

I HID MY LOVE IN A SEWAGE...

Njabulo S Ndebele

I hid my love in a sewage
Of a city; and when it was decayed,
I returned:
I returned to the old lands,
The old lands
Where old men and old women
Laugh all day
Until their lungs are as dry as dust:
Where old men and old women
Talk all day
About the weather, about proverbs, about fields...
About trivial things:
Where they talk all day
About trivial things...

There was I in the wilderness,
Outlandish years dull
Like the rings of a rusted bell.
I stood aloof when the cows
Spread their moo across the rural greens,
I was king,
I was king of the bees,
I ruled over the honey,
I ruled over the milk pail
Full of white bubbles.
Ha! Ha! I held my hollow belly,
In laughter when a hen dropped an egg.
My arms akimbo,
I knew the secrets of the world,
I knew the secret pleasures
The better pleasures,
And God, let me lie on the grass
At the entrance of life – unwanted life.

Below the bottom of life,
My love lay drowned to stench,
Of – course I knew it
I knew my love was dead;
But oh no, let me lie unbothered
On the grass at the entrance of life,
Let me break the bonds that make me me,
Let me drift in the wilderness of callousness,
Let me drift an unidentified soul...

And when the fumes of decayed love
Were unfurled unto the winds,
And they covered the plains and the greens,
And their rot chewed by the trees,
And their rot sung
By choirs of drunken birds,
I knew I had lost;
God, I knew I had lost;
O who am I? Who am I?
I am the hoof that once
Grazed in silence upon the grass,
But now rings like a bell on tarred streets.

[Published in *The Classic Volume 3 Number3*. 1970]