

soldiers dragged along, by some terrible force on the coatstrings of their extremists.

On the one side their extremists being the kind of people who will throw a bomb into something as innocuous as a meeting of the freemasons in Windhoek. On the other a new, young, black leadership which is already saying things about white South Africans far more spine-chilling than the things that were being said in Soweto in 1976.

The whole process of polarisation was an agonising spectacle to somebody like Edgar Brookes, as it should be to all of us. Like us he wondered — where would it end? In the holocaust? And, if it did, would anything he had stood for survive?

The more rapidly we change to a society most South Africans can support the less likely the holocaust, and the more likely that the values which Edgar Brookes regarded as important will survive. Fundamental to all other values is the value of human freedom. Not the freedom of licence, which Edgar Brookes abhorred, but the freedom to develop one's talents so that they can be used in the service of one's fellows and, in Edgar's case, of one's God.

But human freedom and Liberal values will not survive of

their own accord. It may one day be possible to build again a non-racial political organisation pledged to propagate and defend them. I don't know. In the meantime it needs brave and steadfast men like Edgar Brookes to stand up and fight for them. On such people now depends the relevance to our future of what he believed in.

And there is no automatic guarantee that when the present dispensation ends in South Africa it will be succeeded by one that likes the basic human freedoms any more than this one does. The best guarantee of that, as Edgar came to see, was that each person should have that vital asset, the vote. For only while they have that are men free to be governed by the men they want to govern them, and free to get rid of them when they don't.

Will the holocaust come, and with it the destruction of everything that Edgar believed in? I don't know. All I do know is that, had it come in his time, and had he survived it, he would, at the end of it all, have picked himself up off the ground and started to fight once again for those great freedoms we honour tonight, and which his great faith told him must one day triumph: that day when no man will be used, unwillingly, or unwittingly, as a means to another's ends. □

WHAT IS A MAN?

Fatima Dike, *The First South African*, Ravan Playscripts 4, R2,75

Reviewed by Tony Voss

As Ms. Dike's play opens a young man speaks a prologue on a stage lit only by an oil lamp. He begins with a conflation of the Genesis stories of the creation of man and woman and ends with a question: "Am I not a man then?" The question reverberates through the play, for this is Ms. Dike's hero, her first South African, Zwelinzima Jama.

Born to a black mother and a white father, he is brought up in Langa as a Xhosa, and undergoes traditional initiation rites. But his manhood is thwarted at every turn. When his girlfriend, Thembi, falls pregnant, her father rejects him as "a bastard". The "white chick" to whom he passes as a white discovers his secret, rejects him and causes him to be fired from his job. Zwelinzima ("the country is heavy") knocks around with Max the spiv (who calls him "Rooi"), falls foul of the policeman Mtshiselwa. The play is rich in the detail and sweep of township life. But such fulfilment as that life offers is denied to Zwelinzima.

In the second scene of the play, the white location superintendent offers to adopt him, but later when Zwelinzima applies for a pass (a reference book, not a book of life), he is refused. Eventually he can only make his way in the world by denying his family and his heart. Max reports:

I saw him the other day at Salt River station, in brown overalls. He was watching over a group of men working on the railway line. I couldn't have been mistaken even after 3 years, and he saw me. "Rooi...Rooooi...Rooi is ek, ou Max." His eyes looked right through me, and he turned away and spoke to one of the labourers. Ja, hy's 'n klein baas nou, he doesn't want to know us any more. But he can't deny I used to wipe his nose when he was so high.

This is a powerful play. The humour, and there is real humour in it, falters very occasionally, but the overwhelming impression is of lively writing and assured stagecraft. One of the most telling effects is achieved in scenes which involve a single character conducting a conversation with an unseen, unheard other: as in the confrontation of Freda, Zwelinzima's mother, with the superintendent. This text enables a small cast to bring to the stage a sense of individual action and personal relationships set in a wide and vivid context. Though mostly in English, the play in a sense requires a new South African audience, since it also uses Xhosa, Afrikaans and a mixture of all three.

Some of the most powerful writing is given to the mother. Her death is a most moving scene — and Ms. Dike has managed in Freda to give Mother Africa a new resonance without sacrifice of actuality. Each character, whether embodied in an actor or evoked only by the words of others, is clearly felt to be there.

Perhaps the most important fact about this play is that it has been published — in Ravan's very welcome and useful Playscript series. Like the other plays in the series *The First South African* has been performed. It was Ms. Dike's first play as resident playwright at the Space, Cape Town, where it was written and produced in 1977. It has been done before: now it can be done again. Zwelinzima's story is based on an actual case: one of the best ways of ensuring that it doesn't happen again is to act it again.

Ms. Dike's play should not be confused with A.P. Cartwright's book of the same title published in 1971, which is a 'life and times' of Sir Percy Fitzpatrick. □