he regularly shared a table with Breyten Breytenbach, the Afrikaner painter and poet. Then, in 1967 Lewis Nkosi's application for British nationality was finally successful and he was granted British citizenship. Ironically, that same year Lewis Nkosi was arrested for not having a passport and forced to spend a day in a Cameroon gaol. The kindness of an Igbo woman - she travelled 100 miles through the bush to return his mislaid briefcase to the authorities - made it possible for him to continue on to Eastern Nigeria where he experienced the weeks preceding the Biafran War.

Lewis Nkosi's professional career as journalist, essayist and creative writer on the one hand and as literary critic and Harvard scholar on the other

has meant that he has had to mix academic aims with creative development. In line with this duality of purpose, in 1970 he began a four-year course for a Diploma in English Literature at the University of London. Soon after, in the spring of 1971, he was appointed visiting Regents Professor of African Literature at the University of California at Irvine and spent the next three months lecturing, counselling and writing there, while living in a motel room overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Laguna Beach.

#### *The Transplanted Heart (1975)*

In 1975 *The Transplanted Heart, Essays on South Africa* was published by the Ethiope Publishing Corporation, Benin City, Nigeria. In a format not unlike *Home and Exile and Other Selections*, the essays were written over a period of eight years while Lewis Nkosi was working as director of the African Section of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. The principle focus of the essays, some of which had already appeared in *Home and Exile and Other*

*Selections*, is South Africa, in particular the political and cultural repercussions on Black South African life. Inevitably, essays on political figures like B.J. Vorster and his ministers which point to the absurdity and cruelty of their policies have become dated. On the other hand, an essay like "Sex and the Law in South Africa" retains its initial strong impact owing to Nkosi's perceptive observations and criticisms of certain key works of South African literature such as Athol Fugard's play, *The Blood Knot* (1963, 1964) and Alan Paton's novel, *Too Late the Phalarope* (1955). In other essays in the collection, Nkosi discusses the works of Alex La Guma, Athol Fugard and Herman Charles Bosman. *The Transplanted Heart* also contains two obituaries, one to Albert Luthuli and the other to Can Themba.

In 1976 Lewis Nkosi took a Master of Arts degree in English Literature at the University of Sussex with a dissertation entitled "Daniel Defoe and the Rise of the English Middle Class". By this time, too, he had already started writing what was intended to be his first novel, *Underground People*. During this

period, however, by way of a distraction, he began to write a short-story, a piece which would develop eventually into the novella, *Mating Birds*. He went on subsequently to complete two years of course work for a three-year Ph.D on the Polish writer, Joseph Conrad, an author to whom Nkosi is greatly attracted partly because, like Chinua Achebe and V.S. Naipaul, although not his first language, Conrad writes successfully in English. Work on his doctoral thesis was interrupted in 1979, however, by Lewis Nkosi's return to Africa to take up a post as Senior Lecturer at the University of Zambia in Lusaka. Once there, the struggle for Zimbabwean independence led to a general call up in Zambia and the suspension of classes. During this respite from lecturing, Nkosi completed *Mating Birds* which by then had grown into a novella.

*Tasks and Masks* (1981)

*Tasks and Masks, Themes and Styles of African Literature*, a collection of essays based on the reading and theorising Lewis Nkosi found time for during

his visiting professorship at Irvine, was published by Longman in England in 1981. In this work, Lewis Nkosi advocates a Marxist approach which links a literary work both to history and its author while maintaining that in the last instance the meaning and significance of a text will derive from the body of the text itself. In his study, Nkosi draws up a dichotomy between those African writers, on the one hand, who perceive African societies as inherently traditional and invoke oral language forms, cultural activities and historical referents in their literary texts, that is, *masks*, and on the other hand, African writers who create literary texts in order to achieve non-literary objectives, that is, to report on conditions and record opinions in an effort to goad their societies on through the post-colonial period into decolonised, independent dispensations. These latter texts are *tasks*.

Divided into four main sections, the first dealing with the question of language as the writer's medium in Africa, the second with prose writers, the third with poets and the fourth with playwrights, *Tasks and Masks* gives an overall analysis of literary works in sub-Saharan Africa, focussing on the works

and criticism by writers from East, West Southern and Central Africa. Following a presentation of the concept of *négritude* in Chapter Two, with criticism of the opinions and works of Aimé Césaire, Abiola Irele, Léopold Senghor who are in favour and Es'kia Mphahlele who is strongly against the concept, Nkosi maintains that the only interest *négritude* can have as a critical concept is as part of a history of ideas, along with surrealism, romanticism, Freudianism and Marxism. In Chapter Three he writes on writers who portray traditional African society - Chinua Achebe, Peter Abrahams, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Sembene Ousmane and Yambo Ouologuem - all writers with a strong historical sense. He points out that there are various ways of presenting African events and societies and degrees to which African writers pander to European perceptions of African history. In Chapter Four he distinguishes a blurred cleavage between traditional references in the works of Achebe and the early novels of Ngugi and the more 'experimental' writings of Amos Tutuola, Gabriel Okara, Kofi Awoonor, Ayi Kwei Armah and Wole Soyinka. Nkosi maintains that such writers make up an African modernist movement, facing forwards to the

latest innovations in fiction as well as backwards to the roots of African tradition. As African writers and as the successors of an oral tradition, the aim of their craft is a story well told and, given the present situations in Africa, they still have stories to tell. Chapter Five deals with Black South African writers, authors whose *task* focusses on the situation in their country, with critical observations on the works of writers such as Modikwe Dikobe, Enver Carim, Alex La Guma, Es'kia Mphahlele, Bessie Head and D.M. Zwelonka.

Chapters Six and Seven are dedicated to an analysis of African poetry. In Chapter Six, sub-titled 'The Pioneers', Nkosi writes on African poets such as Juan Latino, Phyllis Wheatley, B.W. Vilakazi, H.I.E. Dhlomo, J.J.R. Jolobe, Michael Dei-Anang and Raphael Armattoe. In Chapter Seven - "The Moderns", he comments on the works of Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, Flavian Ranaivo, Jacques Rabemananjara, David Diop, Bernard Dadié, Léopold Senghor, Birago Diop and Tchicaya U'Tamsi.



In Chapter Eight, Nkosi deals with the themes and styles of African drama. In general terms, he contends that the current richness of African drama derives from a parallel development of modern and traditional forms which reflects the condition of contemporary African societies at a time of transition. He offers criticism of the works of Ulli Beier, Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, Ama Ata Aidoo, Efua Sutherland, R. Sarif Easmon, J.C. De Graft, Wole Soyinka and John Pepper Clark, and ends the chapter with the suggestion that popular theatre is the most effective form of mass communication, especially of social comment, that the African artist has at his disposal.

With the publication of *Tasks and Masks, Themes and Styles of African Literature* (1981), Lewis Nkosi consolidated his position as a leading critic of African literature. *Home and Exile and Other Selections*, *The Transplanted Heart* and *Tasks and Masks* remain standard texts of critical thinking on African literatures, and the publication of the latter in 1981 undoubtedly led to Lewis Nkosi's appointment as Associate Professor of Literature at the

University of Zambia in 1984 and his appointment to full professorship the following year.

*italics* → Mating Birds (1986)

One year after his appointment as Professor of Literature at the University of Zambia in 1985, Lewis Nkosi's first novel, *Mating Birds*, was published by Constable in Great Britain. The text is a first person narration written down by Sibiya in a cell on death row at Durban Central Prison. A 25-year-old Zulu undergraduate of the University of Natal, Sibiya has been condemned to death by hanging for allegedly raping Veronica Slater, a White South African. In his account of the events which led up to his being caught *in flagrante* with Veronica in her Durban beach bungalow, Sibiya explains to Dr. Dufré, a Swiss criminologist investigating sexual crimes, that their love-making was by mutual consent and the result of a long process of seduction which had taken place on the beach. Kept apart by the apartheid colour-bar which allocates certain

parts of the beach to members of a specific racial group, Sibiya and Veronica seduce each other at a distance and are subsequently discovered by the South African police during what is their first physical contact with each other. In court, Veronica lies, so Sibiya claims, by saying that she is a rape victim. With his skin colour, the *Immorality Act* and extreme White racist opinion against him, Sibiya is condemned to death, while Veronica escapes all recrimination.

As with *The Rhythm of Violence*, in *Mating Birds* Lewis Nkosi focusses attention on the development of human affective relationships in a context of violence. In *Mating Birds*, the *Immorality Act* and a segregated Durban beach are obstacles in the way of the physical attraction Veronica and Sibiya feel for each other. More than that, it is the legislated taboo itself which acts as the catalyst for Sibiya's lust: "I am certain what I felt for her was not exactly sexual desire for a body I must have known I could never possess, the race laws being what they are in South Africa; (...) it was anger I felt for that girl. A

sudden, all-consuming fury and blinding rage. She lay there in my path like a jibe, a monstrous provocation, ... " (p. 7) In Sibiya's opinion, Veronica's lust for him is also provoked by the taboo: "For in my lust for her, Veronica must have recognised the force of her own social existence, the image of her own sexual powers; (...) I was as much of a drug as she was to me, the ultimate mirror in which she saw reflected the power of her sex and her race." (p. 74) It is the nature of the context of confrontation itself which engenders and foments the physical attraction between the individuals.

However, at another level *Mating Birds* is about injustice, not Veronica's injustice towards Sibiya as she lies about their mutually-felt desire for each other, not the court's injustice as it condemns Sibiya to death after hearing the White girl's undisputed evidence, not even the injustice of South Africa's *Immorality Act* which forbids affection between members of different race-groups. The source of the injustice is the sad state of European spirituality. Sibiya is to be hung for raping a 'European' girl by a 'European'

court which passes judgement in the name of the 'European' race which has spent the last three hundred years systematically colonising - 'raping'- Black Africa. South Africa's apartheid laws have simply concretised the 'rape victim' status of Black South African societies. In effect, it is 'European' spirituality that is on trial and, ultimately, it is 'European' society which will reap the post-colonial whirlwind. In 1987, Lewis Nkosi was awarded the Macmillan Silver Pen Prize for his novel, *Mating Birds*.

*italics* → *Underground People* (1994 - Dutch edition)

Well before *Mating Birds* was published, Lewis Nkosi had read excerpts of *Underground People* in public on several occasions, especially at the University of Zambia. The plot of the novel had developed while thinking about the imprisoned Nelson Mandela and the possibility of exchanging White hostages for his release. However, worried that the story line was too similar to that of Graham Greene's *The Honorary Consul* (1973) and with a desire to

Mike Nicol, *A Good-Looking Corpse* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1991).

Kevin Goddard and Charles Wessels (Comps.), *Out of Exile: Interviews with Albie Sachs, Lewis Nkosi, Mubulelo Mzamane, Breyten Breytenbach, Dennis Brutus, Keorapetse Kgotsitsile* (Grahamstown: National English Literary Museum, 1992).

**Bibliographies:** Bernth Lindfors, *Black African Literature in English, 1982 - 1986* (London: Hans Zell, 1989).

**Biographies:** *Who's Who in African Literature: Biographies, Works, Commentaries*, eds. Janheinz Jahn, Ulla Schild and Almut Nordmann (Tübingen: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1972, p. 265);

*A Reader's Guide to African Literature*, eds. Hans M. Zell and Helene Silver (London: Heinemann; New York: Africana Publishing Corp., 1972); revised and enlarged as *A New Reader's Guide to African Literature*, 2nd edition, eds. Hans M. Zell, Carol Bundy and Virginia Coulon (London, Ibadan, Nairobi: Heinemann; New York: Africana, 1983, pp. 435 - 437);

*Companion to South African English Literature*, comps. David Adey, Ridley Beeton, Michael Chapman and Ernest Pereira (Craighall: Ad. Donker (Pty) Ltd, 1986, p. 146);

*Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, eds. Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly (London: Routledge), ~~end 1993~~; 1994, pp. 1103-1104

**References:** Ursula A. Barnett, *A Vision of Order: A Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914-1980)* (London: Sinclair Browne; Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983);

Josephine Dodd, "The South African Literary Establishment and the Textual Production of 'Woman': J.M.Coetzee and Lewis Nkosi" in Daymond, M.J. (Ed.), *Current Writing* Vol. 2, (Durban: University of Natal, October 1990, pp. 117-129);

Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse eds., *African Writers Talking* (London: Heinemann, <sup>1972, 1988</sup>1972);

James Olney, *Tell Me Africa, An Approach to African Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), <sup>1973</sup>1973;



Piniel Viriri Shava, *A People's Voice, Black South African Writing in the Twentieth Century* (London: Zed Books Ltd; Athens, OH: Ohio University Press; Harare: Baobab Books, 1989);

Landeg White and Tim Couzens eds., *Literature and Society in South Africa* (Harlow: Longman Group Ltd, 1984).