MARIA MBATHA looked at the clock on the kitchen dresser. The clock had stopped. But she knew instinctively that it was very late at night and her eyes were heavy with sleep. She yawned as she continued to rock the young boy she was carrying in her arms to sleep.

But the boy kept staring unblinkingly into the dim-lit room with big, sleepless eyes. They both listened to the noisy silence of the room.

"Ma," the young boy said softly.
"Yes, my son." Her mind was still blank.
"Ma, I want water."
"Water." She repeated the word like a child learning a new word at school.
"Ma, I want water, water, water," he rattled.
"Shut up, you're making noise. Why don't you wait for your mother to come and give you water?"
"I want water. I want water. Put me down. I want water."

The palm of her hand came down hard on the young boy's buttocks. He did not cry. He started kicking his feet up and down.

"Next time I will make you feel the sjambok, Boetikie," she vowed after the young boy's fist had caught her smartly on the chin.
"I want water. Put me down. I want water . . ."

Maria, still holding the young boy in one hand, stood up and gave him a mug ful of water. "You just wet the blankets tonight and see what happens to you tomorrow," she said as she watched him gulp the water greedily.

"Ma, I'm hungry," Boetikie said after finishing the water.
"You must be mad. You had food during the day. You think I'm here to work for you as if you are a European?" She carried him over to the bed and tucked him in.

"I don’t want to sleep. I want food. I’m hungry."

"Shut up now. Don’t act like a lunatic. One of these days I will kill you, Boetikie, God in Heaven hears me."

Boetikie pulled the blanket and covered his head. Maria stood looking at the covered heap for a while. She shook her head and went outside.

Outside, Western Township lay sleeping restlessly under an overcast sky. Usually, at this late hour on Sundays, Western Township, like most African townships, would be alive with drunken revellers staggering home from shebeens and “midnite parties.”

But tonight, like the past few Sundays, Western was quiet. Yet one could not fail to miss the undercurrent of restlessness that throbbed through the belly of the township. When will it ever end? “I hate this boycott,” Maria cursed softly, bitterly, and went back into the room.

Boetikie was snoring nasally. She felt relieved that he was asleep. How this child gets on my nerves! But there was no anger or bitterness in her thoughts. Boetikie was all she had in the world. Her husband had been killed during a faction fight between “Russians” in neighbouring Newclare.

Nana, their only daughter, was married and was now staying in Port Elizabeth. Boetikie was Nana’s child but Maria had to look after him because the man who married Nana did not want the child to live with them.

Maria went to the stove and pulled out the ashtin. There was a bottle in it. She took it out, poured some of the liquid into a glass and gulped it down. Her face contorted into a mask of agony as the brandy burned her throat and warmed her stomach. She sat on a chair and placed the brandy on the table. She stared at the half-empty bottle, hating it and loving it at the same time. She wondered what her husband would have said if he had caught her drinking.

Maria squeezed her head with both hands. Her head was bursting with pain. She felt as though parts of it were falling away in pieces. She seized the bottle and poured herself another tot.

After gulping it down she felt the pain filtering out of her head, leaving a delicious sensation that was a mixture of dare and bravado.

Suddenly the world became a wonderful and beautiful thing and she began to mumble a song. She was now falling in love with the world she had hated so passionately a few hours ago.
She thought of the long walk she would have to make the following day to fetch the bundle of washing in town. For tomorrow would be Monday — “Washing Day.” Although she was not feeling tired, she told herself that she would not go to town. “To hell with the boycott and the washing!”

It felt comforting to be able to say that. It made her feel like a person, a human being who has a right to live her own life the way she wanted to live it.

“Azikhwelwa!” she shouted. “We won’t board the buses,” she interpreted for herself. Just like at the meetings. She laughed and poured herself another shot. Then another. And yet another. After a while followed blissful unconsciousness.

She fell asleep on the table, holding the bottle in one hand and the glass in the other.

A slight breeze trickled through a crack in one of the panes of the window behind Maria’s back. The flame of the cigarette-high candle that was stuck in a saucer, flickered for a moment, as if struggling to hold its own against the breeze. But the breeze licked it off the wick and muffled it in its coldness.

The room was now in semi-darkness.

Maria’s body rose and fell rhythmically with her heavy breathing. As it rose, it seemed to swell with all the pride and joy that had filled the brief years when she had her husband and the crowning glory she felt when she gave birth to their only child, Nana. She had seen her grow into a fine woman.

And as it fell, it was as if all her forty-five years of frustration were weighing heavily down on her plumb body, battling to drain the life out of her.

Maria slept, her mind steeped in the uncaring abandon of the drunk.

Peaceful. No thoughts; no dreams; no hopes nor fears of tomorrow. Bottle-kind of peace, but peace all the same. And the township also slept, nestled uneasily between the inflammable Sophiatown to the north and the lusty Newclare to the south. On the east was Coronationville, prim and pretentious. And on the west, Nature, grim and sad, licking at the scars, dongas, inflicted on her by man with the sharp spades of civilisation.

Morning crept stealthily into Maria’s room, like a policeman stalking a dangerous, armed tsotsi. Maria felt the nursemaid of the mind silently drawing the curtains of sleep away from her eyes. Slowly, she drifted back into wakefulness, but her eyes refused to open. Her head throbbed with a clanging pain.

She knew the pain. A hangover. A hangover coupled with the effects of drinking heavily on an empty stomach. She rubbed her eyes and realised that the door was slightly open. She remembered that she had not locked it last night. The thought
that she had slept without locking the door sent a shiver of fright through her spine.

Then she felt someone shaking her rudely on the shoulder.

"Come on, woman. Don't waste my time. I'm arresting you."

She looked up. Beside her stood a khaki-clad, hefty man. The Law! And in one hand The Law held a bottle of brandy and in the other The Law held a glass. Maria recognised them as her own.

Maria stood up. She was an inch or two taller than The Law. She looked at The Law, feeling sick and scared; cringing and confused.

"Come, woman, let's go," The Law commanded authoritatively.

"Please, father policeman," Maria pleaded. "Don't arrest me, I have to go to work... and I... please, father policeman..."

But Maria knew that it was no use trying to plead with The Law. She had always regarded the police as sub-humans, people without compassion and feeling. People who only found untold joy out of life by arresting, bullying and manhandling others. She heard other policemen shouting and cursing outside. The police were everywhere. It was a raid.

She heard a woman protesting and recognised the voice. It was MaSello, her next-door neighbour. "Don't hit my son like that! I will bring you before the court."

"He has no pass and he's cheeky. These educated tsotsis! He says I have no right to ask him for a pass when he's in bed. Who does he think he is? I'll knock the education out of his head, I vow by my mother."

Maria had resigned herself to the worst. She could not even believe her ears when the policeman gave her back the bottle of brandy and told her to hide it. "Quickly, woman. Hide it before I change my mind."

Maria snatched the bottle and shoved it into the ashtin of the stove. "I don't know when I'll become a Sergeant, doing such stupid things," she heard the policeman mumble as he went out of the house. He banged the door so hard the house rattled with the impact.

The noise woke up Boetikie with a start. Maria, although she could not say why, was crying softly.

"Ma, you're crying."

"Yes, my son," she sniffed.

"Why, Ma?"

"Oh, sheddup!"
When Maria came back from town in the afternoon, carrying a bundle of soiled washing on her head, she was still bitter at the experience she had had at the bus stop. Because she was tired from walking all the way to town, she had boarded the Coronationville bus as these buses were not affected by the fare increase which sparked off the Bus Boycott.

A young Coloured boy had constantly bumped her and called her all sorts of names to unsettle her. But Maria had managed to keep cool.

She met MaSello outside. “MaSello, did you send Boetikie to the shop?” she asked.

“No,” said MaSello. “But I saw him running with MaBatho’s son towards Sophiatown. There’s a fight there, you know. The people are stoning the buses and trams and cars. I understand that one of the buses from town—and it was empty, mark you—ran over an old man who was crossing the main road. That’s why the people are stoning the buses.”

MaSello had hardly finished her narrative and Maria was dashing full throttle in the direction of Sophiatown.

Fear exploded in every pore of her body. She stumbled, fell and scrambled to her feet again, all the while calling Boetikie’s name.

A few yards away from the trellis that divided Sophiatown from Western Township, she realised the full impact of the riot. There was screaming and shouting. People of all shapes and sizes were scampering up and down the streets.

And the police, from nearby Newlands Police Station, fired their guns and pistols above the heads of the milling mob.

Maria had seen Sophiatown many a time in an ugly mood. But today Sophiatown looked like a city at war. There were people lying wounded or dead along the tram rails and the main street.

A policeman, leading two children, a boy and a girl, by the hands, crossed over into Western Township through an opening in the trellis.

Maria realised that the boy was Boetikie. With a shout of joy and relief, she ran towards the policeman. “Save my child, save my child!” she shouted hysterically.

Just at the moment, a group of women and young tsotsis who had been witnessing the little war from a safe distance, mobbed the policeman.

“What are you doing to our children, you government dog?” one of the women shrieked. In a moment the women were upon him, clawing at him, tearing his khaki uniform and battering his head with stones held firmly in their hands. He fell and everybody disappeared.
As Maria pulled Boetikie away she saw the face of the policeman. Something knotted inside her as if to squeeze all the water from her system and bring it out silently through her eyes.

When she reached home the shooting had lulled. A spasmodic “boom” here and there after long intervals.

That night, Maria and Boetikie went to bed without having supper. She did not feel hungry and even Boetikie had not asked for food. It took her a long time to fall asleep. She just lay in the darkness of the locked and bolted room and listened to the whine of ambulances that made the dark room even more foreboding.

And she thought of a policeman whose body was perhaps still lying cold and stoned and punctured along the trellis. She choked and wept.

... Only that same morning that policeman had been alive. That same policeman had been in her room asking her to hide the bottle of brandy. If he had arrested her, she thought, then she would not be remembering his young, pinkish face lying dead and uncared for along the trellis that divides Western Township from Sophiatown...
Sir,—Congratulations on No. 1. It contains a story by Can Themba (THE SUIT) and a poem by J. M. Brander (THE KAROO) which are superb. I am not a judge of drawing, but Andrew Motjuoadi's portrait of MY UNCLE is for me a gem.

I note the editor's remarks on white writers who try to be Africans. How is the white writer to gain insight into things African? I don't intend to answer the question, but merely to make one observation. If a white African had written Casey Motsisi's A VERY IMPORTANT APPOINTMENT, he would have received a mighty cold reception from African critics. Which seems to prove something, doesn't it?

I beg to say a word on my own behalf. I note that some African critics (including you, Mr. Editor, and Ezekiel Mphahlele) are needled by any white African writer who introduces Christians and Christian values into his writing. It is time you got over this. Christian themes are as much part of our culture as any other. Christianity, in all its many forms (sincere, hypocritical, superstitious, and the rest), was as much part of the life of Diepkloof Reformatory as homosexuality, dagga-smoking and football. It is a sign of an immature critic of writing that he reacts with immediate hostility to the introduction of any Christian element, and concludes that the writer is really only a preacher.

As for your statement that I consider that the African should resign himself to dumb humility, I regard it as insulting. It is time you black African writers got some insight, too.

ALAN PATON.
Kloof Natal.
Dorothy Blair is The Classic’s French literature editor. Her translation of the Senghor poems appears on page 47.—Editor.

Dear Mrs. Blair,—I have received the first number of the review, The Classic. I have perused it with much interest.

I am interested to such an extent in black South African writers that I have just written a preface, for a French publishing firm, for Peter Abrahams’s book entitled A Wreath for Udomo.

I much appreciate your translations of my poems. Naturally you may publish them in the aforementioned review.

LEOPOLD SEDAR SENGHR.

Dakar, Senegal.
CONTRIBUTORS

DUGMORE BOETIE is a Johannesburg writer.

NILS BURWITZ is a final-year Arts student at Witwatersrand University.

ENVER DOCRATT has been writing for several years, although the two poems in this issue are his first published work. He lives in Johannesburg and is a South African.

CHARLES EGLINGTON is a poet and art critic whose work has been published in Belgium and France, among other countries. He lives in Johannesburg.

ATHOL FUGARD has been described as the most important playwright in South Africa today. His “Blood Knot” was staged in London early this year. A theatre workshop he started in Johannesburg, has produced the most successful of the few black African actors in South Africa.

HARRY MASHABELA, a Johannesburg journalist, recently earned himself the distinction of being the first black South African reporter to be sent on an assignment in Europe. Mashabela reported on African students who left Eastern universities after claiming discrimination against them.

LEOPOLD SEDAR SENGHOR was born in 1906, of a Catholic family, in the little fishing village of Joal in Senegal, and early distinguished himself as an outstanding scholar. Completing his education in Paris, he became the first African to reach the highest French University degree—the “Agrégation.” By the end of the last war Senghor had become by turns professor, philosopher, prisoner of war, poet and politician. When the independence of Senegal was proclaimed in 1961, he was the obvious choice for the first President of Senegal. The poems (page 47) are from “Nocturnes” (Paris 1961).

LEWIS NKOSI, formerly of Johannesburg, lives in London. He studied at Harvard University on a Nieman Fellowship.

BARNEY SIMON writes from Johannesburg, where he also produces plays. He has had work published in the U.S.


CASEY MOTSISI, a Johannesburg journalist, is planning to publish a collection of short stories, together with reprints of pieces he wrote in his column in “Drum.” He has a book ready for publication.
SPECIAL XMAS OFFER

Make a Christmas gift to a friend — subscribe to

THE CLASSIC

at these special lower rates.

THE CLASSIC — Published Quarterly

Subscription — One year (4 issues)

South Africa and the Protectorates ........................................ R1.00 (post free)
United Kingdom ........................................................................ 11s. 0d. (post free)
U.S.A. .................................................................................. 2 dollars (post free)
African States ........................................................................ 11s. 0d. (post free)

To the Circulation Manager, The Classic, P.O. Box 6434, Johannesburg.

Please send me THE CLASSIC

□ Issues (One Year)

NAME: .................................................................................................

ADDRESS: ............................................................................................

.................................................................................................
SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS

Recent Publications

AFRICAN ATTITUDES
A Study of the Social, Racial and Political Attitudes of Some Middle Class Africans
by E. A. Brett
Price 50 cents

AFRICAN EDUCATION
Some Origins, and Development until 1953
by Muriel Horrell
Price 40 cents

PREJUDICE AND PERSONALITY
A Survey of Current Thought
by B. W. Rose
Price 25 cents

SPORT AND RACE IN SOUTH AFRICA
by Mary Draper
Price 75 cents

PUBLICATIONS DEPARTMENT
P.O. Box 97
JOHANNESBURG

Full Book List Available on Request.