

In this strange land, unshielded by a mask ...

All Poems by Elisabeth Eybers



Elisabeth Eybers
(1915-2007).
Photo by David Samyn.

Although the last few volumes of poetry which Elisabeth Eybers (Klerksdorp, Transvaal, 1915- Amsterdam, 2007) published were practically bilingual, her poems which deal with exile and leaving South Africa were written only in Afrikaans during the sixties and seventies. For the occasion of a few English papers and articles I wrote on her work she enthusiastically set out transforming some of these earlier poems which she had written nearly forty years ago, into English. She did the first translation at my request in 2001 and most of the others during 2003. Her last translation of an old Afrikaans poem was done in July 2007, less than six months before her death on December, 1st 2007. The versions in Afrikaans are from *Versamelde Gedigte* (Querido, 2004).

Ena Jansen, Amsterdam

Step by Step

You learn migration step by step, you see
strange and familiar objects, somehow stranded
on the artificial terrace where you landed
yet did not settle irrefutably.

Willy-nilly

South Africa, when I abandoned you
because of personal hurt (not merely due
to random statements of stupidity)
my accent was enough to indicate
from where I came. Strange, how they welcomed me
while treating you to blind, official hate.

Voetjie vir voetjie

Voetjie vir voetjie word mens immigrant ...
Toevallig uit, toevallig tuis, gestrand
op hierdie teennatuurlike terras
sonder om ooit onloënbaar aan te land.

Nolens volens

Suid-Afrika, toe ek jou moes verlaat
nie om jou domheid maar om eie seer
- met tongval wat my land van herkoms meld -
wis ek nog nie dat ek ook as gas sou geld
by hierdie fuif waar hulle jǒu trakteer
op amptelike monomane haat.

Exile

In this strange land, unshielded by a mask ...
the people here take everyone to task,
don't tolerate nor flatter. What on earth
detains you here? There life was far more worth
and nothing now precludes your safe return.

You answer self-assured:
hate and suspicion can be borne
by all who share equivalent rights, who learn
not to make laws humiliating others
or challenge humanness by rubber stamp,
who look upon their fellow-men as brothers.

Why do I shrink from demanding:
my kinsman, my co-incumbent,
just how will our children fare?
- Who's paying for the past, its hapless care.

Ontheemde

Hier, in die vreemde, en sonder 'n masker aan...
Die mense is hier nie minsamer as daar, gewis
nie toleranter. Wat of wie
hou jou hier vas? Dáár was die lewe beter
en niks belet jou om weer terug te gaan.

Jy antwoord selfbewus:
argwaan en haat is te verdra
tussen gelykgeregtigdes wat nie
verordenend mekaar verneder,
menswees met rubbertjap betwis.

Hoekom huiwer ek om te vra:
my broer, my natuurgenoot,
word ons kinders terreurloos groot ?
- En die onbetaalde gelag van die verlede ?

'Shakes' Moferefere was
incarcerated at the notori-
ous 'Ramkraal' prison in
Bloemfontein for six years
from 1981.

Shakes passed away in
2009 - shortly after revisiting
'Ramkraal' for the first time
since his release.
Photo by George Hugo.



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TELL ME WHERE DID
WE SO WRONG?

WHY CANT WE
LIVE TOGETHER?

SATLA
AI

JAKU