

Arts and Africa

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ANNOUNCEMENT AND SIGNATURE TUNE

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Welcome to ARTS AND AFRICA. This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey and this week we enter the wordy and peppery world of South Africa's little magazines:

ALTON KUMALO READS FROM "NEW CLASSIC"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

That was Alton Kumalo giving air to the words of Sydney Sipho Sepamla of Johannesburg, poet, playwright, short-story writer and, as you will have guessed, now the editor of the latest of South Africa's literary magazines. It's a revival or a continuation of one of the liveliest of the local little magazines, CLASSIC, which presented the world with all sorts of notable South African talents in the 1960s, and not least that of Nat Nakaza, who committed suicide in New York a few years ago. Now the magazine rises again, as I've said, as the NEW CLASSIC, NUMBER ONE. And we'll let the editor continue his introduction for himself, with the help of Alton:

ALTON KUMALO READS FROM "NEW CLASSIC"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

It's more than such a short programme as this can manage to give the flavour of NEW CLASSIC's thirty-six items - poems, stories, photographs. We have no doubt that the quality of contributions will improve as the magazine gets into its stride. But many of the stories and poems are sited and have their birth in the African Townships of Johannesburg and here is Alton Kumalo quoting Sidney Sepamla's impression of a small but well-known part of them:

ALTON KUMALO READS FROM "CLASSIC"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Next we go eight hundred miles to the south, to Cape Town, where the oldest and longest lasting of the South African literary magazines is produced. CONTRAST, edited by novelist Jack Cope. But we are still with the townships in spirit. Only recently Jack was on the African Service telling us about an exciting new writer from Lesotho, Mbulele Mzamane, and in one of the latest CONTRAST's we find a story by Mbulele, THE SOWETO BRIDE. A boy from the townships brings home a black American bride. The narrator was one of those who went to meet her at the airport:

PETER LEHOLA READS FROM "CONTRAST"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

All the bride - sometimes referred to as the makoti - wants to do is get some sleep and recover from her jet-lag and twelve hours of air-travel. But she is taken off to her husband's parents' home for a preliminary reception and for many friends and neighbours to get their first glimpse of her.

PETER LEHOLA READS FROM "CONTRAST"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

And after that she has to go on to a really big do that her husband's friends have prepared for her later in the evening. It's an amusing start to a story which steadily slides into a tragedy, for even if you are black it's not easy to come from American and fit easily into African life in either town or country. But we must press on to another Johannesburg magazine named after that legendary place of gold, "OPHIR". If it existed I'm sure it didn't look much like present day Johannesburg, or GOLI as some call it. One of the most interesting contributions to the July 1975 issue comes from the new young poet, Christopher Mann. It's called After a Visit of a Greek Poet to the Transvaal. The poet referred to is the famous Greek, George Seferis, who himself wrote a well-known poem about this visit. Christopher explains what underlines his own poem:

CHRISTOPHER MANN

Spirits live. Not as some sort of pale ghosts but as real influences on who we are and what we do, just as the people who brought us up and whom we have read. Yes, I suppose I understood it through the African idea of who they are....

MICK DELAP

The importance of ancestors?

CHRISTOPHER MANN

That's what this poem is about, the Greek person who as Seferis did, came to the Transvaal during the war and his poem.... he looks round him and he sees nothing of the past so in my poem I try to show that Seferis was wrong, that the spirits do live in a place like the Transvaal. The place is rich with these people. Now the content is obviously affected by the growing understanding of African culture and the form as well.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now here is Christopher Mann, in his classroom in Swaziland, reading his own poem After the Visit of a Greek Poet to the Transvaal.

CHRISTOPHER MANN READS HIS POEM

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

I would like to have lingered a bit longer over this well-produced little magazine, OPHIR, edited by Peter Horn and containing work by such other stars as Douglas Livingstone and the bi-lingual poet, Wopko Jensma.

I can't resist this satirical little poem by Mike Kirkwood called Sonnet Announcing the Birth of the South African Republic of Letters read for you by Tony Delius.

TONY DELIUS READS THE POEM

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

That goes for a lot of other African countries too. But let's end with a musical version of life in the townships. KO-DIDI is only a few miles from Johannesburg and here is Victor Williams' picture of it for our closing music. Now this is Alex-Tetteh-Lartey saying goodbye.

CLOSING MUSIC: KO-DIDI

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