

THE
MURDER
TRIAL

Being the trial for murder of a young coloured man who attacked and robbed a white man, here called Mr. Fourie.

2
POEMS

*Your shrunken head was bent
But not as it would be
Shortly, on the state's axis of hemp.
Bastard dreamer
Whose life had always hung by a thread
How would one
Betrayal of the floor
Put right the stones with blood on them?*

*I had not known
The law was such an unrealistic thing,
Pompous, marching mountain
Dressed in a sunset's gown
And served by such absolute gravity
To let your little bones swing:
The moon was on you that night—
You and Mr. Fourie.*

*For six weeks you have sat or stood
While they hooked or quarrelled your drunken act
On to their Ledger page,
For six weeks you have been in your crow's nest
Their look-out, and their prize.
I wonder if my thoughts had an ally
Watching your warm wickedness
Plotted by such cold and cross-word compasses.*

*A four-letter feeling jerked you into shape
A four-letter caring robbed you of rope,
And deaf ears drummed
Your frail and daggered lightning
Through the ukulele, bandaged dark .
When smouldering men light brandy women
The bed-springs murmur of obituaries
And mourning mothers cry out from the cells of stars.*

*My head has screwed to see
This tennis-match of our failure
I held my heart in my hand
Covered, like the others and dreamt
Of fathers and sons, murderers and daisies.
And then in a dream much older:
When men were fuses that could fire the world
And while I dreamt, the circle grew tighter.*

*The last day came, dark day of sentence
And the benches garlanded with status.
The judge walked in, the people stood
The judge sat and the people listened
Hearing a widow consoled with additional blood.
Can a trapdoor swallow want
As the grave lets in light?
Black is my cry, black to the roots of sight.*

These poems are part of a collection which won the 1964 South African Poetry Prize, sponsored by the Department of Education, Arts and Science. "The Bathers" has been omitted from Perseus Adams's *The Lord at My Door*, which is about to be published.

Perseus Adams

THE BATHERS

*It had been a day's glorious pitch-and-toss
Beneath the beach-trees of Summerstrand, P.E.,
And now we were returning
By the place where all rivers meet: the sea.*

*And here was all the sunshine
Of a Sunday striped naked to the lip:
An African Sunday, tipping the scales
Towards unbalance: the sea's furore, the gull's rusty screw.*

*I held her waist, I drank her smiles, I
Wrote a poem, and lost it again:
The beach sucked us to the marrow-bone
And then, suddenly we were upon them:*

*Black Africans, in the waves, dancing.
And here was the first thirst in the fire of Spring
The whirling harvest spear
Drawn to a dark heart, gathering rain!*

*They jumped and plunged and laughed and sang
They tore open the long-incumbent
Pillow of the sand; nor did they seem to care
Tides were rough here and life-guards were away.*

*They bit the breeze and dodged tomorrow,
They courted the virgin in each second
Till black, gold and silver collided, spun
And dawn returned at 5 p.m. over the water.*

*Moving closer I grew almost afraid to own
That this was a furious forgetfulness, a passionate
Remembering: for their freedom
Was a wild horse whipped by laws, tugging foam.*

*And O, as I watched, their abandon
Travelled in my own: together
We dragged all the trammels of the city
To that innocent rage, that embracing sea.*

*Yet they gave me no welcome and they did not
Call my name: I turned away
Following the locked path of my
Inward education, accompanied but alone.*

*Turned away and returned to a beach where
"WHITES ONLY" told me I was back with my own.
And here there were life-guards, safer waters
The dark lot of those who seek to divide the sun.*

*Our picnicking day was over;
My love and I were returned to our own
But pity and sorrow had left a stain on me
And the carefree joy of her smiles had gone.*