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# The DEATH of the POET



Walter Chakela

**Worker 1:**

(Exclaiming in sudden shock)

No! This can't be true!

**Worker 2:**

What's wrong now, Kgositsile?

**Worker 1:**

Look at the eleventh page of the newspaper

Worker 3 looks at the said page, but cannot see anything

**Worker 2:**

I don't see anything here. What are you talking about.

**Worker 1:**

That small column hidden in the left corner of the paper.

Worker 1:

**(Reading the column).**

The poet laureate of the township dies in hospital.

(Turning to Worker 1)

**Worker 2:**

What are they...

Worker 1.

**(Interrupting him)**

They are referring to Ingoapele Madingoan. They are referring to the people's poet himself.

**Worker 3:**

But I thought the people's poet was.....

Worker 1:

**(In a sudden outburst)**

Nobody is the people's poet but him!

**Worker 3:**

I was just... never mind.

Worker 1:

**(More to himself).**

Why now, poet? Why now and not earlier or later. Now was not the right time for your departure. Earlier would have been more tolerable, for those were times of death. Later would have been better, for then, surely, you would have finished your task. Now is too late and too soon. By God, how can we lose you now, poet. It is now that we need you to give us your clarion call: On your marks, get set, ready, go! Run Africa! We need to run poet.

**(The others are shocked at the depth of his hurt, and choose to keep quiet as he continues to utter these words:)**

How  
Do I sum you up  
Poet  
Do I  
Call you names  
Couched in flowery language  
Extolling the virtues  
Of your poetry  
You  
Frowned upon  
Such unpropitious utterings alive  
And surely won't

Accept them  
In your now  
Ancestral abode

Should I  
Even  
Try to employ  
The use of words  
Inarticulate words  
For  
I do not possess  
Your eloquence -  
To  
Sketch images  
Of Your life  
How  
Do I  
Begin  
To paint  
This canvass  
In colours  
Connoting  
Your life  
Your extraordinary life  
How  
Do I  
Capture  
The cadence  
Of  
Your thunderous voice  
At  
Regina Mundi  
Or  
At  
Avalon cemetery  
When  
The bones  
Of a revolutionary  
Were interred  
For eternal rest  
I  
Can only say  
What I know  
I  
Can only recount  
What my memory recalls  
Moments  
Events  
Of  
Momentous significance

With you  
a central figure

I remember  
That Saturday  
At Funda Centre  
That Saturday in Soweto  
At the height  
Of PW Botha's emergency  
The occasion:  
Readings from  
Zimbabwean literature  
You  
On the chair  
Yes

I remember the day so well  
We

All of us came  
Writers  
And

Non-writers  
Poets  
And Non-Poets  
Or

Hope-to-be-poets-one-day-  
When-the-inspiration-comes

Yes  
We

All of us came  
And

Found

A party of

Literature enthusiasts  
From

Botha's security police  
Armed

Not with aesthetic sensibilities

Like the rest of us  
But

Armed to the teeth  
With

Machine guns  
And armored vehicles  
On

Your inquiry  
At the reason  
For the heavy artillery  
Came the answer:

We  
Have not come

Like everybody else  
To attend the reading

We were all  
Stunned

By this incongruous spectacle  
And

The equally incongruous answer

I could not help  
But be reminded

Of  
Goebbels

And  
Culture

At the mention of it  
He is said

To have reached  
For his gun

I

Remember the look  
On your face

when you addressed  
The packed theatre

This was

Just

Another form of censorship

The reading must go on

We must not

Be intimidated

The reading must go on

You

Said this

Taking your position

At the helm of ceremonies

And

Gaveling the proceedings

Into order

Poet

We

Were all scared

Though maintaining

a steely exterior

Like

An experienced revolutionary

You

Were wise to

The futility

Of prolonging this reading

For more than necessary


Under such provocative conditions

But  
You were equally wise  
To the historical significance  
Offered  
By this confrontation  
Of  
Poetry  
and  
The guns of apartheid  
So  
The reading went on  
The words  
Of  
Our Zimbabwean comrades  
Filled the theatre  
Though only  
For  
A symbolic while  
Before you call it  
To strategic end  
You  
Had made  
The critical point  
You  
Had consolidated  
This moment  
This  
Event  
For posterity


I  
Remember  
Poet  
The spirit  
You instilled in the people  
When you read  
**Africa my beginning**  
I don't remember  
Any poem  
In the history  
Our literature  
That so stirred the people  
As this one  
In that sonorous voice  
You bellowed:  
Freedom  
Is the law of nature  
Justice  
Is deeply rooted  
In the universal order of things  
I am

Because  
You are  
Because you are  
I am  
This  
Was how  
You whipped  
Your audience  
Into a poetic frenzy  
  
The relationship  
Between  
People and their poets  
Is much distorted these days  
But  
I suppose  
The poetry  
Written by true poets  
Will live  
After them  
  
I remember  
Your deep concern  
Poet  
About our skewed remembrances  
Of  
Our heroes of struggle  
Where  
In the scheme of things  
Are the names of  
Mofutsanyane  
Morolong  
Biko  
And others  
That you named  
In rapid succession  
You asked  
We  
Forget the names  
Of  
Our heroes  
At our peril  
You opined  
You  
Are now gone  
To be  
In the illustrious company  
Of  
Plaatje  
Mofolo

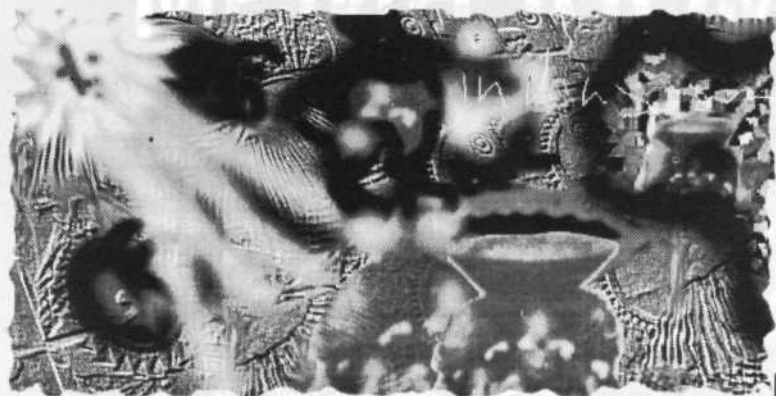
Monyaise  
 |  
 Can see  
 The smile  
 On your face  
 When you ponder  
 The irony that  
 We envy you  
 The company  
 But  
 Not the journey  
 |  
 Have no doubt  
 Poet  
 That  
 You will  
 Acquit yourself well  
 In that community of giants  
 LIGHTS FADE



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