

Birthdays

C. J. DRIVER

Aged twenty-six
I am afraid to die,
That last night's dream
Of an old fat-faced man
Trapped in a war of sweat
Might take my face from me.

Aged twenty-five
I caught a disease
Of each alone in a cage,
Who in goes striding
And out comes crawling
To daily dying flesh.

Aged twenty-four
I saw how hunger
Shoved its thin fingers
Into each skin and eye
Till abstractions lived
In define of bone.

Aged twenty-three
I spoke out bravely,
Named the people's needs —
Declared my private war,
Great abstractions made
Of love and death and pain.

These celebrations of age
Have jumped each fact
With new lust, new flesh —
Till I trouble my bones
With a love each year

And each love a last.
But I am devised
Only a means to die;
What is now, what was,
Must share my cage
With that fat-faced man
Who comes, my age himself.

Fusane's Trial

Fusane screams repeatedly. Mtetwa and Ma-Mtetwa come running into the hut.

MA-MTETWA: Fusane! Fusane!
MTETWA: What is it? Oh, God!
MA-MTETWA: (*Seeing Shabangu*) Oh! Shabangu! Shabangu!
FUSANE: (*Sobbing hysterically*)
(*RUNNING FOOTSTEPS*)
NDUNA: What is it? What's happening?
MA-MTETWA: Oh, Nduna! It's Fusane. She's hit Shabangu with her wooden pillow. Look.
MTETWA: (*Alarmed*) I can't hear him breathing.
NDUNA: Let me listen. (*Pause*) *He's not breathing. He's dead.*
MA-MTETWA: Dead?
MTETWA: Dead!
NDUNA: Dead.
MA-MTETWA: Fusane, what have you done?
MTETWA: Shabangu dead? Dead?
NDUNA: Oh, Fusane, my dear. My darling.
FUSANE: Oh, Nduna, Nduna. He tried to rape me.
MTETWA: What are we going to do now?
MA-MTETWA: (*Gives death ululation*)

(*FIERCE DIN OF VOICES*)

WARDRESS: Fusane Mtetwa! Fusane Mtetwa! Are you sitting on your ears! Wake up! This isn't your mother's house. This is prison. You're used to killing people. Take. Things for you. That old man there!
MTETWA: Here. This way, Fusane. It's your father. I'm here. Oh, this noise. How are you, Fusane? Can you hear me?
FUSANE: Yes, I hear you. I'm all right.
MTETWA: Your mother greets. Oh, this noise. Mother greets you. And Mfundisi. They greet you. Do you hear me?
FUSANE: Yes. Thank them father.
MTETWA: What, Fusane? What did you say? I don't hear you.
FUSANE: Thank mother and Mfundisi.
MTETWA: Yes. Yes. I'll do that. Is there anything you want?
FUSANE: No. Nothing. I'm all right.
MTETWA: We're buying you a lawyer. Do you hear? We're buying you a lawyer.
WARDRESS: Time up! I said time up! Next.
FUSANE: Goodbye, father.
WARDRESS: Are you deaf, you murdering bitch! Old man, go away. Don't cry. They haven't hanged her yet. Next. Look sharp.

CLERK: In the Supreme Court of Swaziland at Mbabane. Regina v Fusane Mtetwa. That the accused, Fusane Mtetwa, is guilty of the crime of Culpable Homicide. In that on the 19th day of September 1964, (*Begin slow fade*) and at Mashobeni, within the jurisdiction of the above Court, the accused did. . . .

PROSECUTOR: . . . and that by repeatedly striking the deceased — an old man — on the head used force in excess of that warranted by the situation. In short, your Lordship, the Crown

will prove that the accused is guilty of the alleged crime of Culpable Homicide. The Crown will call two witnesses. (*Pause*) Your Lordship, I now call Police Sergeant Amos Nkomo.

(*Pause*)
CLERK: Place your right hand on the Bible and repeat after me: I swear that the evidence which I shall give. . . .

PROSECUTOR: Thank you.
JUDGE: Does the defence have any questions?
LAWYER: No questions, your Lordship.
PROSECUTOR: I now call witness for the prosecution, Nduna Nkosi.
ORDERLY: Nduna Nkosi.
JUDGE: (*Pause*) Swear in the witness.
CLERK: Place your right hand on the Bible and repeat after me: I swear that the evidence which I shall give —
NDUNA: I swear that the evidence which I shall give. . . .

NDUNA: Yes, sir. He was dead.
PROSECUTOR: Thank you. The Crown rests, your Lordship.
LAWYER: Are you well acquainted with the accused?
NDUNA: Yes, sir. I wish to marry her.
LAWYER: Does that mean you are betrothed to her?
NDUNA: No, sir. That was not possible.
LAWYER: Would you please explain why.
NDUNA: Her father pledged her to old man Shabangu. (*Hotly*) She hated him. He was forcing her. But she loves me. We were going to run away.
ALL: (*Murmur in court*)
ORDERLY: Silence in Court.
LAWYER: (*Considerately*) Just one more question. On the night in question, did the accused ask you to do anything?
NDUNA: Yes. She asked me to report to the police.
LAWYER: And did you do that?
NDUNA: Yes, sir.
LAWYER: (*Gently*) Thank you. No further questions, your Lordship. With your Lordship's permission I will call my first witness, the Reverend Alfred Magwaza.
(*Murmuring of crowd*)
CLERK: Place your right hand on the Bible and repeat after me: I swear that the evidence which I shall give —
MFUNDISI: I swear that the evidence which I shall give. . . .

MFUNDISI: Yes. I went to see her father that evening. And I also talked to Shabangu.
LAWYER: And what did they say?
MFUNDISI: They were determined to go through with it.
LAWYER: In your opinion is the accused a violent or reckless person?
MFUNDISI: Oh, no. Indeed not. She is a very gentle and conscientious young woman. And hardworking too. She helps to support her family with her dressmaking.
LAWYER: Thank you, Reverend Magwaza.