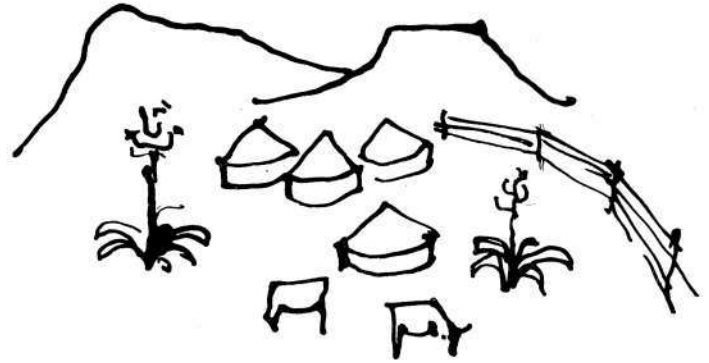


POEMS BY

JOHN — MICHAEL GIBBS

To Molephe Pheto, after an evening of Drums and Poetry

You brought your bitter hatred
And your love to us last night.
Your poems showed our Consciousness
The Children of Soweto dying.
Your articulate drums
Gave their death dignity.
Their sacrifice was sudden and complete:
Yours the exile's slow grey retreat.
Go well, Molephe.
Far away from the Struggle
May you liberate your heart,
With drum and word assuage the anger,
And teach the willing hearer how to love.



D. Nero

Act V, Zimbabwe

We come now to Act Five,
The catharsis, the unhappy denouement.
The play contains no single tragic hero;
All are caught in the final nemesis.
I myself played a small walk-on part
In an earlier act, knew the main actors,
Was swept up in some of the crowd scenes.
Now I wait in the wings
With a few cynics, confused radicals and easy idealists,
Watching the tightening drama from afar.
The wheel of Fortune turns inexorably down.
No running on now to stop the Show.
The Gods will take their toll
Of those who've put their faith
In Nation, Race, or what they call Humanity.
And when the quick catastrophe is done
The fathers' sins will still be visited
On countless sons through time.
Wars don't have heroes any more
But suffering still has power to purify the soul.
Out of the din of propaganda, slogan, treachery, carnage
Will come a quiet passage of new hope.
The cloud is there no bigger than a hand
That heralds rain for the scorched earth.

SEPTEMBER IN ZIMBABWE

The trees are putting on their new leaves again in Zimbabwe,
All the colours of sunrise, yellow, gold and blood red.
The rains are coming, and the land is alive again,
The assegais of grass grow while you watch.
There's blood on the land too,
But the harvest is still to come.
Women turn the soil with slow toil,
Old men have gone to the towns to look for work.
But the young men, the Boys, Vakomana, where are they?
They will be back. They are the harvest
And the harvesters. Some will tell their sons
What they did, omitting the deeds of shame.

RAINS

The rains have come in my soul again.
The drought lasted all of fifteen years,
Barring a shower or two.
Dreams thinned and died like cattle,
Grass shrivelled in the heat before it could seed,
The hot wind blew the land in arid clouds.
I moved on a few times to strange places,
Only to find despair the other end.
Now the time of the singing of birds is come again,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in my land.
Poems spring like pictures to my seeing eye,
Gourd and maize swell in the field,
And the harvest is for sharing.