

“black pussy,” whom you can fool with “any shit if he believes it will prolong the sex act,” and who given an inch will take a mile. When he’s not working, he slouches in a chair, leafing through comic books. Moreover, as a member of the “party,” he possesses all the loathsome traits of the white bleeding hearts and sob sisters. However, at last after Bob’s marriage to white Jeannie and Moses’ obliging act of “lending” the newlyweds the penthouse as a “bridal suite,” the roles are reversed. Bob, now “Robert,” orders Moses about: Moses again lives in the basement, and Robert is writing the book.

But Moses fears that black power militants will misconstrue the moral to be: “that after the ballad and the episode, it is the white man who ends up Upstairs and the black man who ends up Downstairs,” so he concludes the novel by letting us in on his revenge plan.

Clearly this book satirizes man and his institutions; the condition of cities, of humans, of relationships. Nor does Selvon lie when he asserts “None of this narrative is fiction: if I lie I die.” People living in cities do live in a dream world, refusing “to believe or accept the things that happen under their very noses.” Yes, we have here satire, stinging satire, delightful satire that combines language and situation to give us Selvon’s truth: humans are a sorry lot.

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Sipho Sepamla. *A Ride on the Whirlwind: A Novel of Soweto*. (London: Heinemann, 1981) 244 pp., \$7.50 paper.

South African poet, playwright, and teacher Sipho Sepamla has in his second novel, produced a fictional but tensely revealing narrative of events surrounding the 1976 Soweto riots. Dedicated to the young heroes of the day, the novel chronicles daily life in an atmosphere of fear, suspicion, distrust and terrorism.

The fundamental themes of the book, identity and trust, are developed through vignettes exploring the interplay of black and white, age and youth, male and female. Illuminated by the glare of hate-filled extremity, these relationships, shorn of subtlety, reveal in their starkness the pathos of terrorized life.

The novel covers a brief period in the summer of 1976 when a series of terrorist acts challenged the stability of white rule in Soweto. The youthful Mandla and his loosely organized band of teenage saboteurs take great pride in their ability to embarrass the heavily armed and

financed police. Sympathetic bourgeoisie, given a fleeting hope of freedom by the actions of the terrorists, provide cars, supplies, and cash. The simple and gentle Sis Ida, whose home shelters the rebels, goes about her daily business selling cosmetics as the youths in her care try on various roles, tease out their social and sexual identities, and fear informers, all the while making soup and bombs in her kitchen. Motivated primarily by kindness toward the children, she distances herself from the meaning of these activities so effectively that at the end of the novel, she faces her interrogators without guilt, innocently trusting her civility to create a humane relationship.

Trusting no one at all, the protagonist Mzi enters Soweto and the novel to join his terrorist training, unidimensional commitment, and automatic rifle to the cause. Devoid of past and future, Mzi exists as a point of focus for larger movements of history. A trained guerilla warrior, his mission is to kill the policeman Batata who in his madness and cruelty symbolizes and personalizes racial oppression. Paradoxically, Mzi's anonymity enables him to succeed in identifying and destroying the enemy.

As troubling throughout the novel as the issue of the bases, purposes, and development of identity is the equally unresolved issue of trust. Barriers of age, gender, race, economic status, and political affiliation rise frequently to challenge trust. Informants abound, and the result of their disloyalty is anguish. Sepamla suggests a low value on truth. For a bowl of fruit, a bottle of beer, a brief sexual encounter, one's friends and neighbors are betrayed. Where firm and loyal affiliations exist, they seek relief from the pervasive atmosphere of fear; relief through action, escape, or death. The burden of trust is nearly unupportable in such a context.

The risks inherent in these fleeting encounters of trust remain throughout the novel. A bit of sympathy from one police officer, a brave refusal to yield to torture, a car freely loaned for an escape—these are the hooks on which the reader is left to hang shreds of hope. Commandeering safe passage abroad from an ambivalent but ultimately supportive white woman missionary, Mzi escapes after the killing of Batata, only to learn that there are many more Batatas, and no true escape. His youth, power, and agility are painfully inadequate against an armed oppressive state, but his survival is meaningful, nonetheless. Unhappily dependent upon a white woman, there is in his attraction to her a message of human unity. The questions of identity and trust remain unresolved, troublesome, and full of hopeful promise as the story of the 1976 riots closes, but does not end.

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