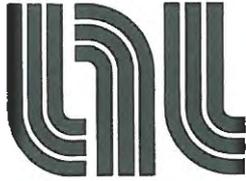


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September 27, 1989

Professor Reinhart Sander  
41 Lincoln Ave.  
Amherst  
Massachusetts 01002

Dear Professor Sander,

The permission to copy a page from the Nortje  
manuscript which Professor Lindfors asked us  
for has just arrived, and I am forwarding a page  
to you. ~~I hope the picture of Dennis Brutus~~  
~~arrived safely, it was sent last week.~~ o.k.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mette Shayne".

Mette Shayne  
librarian

Thanks  
for your info.  
R.S.

✓ AWAY SO FAR INDEED

206  
Away so far indeed my love may never  
grow actual in your home despite that need:  
the waiting numbs the heart with winter wishes,  
the sea between could render me its eunuch.

Tenderness keeps, & now that knowledge deepens,  
through absence you are grown so dear & real.  
The cross of thought sheds snow leaves from dim regions,  
like presences in air, it's what you breathe.

When is your arrival? You arrange your hair  
in distant places, silent to surprise me,  
while I climb istand paths to clearer prospects:  
without your nearness worlds withold their treasures.

Keen edge of winter cleans the flesh like truth,  
air with cold purity becomes your agent.  
My hands bleed for your limbs, land of my own,  
& fingers keen for warmth along your cheek.

With dusk descends the wilderness of dreams  
in your quite usual beauty finding rare virtues.  
Your <sup>lover's</sup> morn's gift is to <sup>point</sup> show my destiny,  
So I shall hold you safe to man's dumb purpose.  
For to some purpose will we seed the dark.

K. Oxford 1966

THIRD PERSON

He asks what tree this is what tree  
so trim & slender with its various golds,  
its ambers fading ~~to~~ the eyes but then  
a through is delivered out of the leaves.

The hint of autumn prints the changing tones  
on silver ash & birch, the crisp notes spin  
in showering moments when the wind  
is air which melancholy stirs to motion.

No grey abstraction ~~is~~ the sky which keeps  
the laws of the mute transfiguring waters.  
Under the shifting mists he links  
his words like pearls about your features.

---

Add to references on ARTHUR K. NORTJE:

André Lefevre, "Arthur Nortje's Poetry of Exile," Restant, 8, 2 (1980):

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Nkondo, G.M. "Arthur Nortje's Microscopic Eye and Literal Imagination,"

ACLALS Bulletin, 6, 1 (1982): 89-99.

V.  
ARTHUR MORTJE  
^

(16 December 1942-10 ? December 1970)

David Bunn

University of the Western Cape

BIRTH: Oudtshoorn, South Africa, 16 December 1942

EDUCATION: Paterson High School, Port-Elizabeth; B.A., University  
College of the Western Cape; B.A., Jesus College, Oxford.

AWARDS: MBARI award for poetry.

~~NEW~~ WORKS:

Educational Books [African Writers Series, 141],

Collections: Dead Roots (London: Heinemann, 1973); Lonely Against the

Light, edited by G. Butler and R. Harnett, New Coin Poetry, 9 (September  
1973).

Anthologies

Major Anthology Appearances (including otherwise unpublished work):

Seven South African Poets, edited by Cosmo Pieterse (London: Heinemann,

1971); Poets to the People, edited by G. Feinberg (London: George Allen

& Unwin, 1974); Poems of Black Africa, edited by Wole Soyinka (London:

Secker & Warburg, 1975); A New Book of South African Verse in English,

edited by G. Butler and C. Mann (Cape Town: Oxford University Press,

ask  
at  
each  
level  
referred

1979); The Return of the Anasi Bird, edited by Tim Couzens and Essop Patel (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1982); Somehow We Survive, edited by Sterling Plump (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1982).

Until recently, Arthur Nortje was often referred to rather sentimentally as South Africa's "forgotten poet." Nevertheless, students of South African culture have never lost sight of Nortje's importance as a poet and as a symbol of resistance to apartheid. Ever since Nortje's tragic death in 1970, a few days before his twenty-eighth birthday, writers and critics alike have been struggling to come to terms with the haunting poetic documents he left behind. In his career, his poetry, and the manner of his death, we see exemplified the problematic of reconciling aesthetics and political commitment, for the essence of Arthur Nortje is struggle--struggle to forge a personal and poetic identity in the face of dehumanizing political forces which eventually drove him into exile. Most important of all, perhaps, Nortje represents a part of South African history which was conveniently effaced and which is only now being painfully recovered. In recent years, academic

interest in Nortje has been fuelled by the discovery of numerous unpublished manuscripts which hint tantalizingly at his unfulfilled potential.

To understand Arthur Nortje, we must understand the political forces that bore down upon him from a very early age. He was the second illegitimate son of Cecilia Potgieter, classified "coloured" (the racist appellation applied to individuals of mixed descent in South Africa), and born into a community that was to suffer increasing alienation with the imposition of apartheid legislation in the forties and fifties. Raised initially in an Afrikaans-speaking family, then nurtured in an English-speaking environment in Port Elizabeth, he had a multilingual background that gave even his earliest poems a brilliant edge.

The early Nortje (in the works written between 1960 and 1964) assumes the posture of the poet manqué, a "dogsbody halfbreed" (as he referred to himself), standing in romantic antithesis to the discriminatory conditions brought about by apartheid. This slightly disdainful attitude is but the first of a series of poetic masks that Nortje donned throughout his career, but it is a mask which disguises a

deep unease. Underlying even his first published works we find aesthetic, political, and personal contradictions that would have scuttled the career of many a writer, but these provide the motive force behind his verse. His is always an aesthetic forged out of crisis and a sense of injustice. Later in his career, Nortje overcame some of these earlier contradictions: when we take into account the evidence of his unpublished letters and journals, a strong sense of purpose and corpus emerges. It is clear that after his exile in England, and his tenure in British Columbia, he had come to understand his life as an Odyssey-like progression with allegorical overtones. In the last years of his short career, this generalizing trend produced some of his greatest work: poems like "Seen one, take one," "Native's Letter," and "All Hungers Pass Away." The final poems enact a rediscovery of political meaning in personal trauma; they also embody a reformulation of his own identity, the African oral tradition, and the denied history of his ancestors. It is this widening mythopoeic and political vision, juxtaposed against occasional poems that call from the pit of despair, which has made it difficult for some critics to assess his final phase.

At the time of his death, Nortje left behind a considerable collection of his poems in manuscript, many of which were collected and published in two separate volumes: Dead Roots and Lonely Against the Light. To this must be added the thirteen anthologies which feature his work (some of it previously unpublished), and two lengthy manuscripts consisting of journal entries, transcribed letters, and drafts of published and unpublished poems. To see Nortje's development we have to cast far and wide to all of these sources, for as yet no complete edition of his works exists.

Even in the earliest published work, his technical expertise is apparent. In "Thumbing a lift," (~~DB p. 11~~<sup>9</sup> for instance, there is a highly self-conscious voice which refers to itself as a "wheedling tramp." This early persona is heavily determined (as much for its political education as for its poetry) by the influence of Dennis Brutus, now exiled, who taught Nortje English at Paterson High School in the fifties. Nortje's relationship with Brutus was deeply determining, and constantly under examination, for the ~~the~~<sup>9</sup> articulate activist was constantly challenging the younger poet to commit himself on the side of

established anti-apartheid organizations. Poems such as "Preventive Detention" and "Autopsy" reveal that Brutus ("the luminous tongue in the black world") had an almost iconographic significance for Nortje.

"Preventive Detention," written in 1963, contains an odd allusion to Brutus's imprisonment: "a spindly scholar's imprisoned because/ winter is in the brilliant grass." (~~DR p. 7~~) Lines such as these are characteristic of the way Nortje blended references to the seasons and images of political causation in his early work. One reason for this, <sup>perhaps,</sup> is that he is interested in patterning the lyric landscape of Romantic verse against the stark South African reality. Had Nortje lived, he would probably have pared away the Romantic influence, because this tendency is evident in his Canadian poems. However the Romantics, and the cadences of Hopkins, are evident in many of his South African poems. Some lines are direct imitations of Hopkins, as in the following rather overblown image from "Slip of a girl": "beautiful phantom by failed love fostered/ elfin in willow woods." (~~DR p. 12~~)

The tension between romanticism and realism is not of course peculiar to Nortje; it is an antinomy apparent in much South African

poetry written in English. Yet for Nortje, the "coloured" writer in South Africa, political realism was inescapable. His early career coincides with one of the most repressive eras in the history of apartheid: a period which saw the dictatorship of Dr Verwoerd (the "architect" of apartheid) and a series of draconian legislative measures designed to entrench segregation.

In the early 1950s, the meagre privileges enjoyed by "coloureds" were quickly eroded. Prohibitions were placed on mixed marriages, racial classification was enforced with the Population Registration Act, and the Separate Registration of Voters Bill denied parliamentary representation to all but whites. In 1959 the Extension of University Education Bill enforced apartheid at universities and schools. Nortje, a promising high school student, was forced to attend the segregated University College of the Western Cape where he was awarded a B.A. degree in 1963. His dissatisfaction is evident in a number of anonymous articles which criticize apartheid education. Significantly, through fear or sheer hesitancy, he refrains from claiming affiliation with any political group.

Arthur Nortje's university training was important, for it fed his academic interest in aesthetic theory and introduced him to a range of established poets. His poetic output increased during this period, and he received his first serious recognition in the form of a Mbari award for poetry from Ibadan University. His expanding circle of friends included influential South African writers such as Richard Rive and Athol Fugard.

Two more sombre trends begin to emerge in the poetry written during his first years at university: first, the theme of self-exploration <sup>starts</sup> to be muted by images of alcohol depression; as in "Hangover":

In case of foul play, imprisonment, death  
by drinking (identity is  
268430: KLEURLING  
Pretoria register, male 1960)  
inform Mrs Halford, Kromboom Road, Crawford

~~("Hangover" DR p.10)~~

In a manner reminiscent of the later Soweto poets, the tyranny of apartheid legislation is experienced as a form of identity crisis; he is reduced to the ciphers and categories imposed by a racist bureaucracy, stamped a "kleurling" (Afrikaans for "coloured"). Secondly, his independent spirit comes into conflict, perhaps for first time, with

those who wish him to apply his talents directly to the overthrow of apartheid. As one opponent remarked: "If only his enormous talent could have been harnessed to a cutting edge of political understanding, what a weapon he might have wielded!"

7 anonymous  
article,  
Educational  
Journal  
June 19  
p. 10

Perhaps the most haunting, and pervasive theme in the poetry from 1963 to 1965, when Nortje left South Africa, is that of silence. "The long silence," he says in a poem of the same name, "speaks/ of death and removals." Elsewhere he comments: "I have seen men with haunting voices/ turned into ghosts by a piece of white paper/ as if their eloquence had been black magic." (~~DR p. 5~~<sup>9</sup>) Thronging through this poetry, and the verse written soon after his arrival in London, there are references to refugees, exiles, and detainees, men like Brutus and Mandela whom the poet later referred to as "the dark princes." More and more of South Africa's most talented artists and political leaders were disappearing into the void of prison and exile.

Arthur Nortje left South Africa for England in late 1965. He enrolled for a B.A. at Oxford, on a scholarship arranged by the National Union of South African students and the undergraduates of Jesus College.

The decision to leave South Africa was a direct response to repressive conditions in that country, conditions which stunted his artistic and political development. Yet even at the moment of leaving, a sense of tremendous poignancy enters his verse; in "Song for a passport," for instance, he comments on his difficulty in acquiring travel documents: "Who loves me so much not to let me go . . . ?" Then in "Transition" there is the following wistful remark: "For your success, black residue,/ I bear desire still, night thing!" This last image is a characteristic one, for many of the voices of black opposition seem distanced and diminished in his early verse. Under a system of racial capitalism, where economic inequality is the norm, those who suffer often seem reduced to a lower but resilient form of life, and this is a recurrent theme in the poetry between 1964 and 1966. Yet in references to blacks as "bacteria," "residue," and "autotoxins," Nortje makes it clear that though life, for the poor, has sunk to its lowest ebb, the potential for subversive action still remains.

When Nortje left for England in 1965, he became part of a community of exiled writers that included legendary figures such as Blake

Modisane, Dennis Brutus, Es'kia Mphahlele, Alex La Guma, Can Themba, and Lewis Nkosi. As many critics have remarked, their leaving brought to an end that short-lived literary renaissance which flowered in South Africa in the fifties and sixties. Harsh legislative measures had also brought this blossoming of talent to an abrupt end. The Sharpeville massacre and subsequent bannings of the Pan Africanist Congress and African National Congress changed the face of black protest in South Africa, sending it underground until the fiery years of 1976 and 1977. The lot of the writer was a particularly unhappy one, for the Publications and Entertainment Act of 1963 instituted the official government censorship policy, and some estimates suggest that by March 1971 over 15,000 books had been banned.

For writers such as Nortje the decision to leave was by no means easily made. But the choice was governed by the hope that being overseas would bring new insights and a critical, objective perspective on the troubled country of one's birth. Once in London, Nortje, the colonial emigrant, revelled in the English way of life that he had known vicariously through literature and postcards: red double-decker buses,

for instance, are described as "gentle monsters." Also, the vastly different environment seemed to offer new possibilities for verse, and the poet rejoiced in the paradox that here, on an island, one seemed to have more freedom than in the open reaches of South Africa:

It seems at times as if I am  
 this island's lover, and can sing her soul,  
 away from the stuporing wilderness where  
 I wanted the wind to terrify the leaves. (DR p. 39)

In the first year of his exile, Nortje felt that he had achieved a more objective perspective on South Africa. Most dominant in his clearing vision of the past is the use of the color gold and the image of the sun whenever he refers to the South African context. He has turned his back, he says, on the "opulent squalor of too much sunshine," a world where "the laager/ masters recline in a gold inertia." (DR, p. 52) Looking back on South Africa is like looking back, through time, to a point where actions are performed with absurd slowness. The sun's heat becomes a metaphor for the inability of the individual to act, and the "gold" or "blonde" masters of apartheid seem satiated with greed. Exile, in other words, enables one to have a critical distance. In later years, however, as Nortje increasingly felt the alienating effects of exile, the South

African sun becomes an agent of macabre change. In "Waiting," for instance, South African poets are described as speaking "through the strangled throat of multi-humanity, / bruised like a python in the maggot fattening sun." (DR p. 90)

Though Nortje felt, in 1966, that he had managed to put a critical distance between himself and South Africa, he soon began to see that writing in a foreign country is never merely an extension (though in a freer context) of writing at home. For this reason, perhaps, he used his time at Oxford to develop an individual theory of art's "objectivity."

Much of what Nortje says on the theme of objectivity is influenced by his reading of modernists like Pound and Eliot, and exaggerated by the New Criticism he absorbed at South African universities. Moreover, he soon became interested in the sixties counter-culture and its heroes, and popular versions of Zen Buddhism no doubt added to his sense that art must be distanced. He was also particularly taken by the standards of detachment and the bias against figurative language to be found in Alain Robbe-Grillet's Towards a New Novel.

Norje's statements about "objectivity" are influenced by his need

to distance himself from South Africa. But these comments on aesthetic theory are also troubled by certain contradictions: how can one espouse an objective theory of art without diminishing the ability of the artist to act as the subject of his own work? In short, it seems absurd to withdraw from a context where one's writing seems to be curtailed, only to erect a theory that deliberately restricts the freedom of the poet to appear as a shaping force in his work. During late 1966, all of his thoughts on the role of art are subject to the same tensions that can be found in his view of exile.

In 1966 and 1967, Arthur Nortje explored with growing urgency the relationship between exile and literary production. There is an increasing sense, in his poetry and journal writings, that exile may sever the poet's ties with the country that first inspired him. Furthermore, he discovered that it was difficult to communicate the subtle horror of apartheid to an audience that had no first hand experience of it. Living in exile meant that one had to balance one's present circumstances against insistent memories of the past. In some of his poems, this produces a strained metaphoric relationship between

foreign and familiar settings, "In Exile," for example, contains these lines:

Leaves and transient  
streetscape conjure up that southern

blue sky and wind-beautiful  
day, creating paradise.  
Otherwise:  
the soul decays in exile.

("In Exile" Lonely  
against the Light,  
p. 35)

Without the direct inspiration of the southern arena, with only memory

guiding it, it is as though the "soul" of poetry withers and dies.

Winter in Oxford sees the poet "forced upon austerities" and "the soul/  
glimmers feebly in its bed of pork."

In his two years at Oxford, Nortje had gathered around him a small group of friends and admirers, perhaps the one effective buffer against his feeling of alienation from South Africa. However, the political and aesthetic contradictions of exile were matched, in spirit, by extreme psychological torment. In late 1966, Nortje weathered a time of suicidal bleakness when on the brink of a nervous breakdown. The period is best summed up by the following stanza from "The Near-mad":

Midnight over the phosphorescent sea.  
Back at the hotel hard bodies bob on the dance floor.  
You lie like an assassin in wait for the moon:  
but your jugular swells, your wrist can stain razors.

There is no question that this poem reflects on a terrifying period of Nortje's life, but it is also an elaboration of the Baudelarian posture—the flâneur in the city—of which he was so fond.

The poems written shortly before Nortje's departure for Canada in 1967 are amongst the most interesting of his career. In works such as "To John, Paul, George and Ringo," and "Discopoem," it is possible to see the depth of his identification with the youth culture of the sixties. "Message from an LSD eater," though an extremely uneven work, records his increasingly frequent experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs, and his journal for this period makes sporadic reference to Huxley, Blake, and other heroes of the counter-culture. Always, though, there is the crushing return to self that follows alcohol or drug-induced experience: "I am unsettled by a ghostly snore/ being buried in mud, life-locked." (DR p. 79)

There is, however, a countervailing tendency in the last poems before his British Columbia adventure. In "Night ferry" we hear for the first time a theme that will swell to symphonic heights in his last poems:

Origins—they are dim in time, colossally

locked in the terrible mountain, buried in seaslime,  
 or vapourized, being volatile. What purpose  
 has the traveller now, whose connection is cut  
 with the whale, the wolf or the albatross?

It is no longer the poet's individual identity that is held up for  
 scrutiny or demolition; rather, we see <sup>here</sup> the individual in relation to a  
 mythic past, a political unconscious. The same theme is sounded in  
 "Waiting," but here ~~it~~ is linked to a forgotten age of South African  
 poetry: "all the dead poets who sang of spring's/ miraculous  
 recrudescence in the sandscapes of Karoo." (~~pp. 90~~)

Despite periods of trial and suffering, Arthur Nortje enjoyed a  
 growing reputation as a poet while in England. His sense of audience had  
 matured, and he was able to elicit the help of able and sensitive  
 friends to act as editors. When in July 1970 he left for British  
 Columbia to take up a teaching position in Hope, he left behind a  
 community that was extremely important for the development of his  
 artistic and political vision. The move to Canada produced some of his  
 most epic and haunting verse; work with a breadth of vision and  
 political understanding that had been lacking up to now. But silence,  
 too, seemed to surround him once again:

It is not cosmic immensity or catastrophe  
 that terrifies me:  
 it is solitude that mutilates,  
 the night bulb that reveals ash on my sleeve. (DR, p91) 9

Nortje had spoken of moving to Canada even before leaving South  
 Africa in 1965. James Davidson, <sup>his</sup> ~~Nortje's~~ old headmaster, eventually  
 sponsored his immigration, and <sup>Nortje</sup> ~~he~~ found a teaching position at Hope, near  
 Vancouver. The two years in British Columbia were characterized <sup>z</sup> by  
 periods of severe depression, exacerbated by recurrent drinking bouts  
 and frequent recourse to barbiturates and amphetamines in a despar<sup>e</sup>ate  
 effort to control his wildly oscillating emotions. The lifeline of  
 memory, too, seemed less and less secure:

Through the maze the fragments enter & the fixed  
 world of yesterday leaks away, evaporates  
 in the steamy planet of a pub's bowels.

From the evidence of his poems alone, it would be possible to chart a  
 cycle of disillusionment during this period. Taking all of the evidence  
 of his letters and journals into account, however, we see that the  
 opposite is true: the Canada period was crucial to Nortje's  
 understanding of <sup>#</sup> ~~world~~ <sup>g</sup> political forces.

Canada and North America enabled Nortje to broaden considerably his

understanding of oppression in South Africa, linking it to an understanding of capitalism and commodity fetishism. Throughout his journal of this period there are references to consumer insanity: "Wheels of profit revolve--turn, turn, turn,--get back. Spinning satanically in Blake fashion. The dollar axis." There is also a constant, reiterative cry of outrage at American involvement in Vietnam and Cambodia, culminating in the the imaginary monologue of a war correspondent, "Seen one, take one."

In Canada, Nortje began to talk self-consciously of a mass of people divided along the lines of class: a sprawling middle-class, espousing "puritan virtues that never mature," seems hostile to his art and blind to the startling beauty of its own natural landscapes: "poetry bleeds," he says, "where summer/ shoots sapphire through the trunks of noon." Nevertheless, though his time in Canada was lonely and difficult, Nortje managed to achieve a savage kind of resolution in the poems written in 1969. During the last two years of his life, the old wish for critical "objectivity" is replaced by an urge to universalize his situation through metaphor and reappraise the past in mythic terms.

Throughout his life, Nortje displayed an ambivalence towards the "coloured" identity that had been foisted on him in racist South Africa. For most of his life, it was his habit to sign his poems with the initials "KAN" (he was baptized Kenneth Arthur Nortje), but this is also a revealing joke, for the same word in Afrikaans means "can" as in "I can." This cheery optimism came to an end in Canada, where he outgrew the witticism. But it is also at this point that Nortje returns to the question of his "mixed" origins. He traces in himself a mixture of Khoikhoi and Jewish blood, and then, instead of the images of self-loathing we find in some of the earlier verse, presents himself as a modern Odysseus, a cast out wanderer. The persona of the later Canada poems is, for the first time, a representative black artist, constantly harking back to an original colonial invasion:

What do you know  
of my exodus from Kalahari, drinking from a gourd  
eating thin lizards, with the riverbed dry  
. . . . .  
& the blond invaders coming on horseback

The developing sense of historical continuity that is present in Nortje's later poetry is in part due to the influence of Black

Consciousness theory, and a feeling of shared suffering with black American writers. It is a perception of communal exile similar to the one Lewis Nkosi records in The Transplanted Heart. In a sense, Nortje and other exiles were ahead of their time in taking inspiration from Black Consciousness theory. Even though an interest in negritude, as well as African nationalism, was present in South Africa from an early period, it was only in the mid-seventies that black consciousness movements such as SASO, and the BPC came into their own in South Africa.

After two dismal years in Hope, Nortje took up a teaching position in Toronto. In January 1970, he was forced to take sick leave; in retrospect, it is clear that he was once again on the brink of a nervous breakdown, and his alcohol and drug abuse had increased alarmingly. He was nursed back to relative health by Mrs. Olga Reed, a Toronto schoolteacher, and he recovered enough to go on a short holiday to England. (The visit is recorded in "Return to the city of the heart")

~~p. 104~~ On returning to Toronto, once again to the care of Olga Reed, he enters one of the most productive periods of his life, writing poems such as "Nightfall," "Poem in Toronto," "Notes from the middle of the

night," "Poem: South African," and "Native's letter". The latter is one of Nortje's greatest accomplishments, and it subjects the question of exile to intense scrutiny. The persona in this work is a poet in exile, the bearer of "memories apocryphal/ of Tshaka, Hendrik, Witbooi, Adam Kok," the unsung heroes of South Africa's repressed history. In other words, Nortje here identifies strongly with the oral tradition in South African poetry, a tradition which stands in sharp opposition to official history. Yet the poem concludes with a call to future generations:

and let no amnesia  
 attack at fire hour:  
 for some of us must storm the castles  
 some define the happening.

It is for these comments, more than any others, that Nortje has been attacked. To some, these concluding lines epitomize Nortje's lack of political commitment and his intellectual remove.

In July 1970 Arthur Nortje returned to England to do a B. Phil. degree at Oxford. A series of dark sonnets record this period, and in poems such as "Nasser is dead" Nortje continues his generalizing tendency, seeing world history as the history of exile and oppression. Until recently, it was widely assumed that Nortjes's return to London

began a cycle of despair, culminating in his death in late 1970. Davis and others have argued against this interpretation, however. Perhaps his most famous poem, "All hungers pass away," can now be seen as closely allied to the tense but balanced examination of exile in the later Canada poems. Yet the sense of the poet's recovery "from the wasted years" is still undermined by the final image:

Face-down  
I lie, thin arms folded, half-aware  
of skin that tightens over pelvis.  
Patnetic, this, the dark posture.

Here, the "dark posture" is as much a pun on the condition of black exiles as it is a reference to the foetal position and the final posture of death. Although the poem expresses a mature vision, many of the tensions that characterized <sup>Z</sup> Nortje's early work are still apparent.

Despite claims to the contrary, "All hungers pass away" is not the last poem Nortje wrote; at least three later pieces exist in manuscript form. But the work does prepare us for events that were to follow. The poet was under some pressure from anti-apartheid organizations <sup>Z</sup> to read at Human Rights Day meetings in December, but there is little evidence to suggest that Nortje felt harassed by their insistent requests. He was

last seen alive on Tuesday 8 December, and a friend, Donald Arthur, found him dead in his rooms on the Friday. A subsequent autopsy revealed the presence of 25 barbiturate tablets in his stomach, and yet at the inquest the Coroner returned an open verdict.

The shock of Arthur Nortje's death still lingers amongst critics and admirers. However, there is a new sense of urgency governing academic research into his work and considerable energy has been expended on gathering manuscripts and dating his published work. Though his death remains a mystery, the rumour that he was about to be deported back to South Africa now seems to have been dispelled.

It is only by seeing Nortje as a poet deeply concerned with the question of exile itself that we gain valuable insights into the forces that shaped his life and work. Some critics ~~such as R.N. Egede~~ still criticize Nortje for his lack of commitment, and though his political vision is unquestionably naive at times, he moved towards a comprehensive understanding of oppression and racism towards the end of his life. The liberatory wave of protest which arose in South Africa in 1976 would have had much to offer Arthur Nortje. Since then, so-called

"coloured" communities that had experienced nagging sectarian doubts during Nortje's day were bound far closer together in their opposition to apartheid, and a new generation of highly politicized writers arose, including young poets such as Hein Willemsse, Chris van Wyk, Donald Parenzee, and Jeremy Cronin. The tragedy is that Nortje did not live to see any of this, nor did he outgrow his reputation as a South African Baudelaire.

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PAPERS

## Manuscripts

No single collection of Nortje's manuscripts exists, and controversy  
surrounds the private ownership of his papers. By far the most

significant collection of his journals, letters, and personal documents,  
<sup>formerly</sup> ~~was~~ in the private collection of Mrs. <sup>Hedy</sup> I. Davis in Pretoria, is now  
at the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown.

Authorized photocopies of much of this material are available in the Africana Library at Northwestern University, Evanston. Close friends of Nortje's such as Dennis Brutus (<sup>formerly</sup> a professor at Northwestern <sup>University</sup>) and Raymond Leitch also possess important manuscript material. Access to some of Nortje's private documents is reserved, since his papers contain references to individuals who are prominent political activists in South Africa and abroad.

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# Arthur Nortje

(16 December 1942 - ?10 December 1970)

David Bunn

University of the Western Cape

BOOKS: *Dead Roots* (London: Heinemann, 1973);  
*Arthur Nortje and Other Poets* (Athlone, South Africa: COSAW, 1988).

OTHER: "Hollows for Travelling Music," in  
*Seven South African Poets*, edited by Cosmo Pieterse (London: Heinemann, 1971);  
"Lonely Against the Light," edited by G. Butler and R. Harnett, *New Coin Poetry*, special issue, 9 (September 1973).

Until recently Arthur Nortje was often referred to rather sentimentally as South Africa's "forgotten poet." Nevertheless most students of South African culture have never lost sight of Nortje's importance as a poet and as a symbol of resistance to apartheid. Ever since Nortje's apparent suicide in December 1970, a few days before his twenty-eighth birthday, writers and critics alike have been struggling to come to terms with the haunting poetry he left behind. In his career, his poems, and the manner of his death, one sees exemplified the problem of reconciling aesthetics and political commitment, for the essence of Nortje's life and work is struggle—struggle to forge a personal and poetic identity in the face of dehumanizing political forces that eventually drove him into exile. Most important of all, perhaps, Nortje represents a part of South African history that was conveniently effaced and which is only being painfully recovered. In recent years academic interest in Nortje has been fueled by the discovery of numerous unpublished manuscripts, which hint at his unfulfilled potential.

To understand Nortje, one must understand the political forces that bore down upon him from a very early age. He was the second ille-

gitimate son of Cecilia Potgieter, was classified as "coloured" (the racist appellation applied to individuals of mixed descent in South Africa), and had been born on 16 December 1942 into a community that was to suffer increasing alienation with the imposition of apartheid legislation in the 1940s and 1950s. Raised initially in an Afrikaans-speaking family, then nurtured in an English-speaking environment in Port Elizabeth, he had a multilingual background that made even his earliest poems unusual.

In those early works (written between 1960 and 1964) Nortje assumes the posture of the poet manqué, a "dogsbody halfbreed" (as he once referred to himself), standing in romantic antithesis to the discriminatory conditions brought about by apartheid. This attitude is but the first of a series of poetic masks that Nortje donned throughout his career, and it is a mask that disguises a deep unease. Underlying even his first published works readers find aesthetic, political, and personal contradictions that would have scuttled the career of many a writer, but these provide the motive force behind his verse. His is always an aesthetic forged out of crisis and a sense of injustice. Later in his career Nortje overcame some of these earlier contradictions: when one takes into account the evidence of his unpublished letters and journals, a strong sense of purpose and corpus emerges. In the late 1960s, after his exile in England and his teaching in British Columbia and Toronto, he had come to understand his life as an odysseylike progression with allegorical overtones. In the last years of his short career this idea produced some of his greatest work: poems such as "Seen One, Take One," "Native's Letter," and "All Hungers Pass Away." His final poems enact a rediscovery of political meaning in personal trauma; they also embody a reformulation of his own identity, the African oral tradition, and the denied history of his ancestors. This widening mythopoeic and political vision, juxtaposed against occasional poems that call from the pit of despair, has made it difficult for some critics to assess his final phase.

At the time of his death Nortje left behind a considerable collection of his poems in manuscript, many of which were published in two separate volumes: *Dead Roots* (1973) and "Lonely Against the Light" (a special issue of *New Coin Poetry*, September 1973). To this must be added the anthologies (feature his work (some of it previously unpublished), and two lengthy manuscripts

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consisting of journal entries, transcribed letters, and drafts of published and unpublished poems (at the National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown, South Africa).

Even in his earliest published work his technical expertise is apparent. In "Thumbing a Lift" (in *Dead Roots*) he has a highly self-conscious voice and refers to himself as a "wheedling tramp." This early persona was heavily determined by the influence of poet Dennis Brutus, now exiled, who taught English to Nortje at Pater-son High School in the 1950s. Brutus, an articulate activist, was constantly challenging the younger poet to commit himself on the side of es-tablished anti-apartheid organizations. Poems by Nortje such as "Preventive Detention" (in *Dead Roots*) reveal that Brutus had an almost icono-graphic significance for him.

"Preventive Detention," written in 1963, in-cludes an odd allusion to Brutus's imprisonment in South Africa: "a spindly scholar's imprisoned because / winter is in the brilliant grass." Lines such as these are characteristic of the way Nortje blends references to the seasons and images of po-litical causation in his early work. He was inter-ested in patterning the lyric landscape of Roman-tic verse against the stark South African reality. Had Nortje lived, he would probably have pared away the Romantic influence, because this paring tendency is evident in his poems written in Can-ada. However, the Romantics, and the cadences of Gerard Manley Hopkins, are evident in many of his South African poems. Some lines are di-rect imitations of Hopkins, as in the following rather overblown image from "Slip of a Girl" (in *Dead Roots*): "beautiful phantom by failed love fos-tered / elfin in willow woods."

The tension between romanticism and real-ism is not, of course, peculiar to Nortje; it is an an-tinomy apparent in much South African poetry written in English. Yet for Nortje, the "coloured" writer in South Africa, political realism was inescap-able. His early career coincides with one of the most repressive eras in the history of apartheid, a period that included the dictatorship of Hendrik Verwoerd (the "architect" of apartheid) and a se-ries of draconian legislative measures designed to entrench segregation.

In the early 1950s the meager privileges en-joyed by "coloureds" had been quickly eroded. Prohibitions were placed on mixed marriages, ra-cial classification was enforced with the Popula-tion Registration Act, and the Separate Registra-

tion of Voters Bill denied parliamentary representation to all but whites. In 1959 the Extension of University Education Bill enforced apartheid at universities and schools. Nortje, a promising high-school student, was forced to attend the segregated Belleville College of the Western Cape, where he was awarded a B.A. in 1963. His dissatisfaction is evident in certain anonymous articles that criticize apartheid education. Significantly, through fear or sheer hesitancy, he refrained from claiming affiliation with any political group.

Nortje's university training was important, for it fed his academic interest in aesthetic theory and introduced him to a range of established poets. His poetic output increased during this period, and he received his first serious recognition in the form of the Mbari Poetry Prize for 1962 from Ibadan University. His expanding circle of friends included influential South African writers such as Richard Rive and Athol Fugard.

Two more somber trends began to emerge in his poetry written during his first years at Belleville. First, the theme of self-exploration started to be muted by images of alcoholic depression, as in "Hangover" (in *Dead Roots*):

In case of foul play, imprisonment, death  
by drinking (identity is  
268430: KLEURLING  
Pretoria register, male 1960)  
inform Mrs Halford, Kromboom Road, Crawford[.]

In a manner reminiscent of the later Soweto poets, Nortje experienced the tyranny of apartheid legislation as a form of identity crisis; he was reduced to the ciphers and categories imposed by a racist bureaucracy and stamped a *kleurling* (Afrikaans for "coloured"). Second, his independent spirit came into conflict, perhaps for first time, with those who wished him to apply his talents directly to the overthrow of apartheid. As one anonymous critic remarked, "If only his enormous talent could have been harnessed to a cutting edge of political understanding, what a weapon he might have wielded!" (*Education Journal*, June 1974).

Perhaps the most haunting and pervasive theme in Nortje's poetry from 1963 to 1965, when he left South Africa, is that of silence. "The long silence," he says in a poem of the same name (in *Dead Roots*), "speaks / of death and removals. . . / I have seen men with haunting voices / turned into ghosts by a piece of white paper / as if their eloquence had been black

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magic." Thronging through this poetry, and the verse written soon after his arrival in London, are characters who are refugees, exiles, and detainees, men like Brutus and Nelson Mandela, whom Nortje later referred to as "the dark princes." More and more of South Africa's most talented artists and political leaders were disappearing into the void of prison and exile.

Nortje himself left South Africa for England in late 1965, after teaching for two years at South End High School in Port Elizabeth. He enrolled for a B.A. at Oxford on a scholarship arranged by the National Union of South African Students and the undergraduates of Jesus College, Oxford. His decision to leave South Africa was a direct response to repressive conditions that stunted his artistic and political development. Yet, even at the moment of leaving, he showed a sense of tremendous poignancy in his verse; in "Song for a Passport," for instance, he comments on his difficulty in acquiring travel documents: "Who loves me so much not to let me go. . . ?" In "Transition" there is the following wistful remark: "For your success, black residue, / I bear desire still, night thing!" This last image is a characteristic one, for many of the voices of black opposition seem distanced and diminished in his early verse. Under a system of racial capitalism, where economic inequality is the norm, those who suffer often seem reduced to a lower but resilient form of life, and this concept is a recurrent theme in his poetry between 1964 and 1966. Yet in references to blacks as "bacteria," "residue," and "autotoxins," Nortje makes it clear that, though life for the poor has sunk to its lowest ebb, the potential for subversive action still remains.

When Nortje left for England, he became part of a community of exiled writers that included legendary figures such as Brutus, Bloke Modisane, Es'kia Mphahlele, Alex La Guma, Can Themba, and Lewis Nkosi. As many critics have remarked, their leaving brought to an end a short-lived literary renaissance, which flowered in South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. Harsh legislative measures had also brought this blossoming of talent to an abrupt end. The Sharpeville massacre and subsequent bannings of the Pan Africanist Congress and African National Congress changed the face of black protest in South Africa, sending it underground until the fiery years of 1976 and 1977. The lot of the writer was a particularly unhappy one, for the Publications and

Entertainment Act of 1963 instituted the official government censorship policy, and some estimates suggest that by March 1971 over fifteen thousand books had been banned.

For writers such as Nortje the decision to leave was by no means easily made. But the choice was governed by the hope that being overseas would bring new insights and a critical, objective perspective on the troubled country of one's birth. Once in London, Nortje, a colonial immigrant, reveled in the English way of life that he had known vicariously through literature and postcards: red double-decker buses, for example, are described by him in a poem as "gentle monsters." The vastly different environment seemed to offer new possibilities for verse, and he rejoiced in the paradox that here, on an island, one seemed to have more freedom than in the open reaches of South Africa, as he indicates in a poem from *Dead Roots*:

It seems at times as if I am  
this island's lover, and can sing her soul,  
away from the stuporing wilderness where  
I wanted the wind to terrify the leaves.

In the first year of his exile Nortje felt that he had achieved a more objective perspective on South Africa. Most dominant in his clearing vision of the past is the use of the color gold and the image of the sun whenever he refers to the South African context. He had turned his back on the "opulent squalor of too much sunshine," a world where "the laager / masters recline in a gold inertia." Looking back on South Africa was for him like looking back, through time, to a point where actions were performed with absurd slowness. In his poetry the sun's heat becomes a metaphor for the inability of the individual to act, and the "gold" or "blonde" masters of apartheid seem satiated with greed. Exile, in other words, enables one to have a critical distance. In his later writing, however, as Nortje increasingly felt the alienating effects of exile, the South African sun becomes an agent of macabre change. In "Waiting" (in *Dead Roots*) South African poets are described as speaking "through the strangled throat of multi-humanity, / bruised like a python in the maggots fattening sun."

Though Nortje felt, in 1966, that he had managed to put a critical distance between himself and South Africa, he soon began to see that writing in a foreign country is never merely an extension (though in a freer context) of writing at

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home. For this reason, perhaps, he used his time at Oxford to develop an individual theory of art's "objectivity." Much of what Nortje wrote on the theme of objectivity was influenced by his reading of modernists such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot and was exaggerated by the New Criticism he absorbed at Belleville College. Moreover he soon became interested in the 1960s counter-culture and its heroes, and popular versions of Zen Buddhism no doubt added to his sense that art must be distanced. He was also particularly taken by the standards of detachment and the bias against figurative language to be found in Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Pour un nouveau roman* (1963; translated as *For a New Novel*, 1966).

Nortje's statements about objectivity were, of course, also influenced by his need to distance himself from South Africa. His comments on aesthetic theory show certain contradictions: how can one espouse an objective theory of art without diminishing the ability of the artist to act as the subject of his own work? In short, it seems absurd to withdraw from a context where one's writing seems to be curtailed, only to erect a theory that deliberately restricts the freedom of the poet to appear as a shaping force in his work. During late 1966 all of his thoughts on the role of art were subject to the same tensions that can be found in his view of exile.

In 1966 and 1967 Nortje explored with growing urgency the relationship between exile and literary production. There is an increasing sense, in his poetry and journal writings, that exile may sever the poet's ties with the country that first inspired him. Furthermore he discovered that it was difficult to communicate the subtle horror of apartheid to an audience that had no firsthand experience of it. Living in exile meant that one had to balance one's present circumstances against insistent memories of the past. In some of his poems this balance produces a strained metaphoric relationship between foreign and familiar settings, as in the poem "In Exile," from "Lonely Against the Light":

Leaves and transient  
streetscape conjure up that southern  
  
blue sky and wind-beautiful  
day, creating paradise.  
Otherwise:  
the soul decays in exile.

Without the direct inspiration of the southern

arena, with only memory guiding it, the "soul" of poetry seems to wither and die. Winter in Oxford caused him to be "forced upon austerities," and "the soul/ glimmers feebly in its bed of pork."

In his two years at Oxford, Nortje had gathered around him a small group of friends and admirers, perhaps the one effective buffer against his feeling of alienation from South Africa. However, the political and aesthetic contradictions of exile were matched, in spirit, by extreme psychological torment. In late 1966 Nortje weathered a time of suicidal bleakness while on the brink of a nervous breakdown. The period is best summed up by the following stanza from "The Near-mad":

Midnight over the phosphorescent sea.  
Back at the hotel hard bodies bob on the dance  
floor.  
You lie like an assassin in wait for the moon:  
but your jugular swells, your wrist can stain razors.

There is no question that this poem reflects a terrifying period of Nortje's life, but it is also an elaboration of the Baudelairean posture—the flaneur in the city—of which Nortje was so fond.

The poems written shortly before Nortje's departure for Canada in 1967 are among the most interesting of his career. In works such as "To John, Paul, George and Ringo" and "Discopoem" (both in *Dead Roots*) it is possible to see the depth of his identification with the youth culture of the 1960s. "Message from an LSD Eater" (also in *Dead Roots*), though an extremely uneven work, records his increasingly frequent experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs, and his journal for this period makes sporadic reference to Aldous Huxley, William Blake, and other heroes of the counter-culture. Always, though, there is the crushing return to self that follows alcohol or drug-induced experience: "I am unsettled by a ghostly snore / being buried in mud, life-locked."

There is, however, a countervailing tendency in the last poems he wrote before his British Columbia experiences. In "Night Ferry" (in *Dead Roots*) a theme appears that was to become greatly significant in his last poems:

Origins—they are dim in time, colossally  
locked in the terrible mountain, buried in seaslime,  
or vapourized, being volatile. What purpose  
has the traveller now, whose connection is cut

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with the whale, the wolf or the albatross?

It is no longer the poet's individual identity that is held up for scrutiny or motion; rather, it is the individual in relation to a mythic past, a political unconscious. The same theme is sounded in "Waiting" but is linked to a forgotten age of South African poetry, including "all the dead poets who sang of spring's / miraculous recrudescence in the sandscapes of Karoo."

Despite periods of trial and suffering, Nortje enjoyed a growing reputation as a poet while in England. His sense of audience had matured, and he was able to elicit the help of able and sensitive friends to act as editors. When he left for British Columbia to take up a teaching position in the town of Hope, he left behind a community that was extremely important for the development of his artistic and political vision. The move to Canada produced some of his most epic and haunting verse, with a breadth of vision and political understanding that had been lacking before. But silence, too, seemed to surround him once again, as seen in this poem from *Dead Roots*:

It is not cosmic immensity or catastrophe  
that terrifies me:  
it is solitude that mutilates,  
the nightbulb that reveals ash on my sleeve.

Nortje had spoken of moving to Canada even before leaving South Africa in 1965. James Davidson, a former headmaster of his, eventually sponsored his immigration, and Nortje found a teaching position at Hope, near Vancouver. The two years in British Columbia were characterized by periods of severe depression, exacerbated by recurrent drinking bouts and frequent recourse to barbiturates and amphetamines in a desperate effort to control his wildly oscillating emotions. The lifeline of memory, too, seemed less and less secure, as in this stanza:

Through the maze the fragments enter & the fixed  
world of yesterday leaks away, evaporates  
in the steamy planet of a pub's bowels.

From the evidence of his poems alone, it would be possible to chart a cycle of disillusionment during this period. Taking all of the evidence of his letters and journals into account, however, one sees that living in Canada and North America at least enabled Nortje to broaden considerably his understanding of oppression in South Africa, link-

ing it to his understanding of capitalism and commodity fetishism. Throughout the journal of his period in British Columbia are references to consumer insanity: "Wheels of profit revolve—turn, turn, turn,—get back. Spinning satanically in Blake fashion. The dollar axis." There is also a constant, reiterative cry of outrage at American involvement in Vietnam and Cambodia, culminating in an imaginary monologue of a war correspondent.

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In Canada, Nortje began to talk and write self-consciously of a mass of people there who were along the lines of class—a sprawling middle class, espousing "puritan virtues that never mature," seemed hostile to his art and blind to the startling beauty of their own natural landscape: "poetry bleeds where summer / shoots sapphire through the trunks of noon." Nevertheless, though his time in Canada was lonely and difficult, Nortje managed to achieve a savage kind of resolution in his poems written in 1969. During the last two years of his life the old wish for critical objectivity was replaced by an urge to universalize his situation through metaphor and reappraise the past in mythic terms.

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Throughout his life Nortje displayed an ambivalence toward the "coloured" identity that had been foisted on him in racist South Africa. For most of his life it was his habit to sign his poems with the initials "KAN" (he was baptized Kenneth Arthur Nortje), but this signature is also a revealing joke, for the word *kan* in Afrikaans means "can," as in "I can." But his humor and optimism came to an end in Canada. Nortje also returned to the question of his mixed origins. He traced in himself a mixture of Khoikhoi and Jewish blood, and then, instead of using the images of self-loathing in some of his earlier verse, he wrote in the persona of a modern Odysseus, a cast-out wanderer. The persona in his later Canada poems is also, for the first time, a representative black artist, constantly harking back to an original colonial invasion, as in these lines:

What do you know  
of my exodus from Kalahari, linking from a  
gourd  
.....  
& the blond invaders coming on horseback [?]

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The developing sense of historical continuity that is present in Nortje's later poetry is in part due to the influence of "Black Consciousness" theory and a feeling of snared suffering

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with black American writers. It is a perception of communal exile similar to the one Nkosi records in *The Transplanted Heart* (1975). In a sense Nortje and other exiles were ahead of their time in taking inspiration from such a theory. Even though an interest in negritude, as well as in African nationalism, was present in South Africa from an early period, it was only in the mid 1970s that black-consciousness movements such as SASO and the BPC came into their own in South Africa.

After two dismal years in British Columbia, Nortje took a teaching position in Toronto. In January 1970 he was forced to take sick leave; in retrospect, it is clear that he was once again on the brink of a nervous breakdown, and his alcohol and drug abuse had increased alarmingly. He was nursed back to relative health by a friend, Mrs. Olga Reed, a Toronto schoolteacher, and he recovered enough to go on a short holiday to England. (The visit is recorded in "Return to the City of the Heart" in *Dead Roots*.) After returning to Toronto, once again to the care of Reed, he entered one of the most productive periods of his life, writing poems such as "Nightfall," "Poems in Toronto," "Notes from the Middle of the Night," "Poems: South African," and "Native's Letter." The last is one of Nortje's greatest accomplishments, and it subjects the question of exile to intense scrutiny. The persona is a poet in exile, the bearer of "memories apocryphal / of Tshaka, Hendrik, Witbooi, Adam Kok," the unsung heroes of South Africa's repressed history. In other words, Nortje identifies strongly with the oral tradition in South African poetry, a tradition in sharp opposition to official history, and the poem concludes with a call to future generations:

. . . let no amnesia  
attack at fire hour:  
for some of us must storm the castles  
some define the happening.

For these comments, more than any others, Nortje has been attacked. To some, these concluding lines epitomize Nortje's lack of political commitment and his intellectual remove.

In July 1970 Nortje returned to England to earn a B. Phil. degree at Oxford. A series of dark sonnets record this period, and in poems such as "Nasser is Dead" Nortje continues his generalizing tendency, seeing world history as the history of exile and oppression. Until recently it was widely assumed that Nortje's return to London

began a cycle of despair, culminating in his death in late 1970. Hedy Davis and others have argued against this interpretation, however. Perhaps Nortje's best-known poem, "All Hunger Pass Away," can be seen as closely allied to the tense but balanced examination of exile in his later Canada poems. Yet the sense of his recovery "from the wasted years" is still undermined by the final image:

Face-down

I lie, thin arms folded, half-aware  
of skin that tightens over pelvis.  
Pathetic, this, the dark posture.

The "dark posture" is as much a pun on the condition of black exiles as it is a reference to the final posture of death. Although the poem expresses a mature vision, many of the tensions that characterize Nortje's early work are still apparent.

Despite claims to the contrary, "All Hungers Pass Away" is not the last poem Nortje wrote; at least three later pieces exist in manuscript form. But the work does seem to prepare reader for events that were to follow. Nortje was under some pressure from anti-apartheid organizations to read at Human Rights Day meeting in December 1970, but there is little evidence to suggest that Nortje felt harassed by their insistent requests. He was last seen alive on 8 December, and a friend, Donald Arthur, found Nortje dead in his rooms three days later. An autopsy revealed the presence of twenty-five barbiturate tablets in his stomach, yet at the inquest the coroner returned an open verdict.

The shock of Nortje's death still lingers among some critics and admirers. However, there is a new sense of urgency governing academic research into his work, and considerable energy has been expended on gathering manuscripts and dating his published work. Though his death remains a mystery, a rumor that he was about to be deported back to South Africa seems to have been dispelled.

Only by seeing Nortje as a poet deeply concerned with the question of exile itself can one gain valuable insights into the forces that shaped his life and work. Some critics still criticize Nortje for his lack of commitment, but though his political vision is unquestionably naive at times, he moved toward a comprehensive understanding of oppression and racism. The liberatory wave of protest that arose in South Africa in 1976 would have had much to offer Arthur Nortje. Since

Hunger or Hungers? ?

then "coloured" communities that had experienced nagging sectarian doubts during Nortje's day were bound closer together in their opposition to apartheid, and a new generation of highly politicized writers arose, including young poets such as Hein Willems, Chris van Wyk, Donald Parenzee, and Jeremy Cronin. The tragedy is that Nortje did not live to see any of this, nor did he outgrow his reputation as a South African Charles Baudelaire.

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**Papers:**

No single collection of Nortje's manuscripts exists, and controversy surrounds the private ownership of his papers. By far the most significant collection of his journals, letters, and personal documents is at the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown, South Africa. (Authorized photocopies of much of this material are available in the Africana Library at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.)