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The Severed Son and other poems (Original writing)

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Andersen, Angela Sue Witzke, M.A.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1990

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THE SEVERED SON
AND OTHER
POEMS

By
Angela W. Andersen

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

English

in

Creative Writing

English Department
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
December, 1990

APPROVAL PAGE

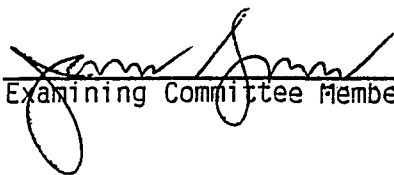
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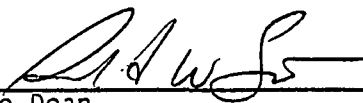
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To You, the Reader:

This poetry speaks of people in and of their many dimensions. I don't set out with any one purpose when I write -- that would smother the poem -- but if there is one thing I am seeking, it is honest portrayal, the truth of the feeling.

As far as the creative process is concerned, I let the poem come, with all its sounds, plays on words, multiple meanings. I let it form into its own mode and tone, and then I look at it, listen to it. Sometimes a poem requires little revision, sometimes it requires much revision, but in the process, I attempt to allow the poem to become its own voice, its own truth. Perhaps you will feel it, and that will be its purpose.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Angel Brecken". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Viola

She is a young woman beneath her stone
Walking the fields unknown
And I am left alone.

Her house is rose
The house where I was
The house where she was

Where she held me, in a fragrance
Where she cloistered me
With the sweet smells of all her passion
Riding in

She called to me,
"My little darling"
"My little angel with tainted wings"
"Come in! Come in!"
"If your nose is clean, come in!"

Her house is full
Even the roots of the grass
Are there, and I am here
Across the road
Wandering
In her gentle
House.

Basement

It is a dark basement

The lines are grey

Where the water was

Where it floods

Like afterbirth.

The dark smell of foul water

Holds the heavy posts

Rotting.

The people above

Have planted their flowers

Have planted their signs

To sell

But behind the house

The basement stairs

Are left before the basement door

Deep and open

Where the air is wet

Where there are loose bodies floating

Floating Floating

Without the bulging water

To carry them

Joseph,

You are the spackled wall

An infant slides against the cold

His bald mind

His stumbled body

Pinches you:

He breathes you in

Beneath his teeth

Beneath his orange pulp feet

He heals you

On a kind and quilted mattress.

Divorcing

It was this kind of shag rug
Where she scarred
Hard sex
Against
Her back

Now she is bare
With her son
Who dosen't ride
The bus.

He said (over the phone)
"We're just no good
Together.
I'm tired
Of being
Castrated."

Fathers and Sons

He says there's a sort of reverence that follows each time he kills
A sort of gratitude for the meat he skins
And doesn't eat.

This time he says his oldest son will follow him four days up the hill
His second son, tugs,
Pappa, please don't kill.

He says the others take in archery, black powder, and the faun
The meat's the best, the tenderest
They always get their faun.

Last year he shot his deer
Tied it to the rail
It dried and Dallin cried
And stabbed it
'Till it fell.

Robert who is Retarded

Gracious hands rope together from all sides

He hides

He haunts in battle in his own

Young voice

His eyes are trenches faded

In them he is

Deepening his own dark

Smile

Barefoot

And impregnable:

His own dull thought

He laughs

And destroys.

The Wailing Wall

In the Wailing Wall
The mind is thick
With knot and sweat
The gallows of the past
In presence
Without them hearing
Soldiers guarding
Crumpled Jews
In deep and hollow
Holes

It's coming, you know

The wide throat of death

As tight as Iraq

Heaving and breathing

Failing dust, opera

And you, my son, there

In khaki cloth where willows

Haven't fallen, where Hemlock

Is your name, open, in afferent pulses

In white

Weather

The Dance of Marriage

The dance of marriage dead and long
The dance of slow and buried song
Dying in a garden rot
The tiny grains the twain forgot
Tiny children wedged between
In tight and twisted sheathes of green
Tender plants the heat doth rip
Their old man in his prime:
A drip.

The Family Picture

In the family picture you are not smiling
All the others peachy keen
You are left staring
Like your grandmother would have done
Like her grandmother would have done
Like a homeless poster face
Your look is swollen in despair
Every why by which the family stands
"Loyalty, status, stability"
Is silenced
In your vacant
Face.

A Cricket Pair

On the blue window sill

In the blue

A baby is born

Again

The life force gives

Nervously blue

And blue most surely

Will die

Unknown

The giver gives

In hollow

Retreat

What Mothers Say to their Daughters

She said to me, "When they're young they break their toys and

When they're old they break your heart"

She said it to me one year

In her alcoholism

And her coarse laughter

And I laughed

After her.

I guess I could have said it

(Or something similar)

But instead I

Held it for this moment

When I would see a rose ribbon frayed

And a jump rope without ends

Tied and blowing

Against a bent down

Rabbit cage

Fence.

The World is Harsh

I once had a wish

Where there are lakes and rains and trailers

In the woods (in Washington)

The desert here is odd in wind

My brother hides

His marks

He walks on heroin

His feet are skin

The widow next to all of us

Wheels her garbage out

The world instead

Wishes to be dead

Where there are rows and rows of connoisseurs

Professors of the woods

The Poet

I'm hating him -- that old, damned poet with the greased laugh and teeth
And dirty breath

Feasting in his scurvy shorts:

Green-yellow against his gut buldging

Oh, he is crude, isn't he?

His own flesh flabbing with his right leg crossed

Cigarette and hairy

In green-yellow froth

When he talks his scratched and testamental voice

Vomits into me four-walled and hideous

And the cross-legged stinking toad

Is comfortable

In his stench.

Vanity

I was thinking about him
With the red shorts
And the thongs
And the Muselix cereal with his two glass bottles of juice in his little blue shopping
Basket
I had forgotten about them (those kind of baskets and my children with me)
While I watched the gym fit man in the gaberdine shorts
Walk to his Mercedes that was black
And my son in back of me
Darting forward
Somewhere I saw ahead of him darting and called him
Just before the car with a couple jetting forward slammed its breaks
And nearly hit him
So my son
I hit him.

Adam Hears

A speckled hole -- a vent above my head

Where the air blows

Where the hot wind blows the dead

I hear them, they are coming -- living old and red

Their fragrance shows

Where the hot wind blows the dead

Already there is innocence

His branches bare

Her double head

Already there are apparitions

Where the hot wind blows the dead.

The Woman in Grey: A Painting

Shifting in the fields

The woman in grey

In the dull grey

Never moves

She has no face, no hands, no place

Her parasol even

Between the grey and the grasses that never grow

In thin and dull and even grey

My Grandmother Had

My grandmother had long, long toe nails
Long toe nails that stuck out long and low
From her see-through, rhinestone, high heels.
She stepped on my toe once, "Oh
I'm sorry, darling
These big ugly feet of mine
With these long toe
Nails"
"Oh
How they hurt," she would say
But she let them grow and curl
Down, around
Weaving
Over the black and calloused body
Of her life.

A Dark Room

Sitting in a dark room

A dark space

My mother is a dark room

A dark space

She and I

Across the board

Across each other

In a dark room

In a dark space

Sitting.

Sitting.

Sylvia Plath
(In Quotations)

ISBN 0-396-45374-7

PS 3566.L27 Z9134 1989

The personal life of Sylvia Plath is opened to the public

Jacked off by a hearty breakfast and pleading

For pills

For literary monologues

Penceling chaotic memories and obsessions

In feverish delirium.

Men she had known in the past

Often flung in --

Then she went to bed:

Reenacted pills, ravings, a short sleep,

The three o'clock awakening, more pleading for pills

For sleep again

And the same hearty breakfast.

* * *

"What a pity. If I could paint, I would want to paint things.

I love the thinginess of things."

Old Men

They had serious voices

Serious enough

(All others believed them)

Now they sit

Laughing

Cock-eyed

and

Knock-knee-d

SECTION II

Third Cottage Boys

THIRD COTTAGE (Detention)

The poetry in a calloused cage
Is crusted hard by violence and vulnerability
The life in a woman, who is bruised
And brutal
With children, maniacs, all of them
Is gold in angry opposition.

The Christmas carol that enters
The house of beating voices
Is vacant
In opposition.

In this home
The boys are scared
Tasting metal
Buried
Alone.

Juliano

He had a scar that ran down the center of his chest
Wide and thick
His hair was dark, knotted
And he lied

He styled his friends around him
All of them following
To world domination

I saw him scribble Satanic symbols on his shoe
I saw into him
He said, "Oh, it's really a joke"

After they knew he couldn't read
He was caged

Kevin

When he went back in

I saw him behind the stainless

Steel cafeteria counter

In Zenoff Hall:

He was crying,

"I don't have anywhere else

To go"

His grandparents

Grow lovely roses

In arches

On Edna Street

Heath

Heath called me
After I stopped coming
To Third Cottage, "I
Bought a new car but
It was towed away because
It wasn't insured or
Registered and
I'm going to be getting that
Very soon. Could
You loan me fifty dollars? I'm
Calling from the phone at school; My
Mother and I got in a big
Fight last night and
She's bitchin'
Again."

Phillip

He wore

A pressed

Flat

Top

A hat

Flat

Brown

Yellow brown

Glasses

Round

He was

A thumb screw

Thief

Of cars

He was

Intelligent

And God.

I was surprised

That he

Was there

Joey

Joey always followed
With Phillip,
He had the kind of weathered blond hair
Like Shredded Wheat.
He would like that.
He would like being thought of
As wheat
He was
The Staff
Of Life

Joey,
His open shawl
Blew
And crystal found him
And left him
Staggering
Crawling.

Mark

Mark, the elemental star of all

Our successes

His own magician

Gaining him

Perfection:

He would walk across the stage

And copulate

With the best of us

With his spark

Of potential

So we let him slip by

Conning us

In every way

Lawrence

He was a soft faggot
Who loved
And let his innocence
Hang him

He held me
And offered me
To let him cry

So I let go
And he went on
Waiting in a cage
For his father

James

Black apostle

Dragging in

To each of them

I saw your fists clenched

And your head ragged

Against a carved school

Desk. "We are melting

Minds," Mark said.

But you didn't

Say what you

Were doing

That day.

John

Where is John?

Narrow

He feared the attitude

Of Healing

He was healing

The holes of his eyes were ahhs

Long

Starving sags of tissue

Beneath them

He was in them

Now he has brought us all

To Spring Mountain

Where we do not see him

Where we wade before his bottled eyes

Where he is swelling

Tony Sedgwick

Tony,

You are these boys

Aching

For sanity's home

They are in your acne scars

Your eyes, your

Courtesy

The viper they see

Is your reversal

Backing into

Each of them

SECTION III

Lighter Poetry

How We Marriage

She announces to me, "I'm a vegetarian,"

And buys 750 pounds of dry

Beans: kidney, Great Northern,

Small red

and white

and I

Buy

Breakfast sausage

With the orange grease.

Then she says, "I swear,

That smell is going to make me throw up"

She rinses her beans

I make my pizza

She makes her pasta out of fresh

Duck eggs.

She sits neatly across the table,

Me

The kids

The dog on the floor

With the sausage

She

With her duck pasta

And her beans

Boiling

Roman Numerals

I hate Roman Numerals

I suppose they look spiffy in a' preface or a title -- all lined up

Bold, angled, loud, proud and fat:

M M D C C L X I I I

But I hate them staring back at me

Not knowing what in duck soup they're saying

Much past thirty.

The Fly and I

It bothers us
To have something
So intimate
As a fly
ON us
Perhaps
It's the way
The fly
Looks
And rubs
His greedy little
Tongs
Together

We sit sitting on the toilet
Hoping that none of us isn't leaking
In such a way that such a fly
Could find a way to slip into
The thick of it BUT worst of all
Not to find his way back out
Again and once again so intimately
Place his pompous little laquered
Self
ON
us.

The Wiener Burglar
(For the Deconstructionist)

The Wiener Burglar came to my house last night
He sneaked through the door
And turned out the light
He opened the frig
And to his surprise
There were no wieners
Only fries
He said to himself
There must be some wieners here
So he marched up the stairs
And into my fear
But I shut my eyes tight
And hid from his sight
And he found no wieners in my house that night
So when he was gone
From under my bed
I pulled out six wieners that would have been dead
A whole package of wieners
I had hid them away
I was saving them for
A rainy day
Since my fear was all gone
And the Burglar was too
I ate five of those weenies
And saved one for you.

Dog

NO!

You long-haired huffing, sneezing, wheezing

Bounding, hovering, hounding

Dragging me out of bed at three a.m.

Whining, whimpering, grunting, groaning, panting

Moaning

You dry-mouthed, black tipped

Saggy, sloppy, flopping

Flea-bitten sack of

Flogging to my soul!

SECTION IV

Dreams and the Odd

The quiet child in my room
Never laughs
Never calls
Just the constant constricting of his fingers
The last cry of a crusty fish
On dry ground
His brittle, brittle bones
Still clamouring between us

Battered Woman Therapy

Man cut out woman's heart

And she found it there

Beating

Under desert dust.

Woman went away for awhile

And Man found her

Sneaking in

Listening for her own dull heart

So he beat it until it wasn't dead

Any more.

Woman heard it

Guiltily.

Man flew off

And woman was left

With the hole.

Hemingway

The sun is filtered there
Folding and narrowing to the West
Sea
Neither grey nor black
But at best a sound:
Night clouds against a water
An agreeing suffocation
Which is empty.

Fatherhood

Fall corn doesn't crop up gradually
It bursts itself toward the late
October sky--
A man's last attempt
At fatherhood.

I've seen the boy cling to his mother
When most boys
Are gambling on BMX's
And baseball cards
He's dizzy against his mother's cupcake arms

His father
Is
Heading for
The
Frost.

In Front of the Barbary Coast

A shriner without his arm

His white shirt sleeve

Pressed and pinned

Beside him

His old hair blowing

His sun sores soft

His red face

Lost

About a Throat

There's something about a throat been slit
After the blood has run out
After it's left there turning in
And empty
Purple.

There's something about it being able to open
That keeps me from looking in.

I dreamed a man whose throat had been slit ear to ear
And when I pulled his finger up to touch it
I felt it
Getting firmer
Turning in.

It's the fear of the head flipped back
And the throat gaped open.

It would be worse
Far worse than a mirror
Up the stairs
Of a girl's
Panties.

The throat of Hell would gape open
And swallow me.

Mental Illness

Here

On a sheet of clay

He carves a rag

A bone

A shank of day

Here

Under sheltered sun

Flat against a sand stone

Wall

He waits in quiet medicine

In a hospital of quiet

Medicine

Here

In a flat chair

Your own museum

You offer him

He is here with you

Rocking

In your broken

Zoo

Peru, Andres

A plot of trees
He will always be the two-
Bird flying through
A red shadow of seas

He holds the plane
A tiny thumb against
A tiny wheel against
A nail, a house of rain

He cannot read, his brown
Eyes see brown
He is alone
In rows of earth and brown

On Ending His Nationality

He peels his skull

His celophane covered skull

Back, he looks

Back, he sees me

Watching him

He peels it closed again

And drives his

Yellow

Car

SECTION V

Perfect Children

Embryonic Child

Embryonic child

Quiet

Mild

Eyes without lashes

Brows without form

Aureole white

Distant

Light

Bartering with the man among the tombs

Berthing with the others in the wombs

Without distance

Without form

Mild

Quiet

Embryonic child

The I Am

Even the slightest thumb against a paperback cover awakens him

As if returning from some faraway land

Where sound is light

And sight is quieted

Still

Where he, out of infant body, becomes the man again

Walking with the tall ones

Robed

Gloried

Across all generations, galaxies,

And ages past

In the fullness of his times and beings

Every where and every when

Where he becomes the man again --

He jolts with outstretched body stiff

Eyes wide and tight and distant

As if returning from some faraway land

Where sound is light

And sight

Is still.

Black Baby

Her skin is torn

Her child is born

Narrow generations sigh

Looking, I

See a black baby without his mother there

Abandoned to his own aggressive care

He is suffering

His old mind, unknowing

Bloody generations bind

He is left to find

Willow Child

Willow Child nears the pool no more

Surrenders single, narrowly twisted leaves:

Silken scales brush cold the one who grieves.

Time compels a sharing with the shore

Completed still the willow child is shed

Flushed in silence, in nervous sighs compressed,

Agreed, the sheet is placed, the child undressed

Time compels a burial for the dead

Willow child immure and disimmure

Collecting quiet mournings of the night

Again the sand pulls closer to his sight

Time unsphered: a willow submerged once more

Waking up the sound of fresh fingers touching

A silent baby finds his hands

When no one's watching

watching his hands

look back at him

The two of them still

In open conversation

Listening to his fingers

folding

touching

Cradling his skin

His smells of sweet water bread

Saves

Upon his face.

Popsicles

One child stuck to a Popsicle stick

His feet bare

His own brown eyes

Full of squares of marbled light

And the stick

Leading him

Anywhere

To Devan

Held within a softly breathing
Gentle, infant body,
You move away from bumper pads
And jolts of other brothers
Your crib beside the garden window
With late tomatoes and early pumpkin vines
And chimes of other neighbors
Labors all around the house just now
And you in subtle breathing
With lips and eyes half parted
Always with your hand held near
Your silent face
Always with your head towards
The light.

A Shallow Spark

This tiny child

Who holds me

Who suckles me

Whose head is mine

Whose hair is whispered

In my fingers

This tiny child

Is older than the sun who

Wraps around

My mourning

He hallows me:

A shallow spark

Against a cavity

Of time

This tiny child

Divine

Staying Here

The world will graze away

I will stay here

Watching you:

Nervous body

Infant nails

Scratching at a dream

Uneven breaths

Red and glittered veins

Against your lids--

Your mind is a fruit bowl

So you will let me stay here

(There is nothing more than this.)

Joshua

There was an old child born
His parents young, without reason
Using cocaine in a rainy Portland season
Before the old child born

He was shaking when she changed him
His mother shaking when she was gone
Stripping in rooms until dawn
While he lay shaking his grandmother changed him.

She held him two days before the funeral
She kissed him, kissed him
Sang and sang, and never once wept

The child's face was brilliant and full
His fingers lifted around him
He died and died, and never once slept

I remember this:
this feeling that transfigures woman
back into herself again
I remember this hazy child wrapped and folded
fresh in my arms
I remember this stop along the giddy pass of day
I remember pausing here
feeling I had found the only space in all of time
that would never change
Like a fox circled, sleeping in a worn and polished berth
I remember this child
Uncircumcised and unmoved
Asleep within
My earth.

SECTION VI
THE SEVERED SON

THE SEVERED SON

An Introduction:

The Severed Son is set in Africa, about 1910. The principal character, Zomu, is a native African who has worked in the Kimberly Gold Mine and lived in a nearby compound with his wife and two sons. The effects of both working and living in severely depressed conditions remain with Zomu, as he frequently relives past events. The dramatic narrative borrows from history actual names of cities and the mine mentioned in the piece. The rest is fictional.

At one level, The Severed Son is a story of man's isolation in a violent and vulnerable world, hence, the story could be of anyone in any era. It is a journey of the mind, echoing sound and thought, transgenerational, and appearing chaotic, but ordered, once understood. Thus, we see Zomu hearing the African cries and persuadings of ancestors and present associates, with no respect to time or place.

Reaching Bloemfontein for Zomu is like reaching Byzantium for Yeats -- at one level he arrives -- we always do, whether or not we are conscious of it.

THE SEVERED SON

by Angela Andersen

Zomu

Had an eye full of glass.
He built a fire to burn
The living cow, dead.
He held her, teeth clenched, up
And slit her, ear to ear.
The bloated, glutted, gutted
Cow, the paradisiacal glory
Of Zimbabwe, burned like an altar
Inside out, bursting
Full of greed and malice,
Diseased, "Bleed the poison
Out," he whispered. His brain
Was crazed, washed, salted
Fresh full of death.

He listened to the voices touching him,
 Coaxing him, "Go, go,"
 "Here, here, here"
 "There!" -- an arm around him,
 Pointing him, "Here, here!"
 Zomu crouched near the seething
 Cow; it was good to watch
 Death flatten in the dry
 Sand; it was good to watch
 Drips of rain steam
 On the cow's hot, leathered
 Flesh; it was good to burn.
 There was nothing left, then.
 The muscle had consumed every moisture,
 Leaving her dry.

The hot coals pulled her skin
 Under her skin. She sucked
 At the earth and it left her brittle.
 "Ooooooooooyee, ooooooyee, ooooooyee"
 Deep in his throat he knew it
 "Oooooooooohyee, oooooooooh, eye euuuuuu"
 He burned the cow's incense
 "Ahhhhhhh, Ishe Komborera, Africa"
 He burned the cow's mind--
 A mind that never moves
 When it burns in an act of worship.

"Aheyyyyyyyy, yaaaaaaaaa, eeeeeeeeeeee"

"Eeeeeeeeeeeee"

Zomu burned her. It left him
Brutal against his own colic mind.

He spit upon the cow's remains.
All the death, burial, and resurrection
Of the day could not save him.
He knew when he returned from Durban
He would wait until nightfall and go
To the Big Hole again.
He knew he would lead others to the mine
And stop the transport of gold.
He knew he would kill again.
Zomu walked through the night,
Through the next day.
He reached the lord's house.
He walked to the back where the white lord
Was waiting, leaning against a post
Looking to the east shore.

The lord imagined heavy
Rain, with busses with the people
Of Great Britain passing by.
He imagined the gutters of London
Filled, running over with water
And debris.

He imagined stepping there, watching
Water swell, pass, . . .
In and around his shoe.
But it was dry here. The tiny
Rain was gone. The sun
Was on him, like a clawing, wreeathing
Thing. His face had become
Lined and stark, and narrow.
He was in Africa.

"Where is the cattle?" asked the lord.
"There was only one cow on the ship."
"It was bloated," Zomu said.
"You killed it, then?"
"Yes." Zomu waited
For his response. The white lord
Looked out for a moment, turned
And walked into the house.
No one was in Zomu's home
When he arrived. His boys
Were at the river. His cot
Was dark.
"Who is with me tonight? One. Two."
"Three, four. . . Five."
"Five of us."

He took his knife and made
Five marks on the cot's wooden
Frame. For eleven years
He had marked the wooden frame.
He had been in the DeBeer's compound.
He had mined the Big Hole: Every day
He had breathed, a mile deep, the heating
Diseased dust. Now he had his own land
And his boys.
Zomu stood and looked
Through the uneven slit of the shutters.
His boys were coming now.
A nerve between his shoulders was pinched.

Zomu saw a baby in his mind there
As he was wrapping his knife in a cloth
As he was putting it deep in his green bag
As he was getting ready.
Kamau pushed the door open fast
Zomu saw the baby again
He heard him lying there,
"Ahhhhhhhhye ahhhhhh gaaaaaaehhh"
Every time Zomu would return to the compound
He saw the baby.
He saw his wife holding the baby
Scared and hating Zomu
Every time he came back

From the Big Hole.

Zomu heard the baby again.

He heard Kamau again,

"Uuuuuuuuhhh ehhehh ann uhhhh ahhhhh"

His wife was holding the hole on Kamau's head

With a white handkerchief.

Kamau had a hole -- two holes

She didn't see the other, it bled

Against the shirt on her arm.

She knew it

When they lifted the baby

From her arm.

She was there;

Zomu was there

When they took Kamau to the room

With one table.

And one doctor.

They let him lie there while they waited

And thought of what to do.

The side of Kamau's head was swelling.

His forehead had a hole, not bleeding

But open, full of flesh and little rocks

And the smell of his head.

The piece of glass was lodged

Inside. The doctor

Took a cup,

Poured the water in
Rinsing, cleaning the hole.
His fingers could go deep, between
Kamau's skin and his blue
Skull. He rinsed the hole
Again, letting the water drain out.

Then he said, "There's a piece of glass here."
He pulled it forward with his gloved
Left hand. It was small enough to fit
Between his fingers. He looked at it
And at Kamau's mother.
"This may get infected. I don't know
If I can get it clean," he said.
But the hole was clean.
He stitched it; then he rinsed and stitched
The second hole, tight.
Kamau's head was still swelling. "Aahhhhhhh eh uuuuhhh"
The baby was looking and his head
Was dull. Kamau's mother was looking at Zomu.
She hated the compound more
And the black scar after.

X

X

X

Then Zomu remembered.

"Are you ready, Kamau?" he asked.

"Yes. Mobera is ready, too."

It was eleven thirty.

Zomu and his two sons went to the river

To meet the others

To stop the transport

Of gold.

THE SEVERED SON

Part II

Early morning, Zomu
Was warm, somewhere in the bush.
His left leg was throbbing. He had
A cut on the instep of his foot.
He rubbed his hand down near
His foot; his veins were warm.
He could feel them near the surface now.
He heard a small bird, only one, sounding twisted
And tight in short cries.
Then he heard a loud sound,
A fiery sound, coming from Bloemfontein.
Zomu tried to lift himself --
He pushed his hands against the ground
He could feel the blow he received
Hard on his left side.

His arm could barely lift him.
The small bird was almost quiet now.
He heard him, very faint, in short
Pulses. Zomu stood. The ache was less.
He wondered if his sons were dead.
He wondered if the two other men
That were with him were dead.
Zomu heard the fire again.
Now he thought to head east, toward

Bloemfontein. He lifted his left leg.
 His blood came down hard with his heel.
 The pain cut up and into
 His calf. But he continued to walk.
 He knew the heavy dragging sound
 Leading him to the city.

Below the fire he could always
 Hear the dragging.
 "The temple veil was rent in twain."
 He thought of the first time he heard of it
 In the compound. Zomu breathed deep.
 He could feel his blood come down hard
 To his heel. Every time he took
 A step the pain spread flat
 Inside his leg; he pulled
 His stiff leg forward; then the blood
 Pulsed another time.
 The veil was in his mind now. It haunted him
 When he first saw it, but then he heard it,
 And that is what was planted in him
 Over and over.

"Ooooheee ahhh ehhehh eeuu"
 "Ahhhhhhh ehhehh eeuu euuuuuu euuuuuu. . ."
 The veil was a chorus of dissonant
 Cries, clawing at the sound of heaven,

A rising, twisted, steady sound
Of voices heaving, dragging
Against a dark and gravid sky.
"Ahhhhhhheee Ahhhhhheee Ehhh"
"Eeeehhha Eeeehhhhhhhhaaa"
Zomu's mind was the vortex
Of the dissonance, through him it would cross,
Bursting in all directions;
He felt it there steady when he walked
With his blood coming down hard with his foot.
Zomu walked for nearly eight hours.

The sun was behind him, on him,
Burning against his naked back.
His foot dragged and brought
The smell of dust to his face.
He remembered the mine even more.
He could not see in any direction,
Only the mark of the pick as it struck
Against the rock, hard, and pounding
In him. His legs were strong.
His arms were tight against the handle
Of the pick; his hands were clenched.
And the pain was sharp, as if the mark
Of the pick was driven in them.
He was thirsty now. Soon the sun
Would be down and he would still be thirsty.

He knew he was two days from Bloemfontein.
A great system of sound flooded him.
First, a single drop, flat
Against a hard surface, then,
All at once, a surge of sound,
As if his veins were filled with heavy water.
He rested now, with his veins filled;
He fell asleep, dreaming of the sound
And of his wife, whom he could not love.
It was still dark when Zomu awoke --
He heard the sound flood his mind -
Again. Before he knew that the sound
Was coming in, he was urinating on the dusty
Soil. He could barely see his urine,
Dark against the early morning ground.

The tight earth held the urine
Like a pool. Zomu cupped his hands,
He brought the urine to his lips,
He drank quickly; his mouth,
Tongue, and throat were warm
All at once together.
"I am not here; I am here," he said.
"I am somewhere else. Not here."
Zomu listened to himself
Think the thoughts of a man
Who winds down into himself.
He stood and saw that his foot

Had swollen to a thick, dull weight.

The pain was on him once again.

The sun was on him once again.

His mind led him to the bottom

Of the Big Hole where the air

Was heavy and old. Each time

He tried to crawl enough

The rock and sand would hold him.

"God, help me," he whispered.

Zomu dragged his leg.

In an iron crawl his weight

Was dead against the ground.

He began to notice the sound

Of wind all around him.

He heard the sound of a baby

Crying, laughing, he was not

Sure. The wind grew louder

He cried with it, "Ahhhhhhhh"

"Ahhhhhhhh ahhhhh eh eh eh eh eh ahhhh ahhhh uhhh"

"Ahhhhhhhh ahhhhh ahhhhhhh ahhhhhhhhh h h h h"

He was breathing in dust, coughing

All the dull breaths of death;

His knees were heavy on the soil.

The pain in his leg was tight

And long, "Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh"

"Ahhhh Ahhhhhhhhhhh Ahhhhhhhhhhh hhhhhhhhh"

He couldn't hold the sound any longer.

He cried louder: the louder

He cried, the louder the wind

Sounded around him, winding

In him, down, open

And down. His head was pounding

Like an old man's fist was pounding

In it. Pounding. Pounding.

Then he heard a quiet. Louder

Than the pounding, he heard

A quiet growing, as if nothing

Was in him but the sound of quiet

Growing. It was a single strand --

Firm against his leavened mind.

He let it rest there.

He let the strand of quiet

Hold him steady. He knew that he

Could stand. Zomu

Gathered his death around him

Severed,

He felt the air.