

bench and a cupboard. Now the 'home' was a complete home. Dart, there are hundreds and hundreds of things I do not know. You, daddy Henry and Sophia know.

Recently I visited you accompanied by my friend Albert. For Albert in his life you were the first white people to make him feel that he was a human being. I must tell you he will never forget you in his life. On our way back your name and attitude towards us was always in his lips, so much that he told me not to leave him behind when I go to you again. I am sure you were disappointed when we declined sleeping there, but at our homes they did not know where we were. Now came the moment when I was leaving.. Daddy Henry shook my hand with a smile, but that was not a happy smile, it was a smile of a sad person. I looked over him at Sally, the same was written on her face. At Mummy Dart it was the same. I do not know whether it was me who reflected those feelings or what. I could not stand that I had to look down. On the

way tears were spilling down my cheeks. I was thinking of good people.

It is a long time since these Afrikaaners have oppressed us. I lost my father because of them. To them we are worse than dogs. I am afraid good people like you, Alan Patons who has been warning them for a long time, Helen Suzmans, Eglins and many others are going to suffer because of them. Black man hates White man because White man has taught him to hate. The world kills good people, where are Kennedys, Luthulis and Martin Luther Kings? Daddy Henry, Mummy Dart, James and Sally, I hate the one who hates me. Praise and, thanks to your family. As it is said by Alan Paton, they killed the Liberal Party in 1968 which was composed of all races. I am sure it could have saved South Africa, but now it is very late, there is no looking back.

Your loving son
Simon.

(Names have been disguised for obvious reasons) •

live tunes:

cold steel:

Ophir amuse:

wit florist

By Tony Voss.

Bateleur Poets:— Bateleur Press — Johannesburg. 1977

The Bateleur Poets series brings together between one pair of covers 'four separate books pressed into one volume only through considerations of economy" (Lionel Abrahams in the publisher's foreword to this volume). The series began well in 1975 with Abrahams himself, Robert Greig, Mike Kirkwood and Walter Saunders. This second volume is as good as the first, and, to my mind, more interesting. It seems only fair to discuss the volume as if we had four separate books, as Peter Strauss did when he reviewed the first Bateleur Poets in Reality last year.

Don MacLennan

A typical Don MacLennan poem, if there is such a thing, begins on a note of conversation, or observation, or self-questioning, moves through complexity and out again, into an earned simplicity and melody. I would like to quote many of the longer poems here, but will settle for the first poem of Life Songs:

Love Song

Not what you've done that counts
but how you keep reminding people
of yourself.
And here I am again
eating vain hope
beginning to unlearn pain
and claim priority on just one grip
that holds you to my ribs again.

The rhyme sings at the end of that poem, and the poet's ear is always good and true. This is the end of a longer poem called 'Conversation':

A point I have to raise —
love and literature occur
just when you need to love or clarify or praise.

Here are the beginning and ending of a poem ^called 'Self Education':

Here's the eye trying to see
a glass steam over, fog digest a hill,
heat make ovens out of rocks.
Impossible.

One of the eye's darkest shocks —
it sees shut, everything.

On the evidence of this selection, Don MacLennan is a quotable poet. The lines and phrases do not do entire justice to the poems from which they are taken; but I have the sense that the poems have been experienced to make certain statements possible.

A candle in a saucer,
that's a dying thing.

('Arcadia')

Occasionally I was struck by the sharpness of observation

The naked genitals of children shrink
under the lash of ice-soaked wind,
offensive their omnivorous eyes.

('Night Raid')

and the exuberance of the imagery:

hangovers through which
The intimacy of last night's revelation
crawls like an autopsy.

('Poem for Ann Hubbard')

There is a beneficent craft in the best of these poems, and one is convinced of the rightness and naturalness of the poet's calling. And there is a sense of the difference, as well as the relation between living and writing:

Do not make me a poet
with this pain:
it is not poetry I wanted,
it was you.

and It is not how I lie
but how I want to lie.

The achievement of these poems gives a sense of conviction to those moments when the poet's own vocation is the subject of his verse:

The practice of a life:
the fact is, it knows no other art
than the art of writing poetry.

('A Coppice at Kleinemonde')

Don MacLennan can write love poetry and philosophical poetry, particularly with an epistemological slant. His poems derive their power from a kind of loyalty to the moment of immediate and existential sensibility. He is not so successful, it seems to me, when he has consciously to marshal images and impressions into an order, when the poems seem to serve some idea outside themselves. ('Culloden', 'By Kleinemonde River'). Don MacLennan is best when he obeys his own injunction;

Let yourself go up in leaf
yield up that precious gift.

(A Coppice at Kleinemonde')

Sheila Roberts

Lou's Life and Other Poems falls into three groups: ten poems about Lou, her late (?) husband, Steel, her friend, Mary-Beth, her servant Therees; five 'Clifton Sketches' and two 'Thumbnail Sketches'. It is difficult to do any justice to these poems by quotation, but

Mary-Beth looked oo-la-la
in a lemony see-through affair
her breasts like spotted Israeli
grapefruit.

That's from 'Weekend in Maseru': the next poem in the collection is 'Postscript: return by air,' which is short enough to quote in full:

The clerk at the airstrip said
that since the American students
of the Peace Corps
were living in the villages
(and obviously sleeping with the coons)
the black swines were making passes
in the streets
at decent girls like herself.

Sheila Robert's Lou gives us the latest reports from the shifting frontier; between white and black, bourgeois and proletariat, men and women, South Africa and Africa .

There is a kind of achieved naivete in Sheila Robert's poems; the poet betrays no self-consciousness of her art. Perhaps this comes from a clear sense of her relationship to the "middle-classes" and ' suburbia" of which she writes

in her preface, and from which she draws the subjects for her poetry. The effect is often that the poems are coming from the voice of a medium, whose guide is a disembodied inhabitant of South Africa., a kind of ghostly Sunday Times: and South Africa itself, seen with the gaze that gives the clarity of hallucination, has become the beyond in which the guide wanders, speaking through the poet.

The poems have a strong basis in character and narrative, and sometimes I could see no pressing formal necessity for their presentation as verse. Perhaps some of these poems used to be, or are going to be, short stories: "Steel's Foreman's Labour Problem" and most of the sketches. Honest, frank, true they may be, but not, to my mind, poems.

Colin Style

Colin Style's collection, *Baobab Street*, gives us twenty-five poems of undeniable assurance, poise and power. He writes free verse of great discipline and technical skill, and I am always convinced that this poet feels that he is saying exactly what he wants to say. Here is the last stanza of 'Bulawayo':

The monotony,
the sufficiency of towns,
stagnant groups,
never stir me like de Jongh.
The 'Old Tree Hout Bay'
invites me always
to wade as a boy
through shallows, past sea-horses,
pick berries,
cut batons,
pry through rafters
for answers, warm mutters from owls.

His poems give the strong sense of writing from a particular historical or cultural moment. And his eye for human and material and natural detail is often striking. You can feel the range of his almost relentless voice in *The Pottle*.

There is in all these poems a confidence and a certainty. Seldom anything obviously heroic, the chance never taken to let a poem reverberate or ring in case it should ring false.

Yet Colin Style does write about heroes: about Rhodesian heroes and how they are made, Ray Amm, the motor-cycle ace, A.S. Cripps; culture heroes in contexts that give them away, 'Stewart Granger in Salisbury', 'Paul Robeson at Stratford Station', 'Poetry Reading' (the Russian poet Vinokurov in Earls Court): other artists, 'Douglas Livingstone', 'Musical Saw in Durban', 'Ventriloquist'.

Other subjects are drawn from those places that would be inarticulate without poets, the provincial towns of Africa: 'The New Town', 'Baobab Street', 'Closing of the Sanitary Lanes'. In two of the most accessible of the poems, 'Letter to Gweshe' and 'Hoeing in Gweshe', Colin Style adopts a pastoral persona, and finds a new voice and a new tune.

What more could one ask for? A sense of humour, a little 'give': "Just a little lovin' ", as Bing Crosby used to sing "Will go a long way" . If Nadine Gordimer were a poet, she might hope to be as good as Colin Style.

Peter Wilhelm

In 'Spring for the Prisoners, November 1975' the last poem in his collection, *White Flowers*, Peter Wilhelm writes:

The spring comes in the winter of my language
because the language doesn't fit,
the language doesn't work any more,
it doesn't work well.

That's good, but the poem is spoilt, to my mind, by the accumulation of detail, by taking that South African Poet's argument too far. I think many of his poems are too long, partly because he gives in to the temptation to add a witty or surprising turn. Perhaps this is because, as he writes in his preface he is "consciously.struggling to become human in Africa", and anything may be relevant in a process like that. In any event, I find the shorter poems generally more delightful and instructive: for example 'John Harris Bombs Johannesburg Station', 'Roadblock', 'La Luta Continua'. Here Peter Wilhelm concentrates his attention and his powers, as he speaks through an assumed figure, recalling action and experience with precision. 'Bartholomew Diaz Erects a Cross in Africa' goes well for two stanzas, when Diaz speaks but the narrative voice of the last stanza adds nothing but pretension.

Of all these four poets I would like to see more. Surely Colin Style deserves by now a volume on his own. Many of these poems have appeared before and it would be useful, but perhaps too expensive, for the publishers to tell us where. Are these selections work-in-progress or each poet's choice from the best up to now?-

A good book this (perhaps it needed a closer proof-read). Worth buying, worth having. I'll read it again. •