
Inside & Out

Poems from *Inside* and *Even the Dead* by
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FOR COMRADES IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Every time they cage a bird
the sky shrinks. A little.

Where without appetite –
you commune
with the stale bread of yourself,
pacing to and fro, to shun,
one driven step on ahead
of the conversationist
who lurks in your head.
You are an eyeball
you are many eyes
hauled to high windows
to glimpse, dopplered by mesh
how-how-how long?
the visible, invisible, visible
across the sky
the question mark – one
sole ibis flies.

DEATH ROW

I
The first we hear is this tremendous
cajoling laughter.

Ten minutes later, above our cells
Squeak-squeak-squeak, across the catwalk
Walks an unfamiliar warder.

It's three fokken terrorists – he says,
Not grasping, yet.

Who we are.
*They're impossible man. A person
Can't do
Nothing with them.*

Johannes Shabangu.
David Moise.
Bobby Tsotsobe.

Having
Skipped the country
trained in diverse parts
slipped back clandestinely
Dug
diggers of the earth
residers of holes underground.
Sons of the soil
breath to be swallowed
breath swallowed by the night
In the night
darker than plain dark
and all so quiet
Sappers
Soweto's sons
stalkers

Who blew up
Sasol 2 by Secunda

Uncle Tom's Hall
Booyens, the cop shop
Dube line
likewise a place near
Malelane
Caught
Caught in a shoot-out
captured at Matola
strung upside down
Probed without days
in a night
in a river of needles
The clammy hood
choke hold
a year without season
For months
your bodies probed
months long until

finally you were led
unbowed into court
and charged
all three
with high treason.

Now nine months already, brothers
You've been sitting
On death row.

II
What concerning C section
can I tell you?

What down here could be different
from B section?

A section? Or from wherever
it is inside this slaughterhouse
they've just randomly
shifted you from?

Listen . . . two walls to the left.
A garden – I think,
from where this sound
leaks in.
A guinea-hen's call – we've been told,
glass on glass
a pocketful of marbles weeping
deep in her throat, but don't ask

On Wednesday mornings
almost every other week,
another, staggered sound
like bioscope seats flapped
back. What's that!? Don't

Ask me, brothers, I

. . . Perhaps I didn't hear.

III
Of course we never get to speak,
As such, to each other.
We're still fifty yards, one corridor,
Many locked locks apart.

Nkosi sikelel', we try singing, at night.
Us down here, to you,
Three condemneds, along there.

Morena . . . we whiteys sing,
Mayibuye iAfrika, and muffled
Far-off chortling, you guys
Call back: *Encore! Encore!*

IV
Then it's you singing slow
Antiphonal phrases,
Three tongues floating over
That audible
Drop which gathers,
The words thrumming in your

It was the first time I had ever
seen a man so young and so
fit. He was tall and thin, with
dark hair and a beard. He
looked at me with a steady
gaze, and I felt a strange
familiarity. He was the man
I had seen in the dream.

The paternity of the man.

He was that man when he died.

And he had been dead for a long time.

He had been dead for a long time,
but he was still alive in my
mind. He was still there, in
my mind, in my heart, in my
soul. He was still there, in
my mind, in my heart, in my
soul. He was still there, in
my mind, in my heart, in my
soul.

Venture to the Interior

PROLOGUE

Now in your cockpit
from your pilot's seat within
test the distant parts of this machine.
Take the tongue-tip and feel up
t-t-t-t-t
there, just
behind your upper front teeth
the ribbed shoal that runs back and up
to a solid arch of bone.
Beyond, slide along the soft velum's central crease
peeling back on your tongue's joy stick
until you touch
the stem from which depends
a strange
perhaps forbidden fruit aaaaah!
say aaaaah!
working the throttles of your glottis.
And now
to cool a while
let the tongue untwine
returning to its berth.
Let lip touch lip
hmmmmm, mmmmm.
Flick the switch to In
then Out: these
being the two prevailing winds.

Are all systems go?
- Good.
Then let flesh be made words.

CAVE-SITE

I want you
to prise carefully
sound
from sound
to honour by speaking
(and sometimes to discard)
to lift, cough,
breccia, rock, sediment
layer through layer
in this
mouth or
cave-site of word
root, birdbone,
shells of meaning
left in our mouths
by thousands of years of
human occupation.

LITANY

Out of the primal swamps
down the line of the mudfish
through the snake where your ways parted
after the hardening of the palate
you came

to me o

Amphibian Rose
tchareep grrrtch-grrrtch
tchareeep tchareeep tchareeep
Protrusible Shadow
Tree of Tastebuds

kree-kree-kree-kree

sssszzz

from this jungle of unmapped sounds
you arise

Elastic Denizen
Abettor of Mastication
Disporting Porpoise
Friend to Deglutition
Concavity turned Turtle

sszzzzzzzzzzzz(_____!)

Convexity of Muscle

you come

whirra – whirra – whirra – whirra
dove

Love Scout
Periscope of Pleasure
Winged Breath

you come

bearing the leaves of speech

Tongue!

O Ark of Language.

PLATO'S CAVE

... would they not assume that the shadows they saw were real things?

Imagine a chamber that's cave-like and runs
down and down underground,
and imagine
within this chamber
there are prisoners with strange anatomical names.
Each is fastened here or there
and enfolded in dark.

Suppose further that these prisoners are restless,
that they hoist the back of their tongue
to enclose a pocket of air, and then
with a quick downward stroke they make
!quagga!

painting a palatal click on the roof of their cave.

Or suppose, hearing snatches of news,
they are filled with deep longing,
these prisoners who incessantly mimic
the sounds of their land
down in the blue-veined stopes
down in the very confines of their chamber.

Supposing all this,
do you think they'd assume
this shadow play was real?
That these prisoners could forget
the struggles of their brothers and sisters
there outside where these sounds
bathed in the daylight, may

someday, grow into words?

LABYRINTH I

from a blanket
– unpicked,
twined for strength,
balled for concealment,
taken out in the dead of night,
this cotton thread,
weighted with a comb
on its casting end, this
– is a cable.

Blind guessing
on distance and angle,
the comb skating off
many times
from under the chink, tentative,
of my locked door, trailing
its cotton tail, lifeline
out, as it jigs
back at last to rebound
under my neighbour's
cell door, this
– is a cable.

a thread of contact
down which to pass
a meagre
well read, smuggled-in, month-old, scrap of
– newspaper.

Our land holds its hard
Wooden truths like a peach
A pip:

Out at Athlone
By the power station
Over the two cooling towers, the wind
Turns visible in its spoors.
Skin and bone, zig zag,
Through the khaki bush
It hums, the wind tongues
Its gom-gom, frets a gorah,
In a gwarrie bush the wind,
So I fancy, mourns, thin
Thin with worries:

Goringhaicona

Goringhaiqua Gorachouqua: sounds
Like at the back of our sky
Cicadas' songs ache: Hessequa
Hacumqua, like vocables swallowed
In frogs' throats: Cochoqua,
The names of decimated
Khoikhoin tribes – their cattle stolen,
Lands seized
As their warriors died
Charging zig-zag into musket fire,
Those warriors who've left behind
Their fallen spears that our land
Like a peach its pip
Holds now:

This unfinished task.

To learn how to speak
With the voices of the land,
To parse the speech in its rivers,
To catch in the inarticulate grunt,
Stammer, call, cry, babble, tongue's knot
A sense of the stoneness of these stones
From which all words are cut.
To trace with the tongue wagon-trails
Saying the suffix of their aches in -kuil, -pan, -fontein,
In watery names that confirm
The dryness of their ways.
To visit the places of occlusion, or the lick
In a vlei-bank dawn.
To bury my mouth in the pit of your arm,
In that planetarium,
Pectoral beginning to the nub of time
Down there close to the water-table, to feel
The full moon as it drums
At the back of my throat
Its cow-skinned vowel.
To write a poem with words like:
I'm telling you,
Stompie, stickfast, golovan,
Songololo, just boombang, just
To understand the least inflections,
To voice without swallowing
Syllables born in tin shacks, or catch
The 5.15 ikwata bust fife
Chwannisberg train, to reach
The low chant of the mine gang's
Mineral glow of our people's unbreakable resolve.

To learn how to speak
With the voices of this land.

Some Uncertain Wires
