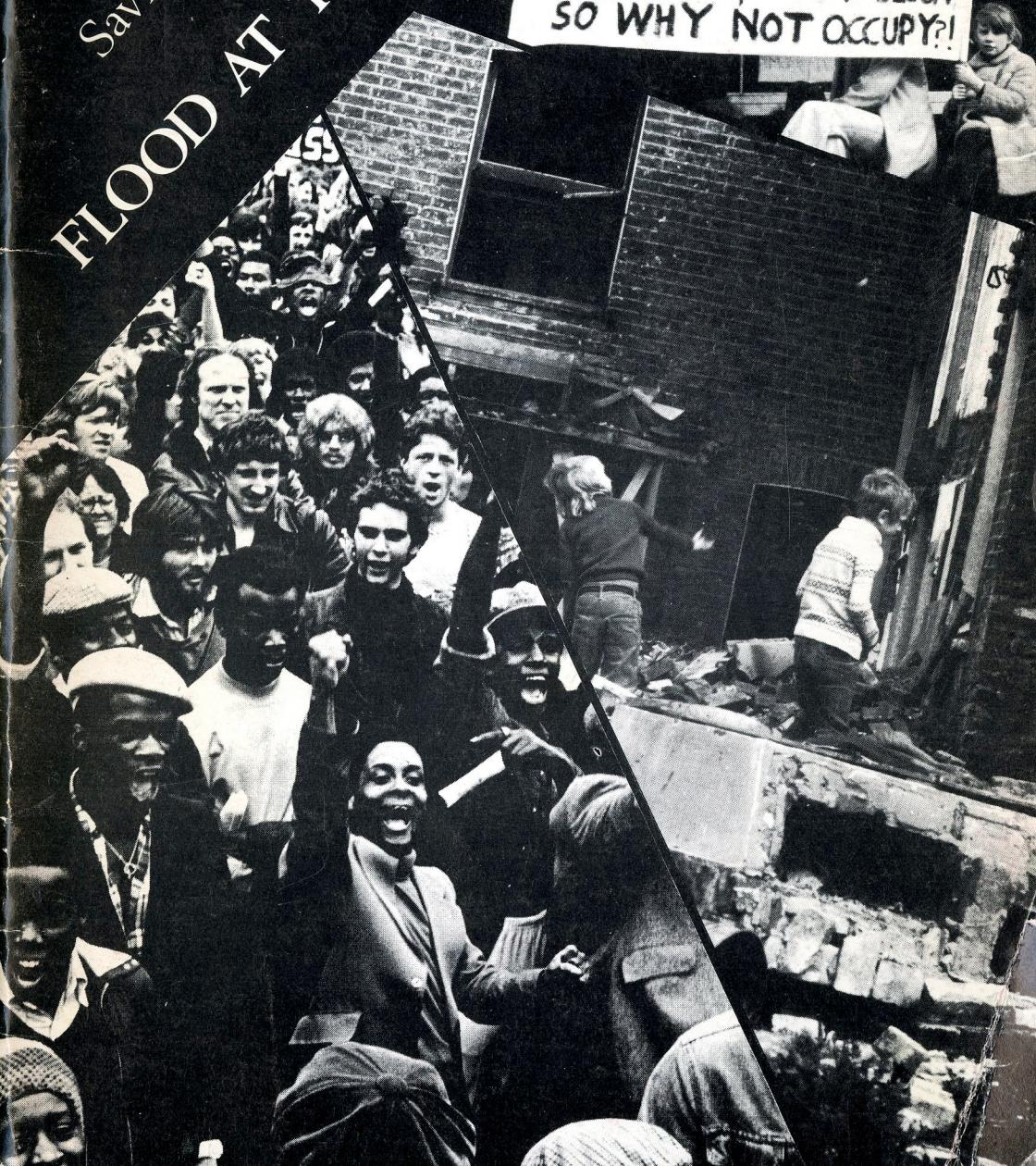
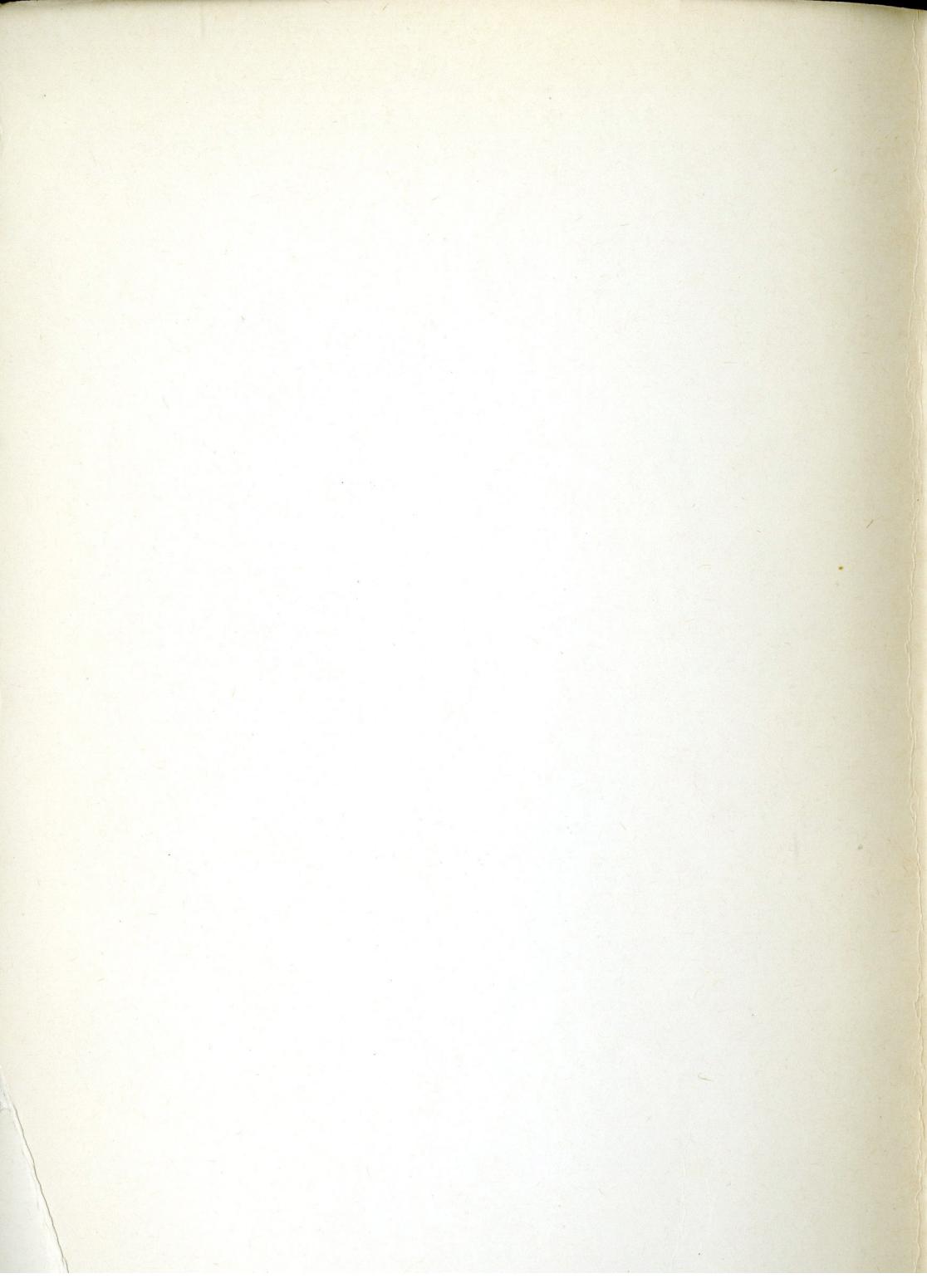


# Savitri Hensman FLOOD AT THE DOOR

WE CAN'T FIND NOWHERE TO LIVE,  
NO MATTER HOW WE TRY.  
HARRY'S GOT AN EMPTY BLOCK  
SO WHY NOT OCCUPY?!





# FLOOD AT THE DOOR

## POEMS

Savitri Hensman

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Sarah Moriarty

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I was born in Sri Lanka in 1962, but came to Britain when I was two. I went to primary school in Ealing, then moved, and settled in Stoke Newington.

I have always enjoyed reading and hearing poetry, from folk ballads to Blake. I began to write poems in my spare time, sparked off by the place I lived in and the things happening around me. I showed my poems to parents, friends; it was difficult, and still is, but it was the only way to find out which ones worked and which did not.

A few months ago I took some to Centerprise, and was invited to join the Hackney Writers' Workshop, which I did. We meet regularly to read, discuss and grow together. We are part of a wider movement, that of worker writers and community publishers. This movement is growing, both in size and importance. I am now in the sixth form at Highbury Hill High School, studying science. I hope to go on writing.

Savi.

We hope that you will enjoy this collection of poems and pictures and be stimulated by them. It seems a shame that, because of the subjects they are studying for 'A' Level, Savi and Sarah have not been able to make poetry and art part of their life at school.

The book is important in itself, but it is also part of a growing body of writing by young people, many of whom are still at school, whose voices may have been heard in small school magazines, but whose writing seldom reaches a wider audience. We believe that there is much that deserves a wider audience, and are committed to promoting work by pupils at school in the Hackney area. Other people are doing the same thing: not only are a lot of London schools publishing work by young people through the English Centre, but the number of small publishing groups across the country is growing steadily.

If you enjoyed this book, we hope that you will be encouraged to put your thoughts and ideas onto paper yourselves.

If you do we'd like to hear about it.

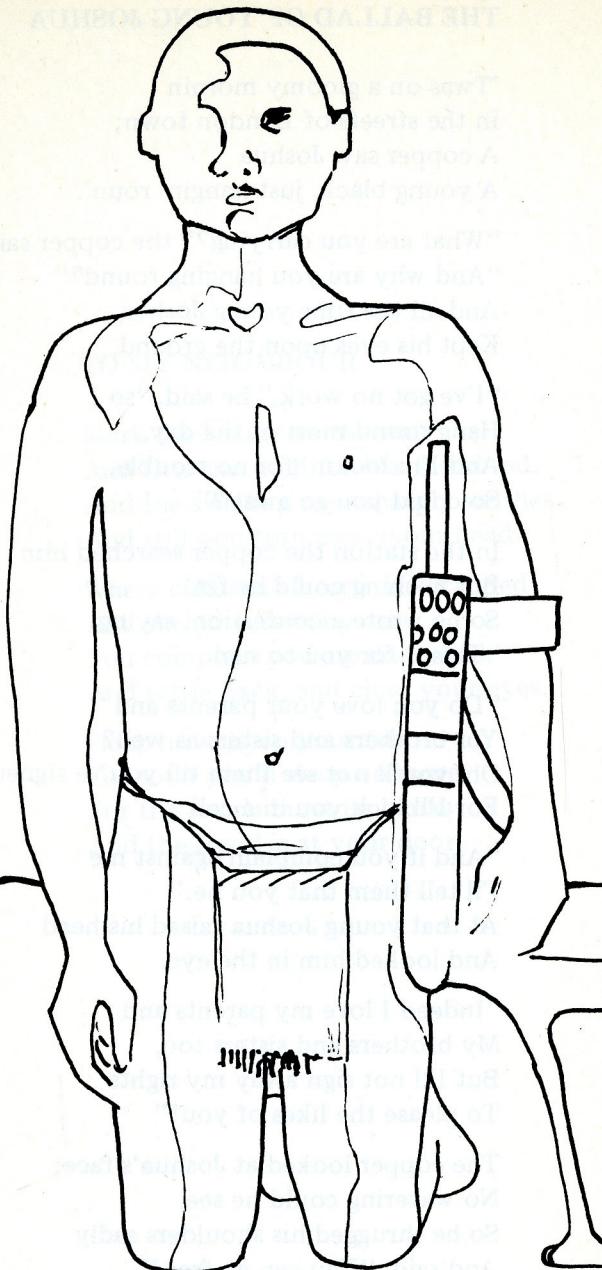
Centerprise.

The racist  
Sweats to build a cage  
For the black  
Eagerly and urgently hammering in  
Every bolt for every bar  
While the cancer of fear and hate  
Eats away at his heart  
At last he looks round at his work  
And gives a start  
For the mighty cage is complete  
And he, too, is inside.

# **BLACK IS NOT A SKIN COLOUR**

**BLACK IS NOT A SKIN COLOUR**

Black  
Is not the colour of a skin  
Black cannot ride in posh cars  
Or look with contempt on the poor  
The hand is black that wields a machete  
Cutting sugar that others may grow rich  
Black sleeps rough  
In corrugated iron shanty-towns  
Black, tilling the soil, is drained  
By the vampire landlord  
But raises a voice of revolt  
Black grips the guns and the knives  
To bring down the well-off and mighty  
Black is the colour of a heart.



## THE BALLAD OF YOUNG JOSHUA

'Twas on a gloomy mornin  
In the streets of London town;  
A copper saw Joshua  
A young black, just hangin' roun'.

"What are you carrying?" the copper said  
"And why are you hanging round?"  
And all the time young Joshua  
Kept his eyes upon the ground.

"I've got no work," he said, "so I  
Hang round most of the day,  
And I'm lookin' for no trouble,  
So could you go away?"

In the station the copper searched him  
But nothing could he fin'  
So he wrote a confession, saying,  
"This is for you to sign.

"Do you love your parents and  
Yor brothers and sisters as well?  
Oh, you'll not see them till you've signed  
For I'll lock you in a cell.

"And if you complain against me  
I'll tell them that you lie."  
At that young Joshua raised his head  
And looked him in the eye.

"Indeed I love my parents and  
My brothers and sisters too,  
But I'll not sign away my rights  
To please the likes of you!"

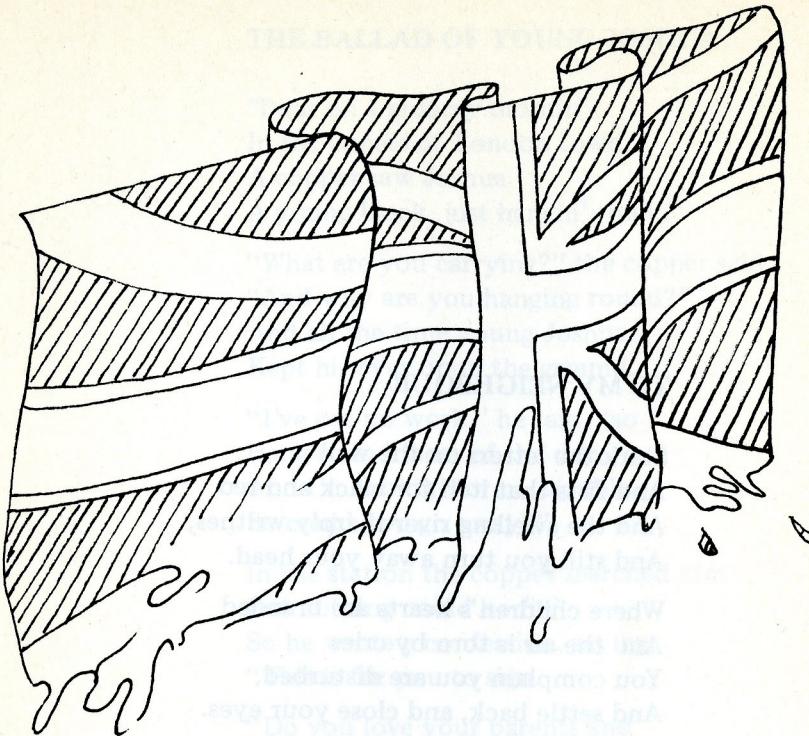
The copper looked at Joshua's face;  
No wavering could he see,  
So he shrugged his shoulders sadly  
And said, "You can go free."

## TO MY NEIGHBOUR

Stark the letters on the wall  
And fists that itch for black and red,  
And the swelling river sharply writhes,  
And still you turn away your head.

Where children's hearts are branded  
And the air is torn by cries  
You complain you are disturbed,  
And settle back, and close your eyes.

Sleep now, sleep your fill  
For soon you'll sleep no more,  
For the river's burst its banks  
And the flood is at your door.



## WORLD WAR TWO

'We didn't win to have you here,'  
You say, and flaunt the Union Jack  
But by your side we fought and died  
Red on white and red on black

And looked him in the eye.

"Indeed I love my parents and  
My brothers and sisters too,  
but I'll not sign away my rights  
To please the likes of you."

The copper looked at Justice's face  
No wavering could he see,  
So he shrugged his shoulders sadly  
And said, "The copper tree."

## JUST ANOTHER ASIAN

Watching were the stars that night  
Watching was the moon  
As Abdul left the bus-stop  
Whistling a tune

The street was still and quiet  
And the street-lamps they were bright  
But something gleamed more brightly  
In an alleyway that night

A cold breeze stirred and dwindled;  
He did not see or hear  
The silent youths who played with  
The knife as he drew near

His eyes were on the street ahead  
His thoughts were on his wife  
And then he heard their curses  
And he struggled for his life

They stabbed him in the face and chest  
They stabbed him in the back  
Then they kicked him as he lay there  
And told him to go back

In the stillness, in the moonlight  
Stands a woman by her gate  
Waiting for her husband  
But tonight he will be late

The police stand by the body  
Nothing much to say  
Just another Asian  
Has been killed today

### **THE PROSTITUTE**

She waits at the station entrance  
Offering herself for sale  
And her expectant silence  
Is as loud as a mourner's wail.

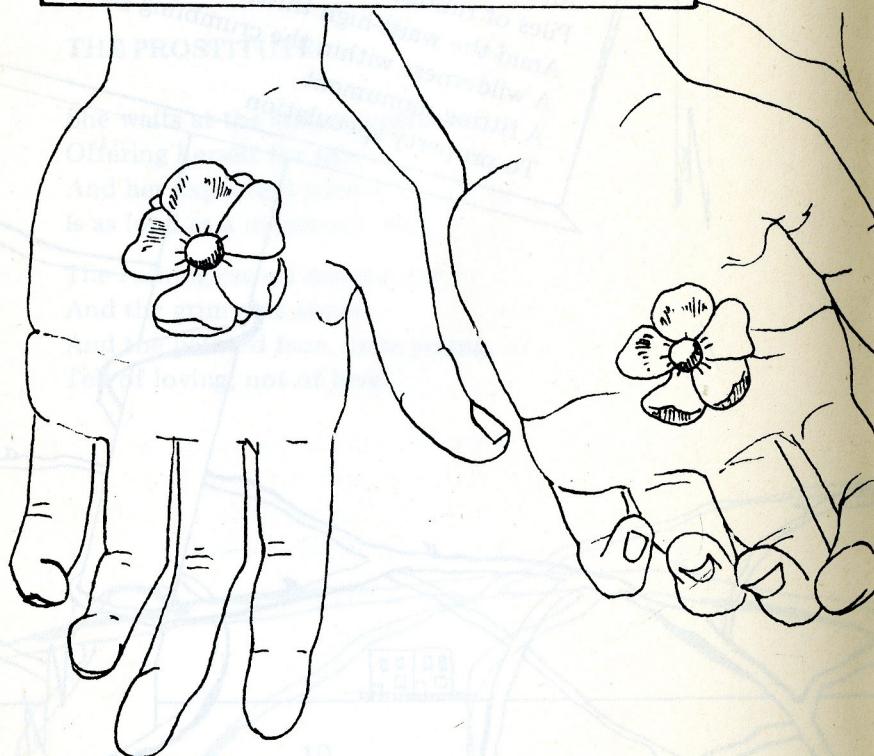
The rushing crowd around her  
And the grimy air above  
And the painted face, once young,  
Tell of loving, not of love.

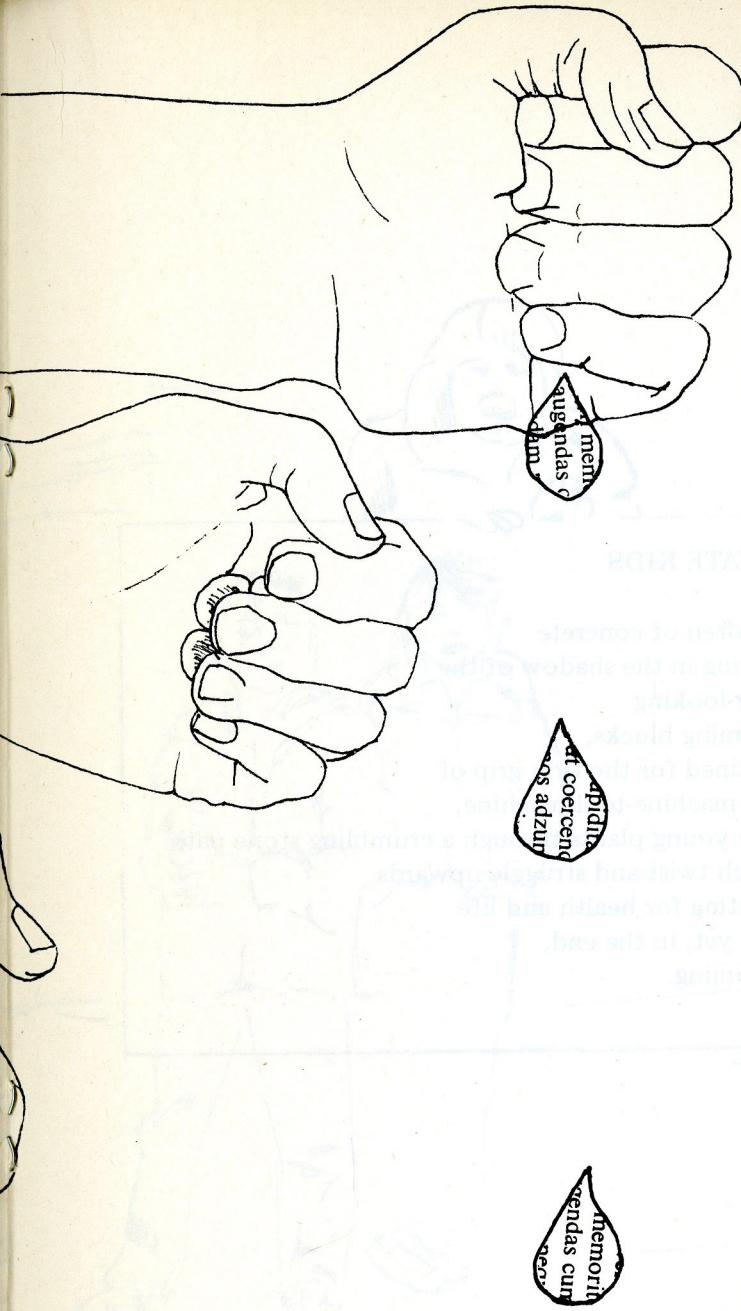
### THE MONUMENT

Five years ago, on this site,  
Stood a late Victorian house  
In it people lived and talked and laughed  
Now, while thousands hunt for homes  
And babies wheeze in damp basements,  
Piles of rubbish slowly decay  
Amid the waist-high thistles growing everywhere  
A wilderness within the crumbling garden walls  
A fitting monument  
To property speculation

## ENGLISH LITERATURE — GCE

Two dozen pupils  
Dissect the set texts  
Relentless hands  
Ripping apart the delicate flowers  
Petal by petal  
To learn  
How to understand beauty







### ESTATE KIDS

Children of concrete  
Playing in the shadow of the  
Over-looking  
Looming blocks,  
Destined for the firm grip of  
The machine-tool machine,  
Like young plants through a crumbling stone path  
Which twist and struggle upwards  
Fighting for health and life  
And yet, in the end,  
Blooming.

mission



## MONSOON

Rain, rain, monsoon rain  
Burst from sky like lightning down  
Break on hillside, break on field,  
Break on walkers in the town.

Rain, rain, lash the earth  
Nimbly dance with shoes of steel  
Leap in rivers, splash the soil  
Knock huts over as you reel.

Not like English drizzling  
Water trickling through the day  
Cast down from self-sodden clouds  
Fusing with the city grey

Rain, rain, monsoon rain  
Leave you must but come again.

Asbestos fingers, yours, you rightly said  
Which reared three children, and I was the first;  
You taught me singing: but those days are dead,  
Evaporated, and I'm left in thirst.  
Oh, you shone brightly, and your wings they grew;  
Your father's daughter you, you could not stay;  
The air hung heavy on the day you flew,  
The airport empty, for you'd gone away.  
The memories lingered, but time pushed me on;  
I grew to a near-woman, by and by;  
Folks call me by your name sometimes, now you are gone  
And with your help I'm learning how to fly.  
The day speeds nearer when I leave to roam;  
Perhaps we'll be more close, both far from home.

## PASSION

Oh the heat of the sun  
Bare rock without water  
Bare rock without water

My brother and I went out  
To the open fields one day  
Then he lay in blood at my feet  
And I hid the body away

The wine I drink is sour  
For the vineyard has grown wild

Now the soldiers are coming  
And we must flee this town  
For they're cutting down our husbands  
And tearing the temple down

Bare rock without water

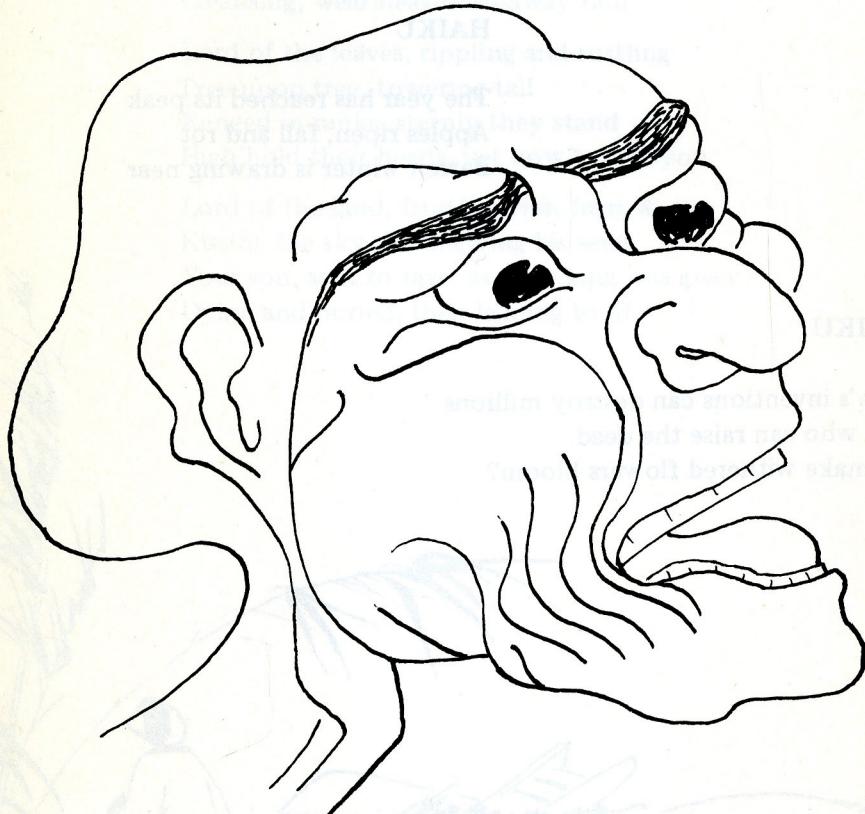
Thank you, Lord, for your blessing  
On the mission we've fulfilled  
For the safe return of our bombers  
And the children we have killed

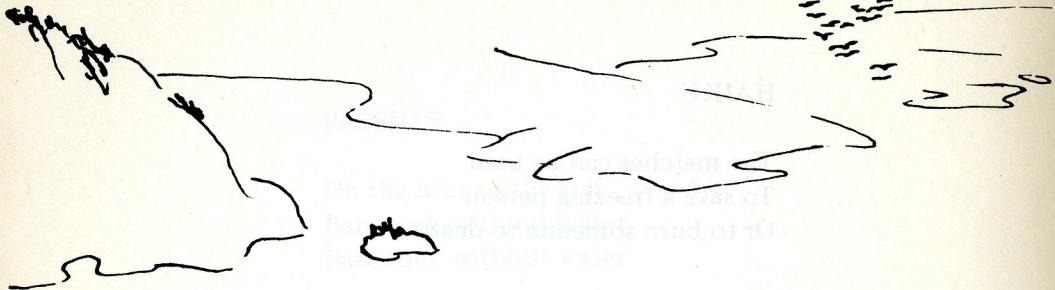
My God, my God, why have your forsaken me?

May their hearts live for ever  
The poor shall eat and be satisfied  
It is finished

## HAIKU

The matches can be used  
To save a freezing person  
Or to burn someone to death





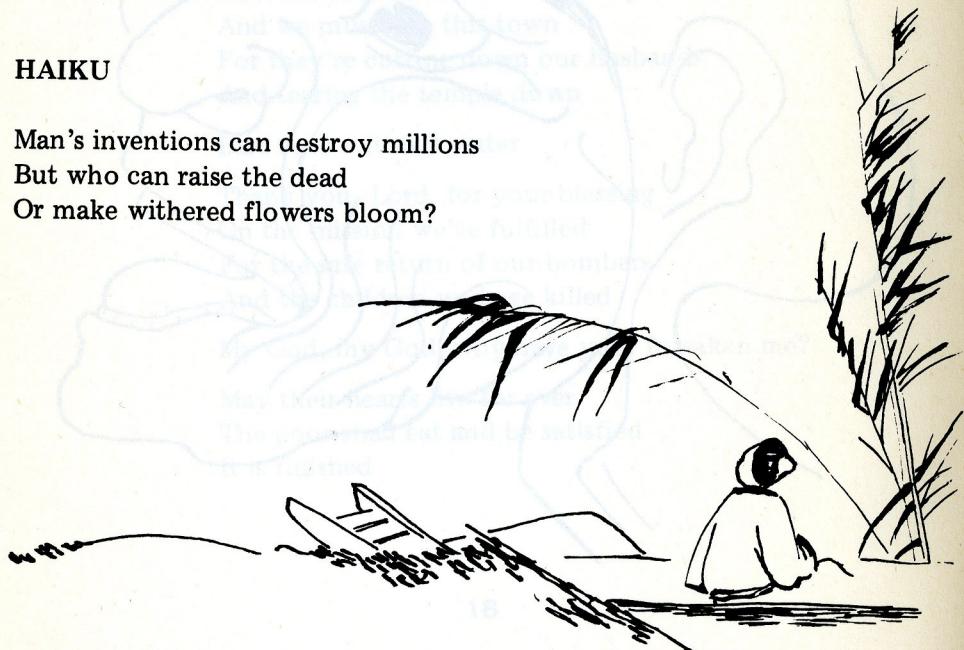
On the 20th instant I was at  
the head of a stream of mud of  
about 10

### HAIKU

The year has reached its peak  
Apples ripen, fall and rot  
Barren winter is drawing near

### HAIKU

Man's inventions can destroy millions  
But who can raise the dead  
Or make withered flowers bloom?



LOANED FROM THE LAND

KING OF CREATION

Whose son stilled the storm, walked on the water  
Vast is your sea, slow surging strong on  
Rivers race-rushing, dancing, drunk-daring  
Cleansing, weariness-wash-away rain

Lord of the leaves, rippling and rustling  
Tree upon tree, towering-tall  
Ranged in ranks, sternly they stand  
High hold their heads, yet bow before you

Lord of the land, fruitful-fresh-furrow  
Kissing the sky, forth-giving his seed  
Your son, sent to save, as corn-king was given  
Dying and buried, then leaping to life

— Paper sold to George Bush, Nov. 18, 1861.

— Wodehouse's in very tall  
dark-faced boys whose no better line  
Circle round at the bottom back

3.

Where is the wind that comes from the land  
And the fields of green, when evening green?  
Whispered in the pines, they sleep  
While the white neck drags me and myt down  
When trees dropped and stood  
To protect from the winter tempests to the land

A silver wind passed through this way  
Here, where the dead leaves lie  
The baby playing with his toes  
Grinned as it went by

To an old man on a bench it came,  
Caressed his stubbly chin  
The old man lifted up his eyes  
To let the daylight in

The silver wind came on the beast  
That lives in a Chelsea street  
And feeds on stocks and human flesh,  
And lashed it off its feet

## LAMENT FOR THE LAND

1.

The Bear is very friendly  
Though he sniffs you head to toe  
And his breath it smells of chemicals  
And his teeth they tend to show.

Oh, The Bear believes in freedom  
As he's proved so well before  
For when he hugs you tightly  
You'll be free for evermore.

2.

Big bee buzzing  
In the sky  
If it sting you  
Then you die

Houses flare and  
Wood turns brown  
Screaming vultures  
Circle town

3.

Where is the wheat that once grew gold  
And the fields of fresh, wind-dancing green?  
Withered in their prime, they droop  
Since the silver bird from the East spat down  
And a tree, stripped and stark  
Stretches out its twisted limbs to the land.

Headlamp eyes and

Teeth of brass

Big boot Boris

Trample grass

Quick fish darting

Dance in brook

Boris dangle

Poison hook

Mosquito nip him

On the face

Dance away and

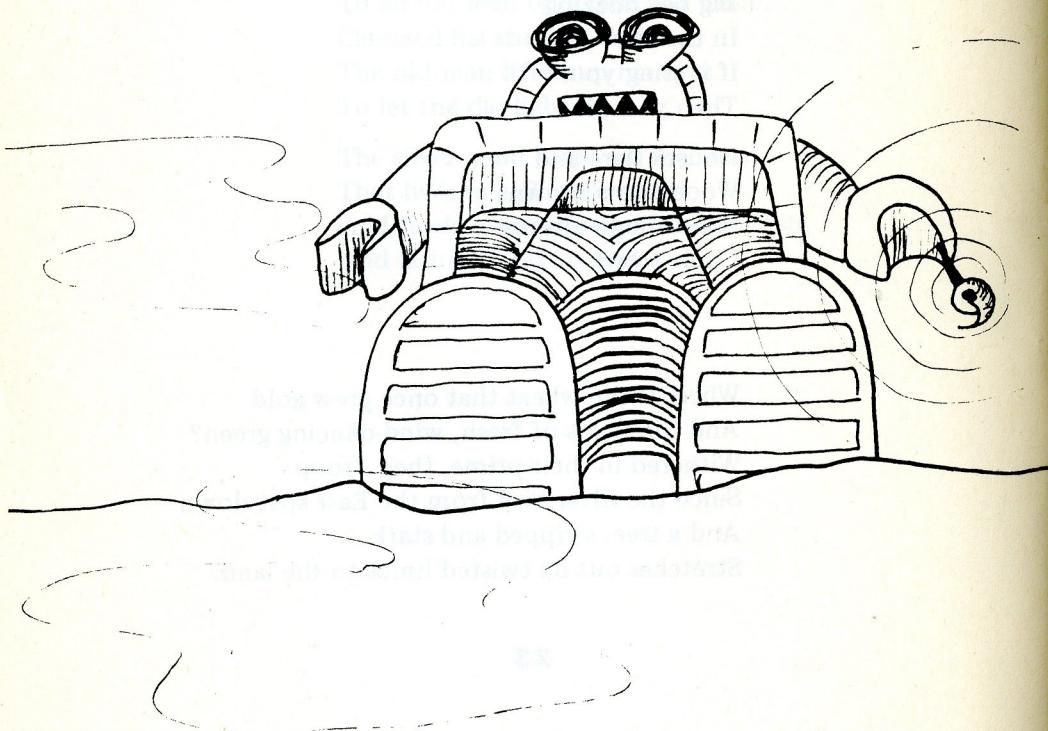
He give chase

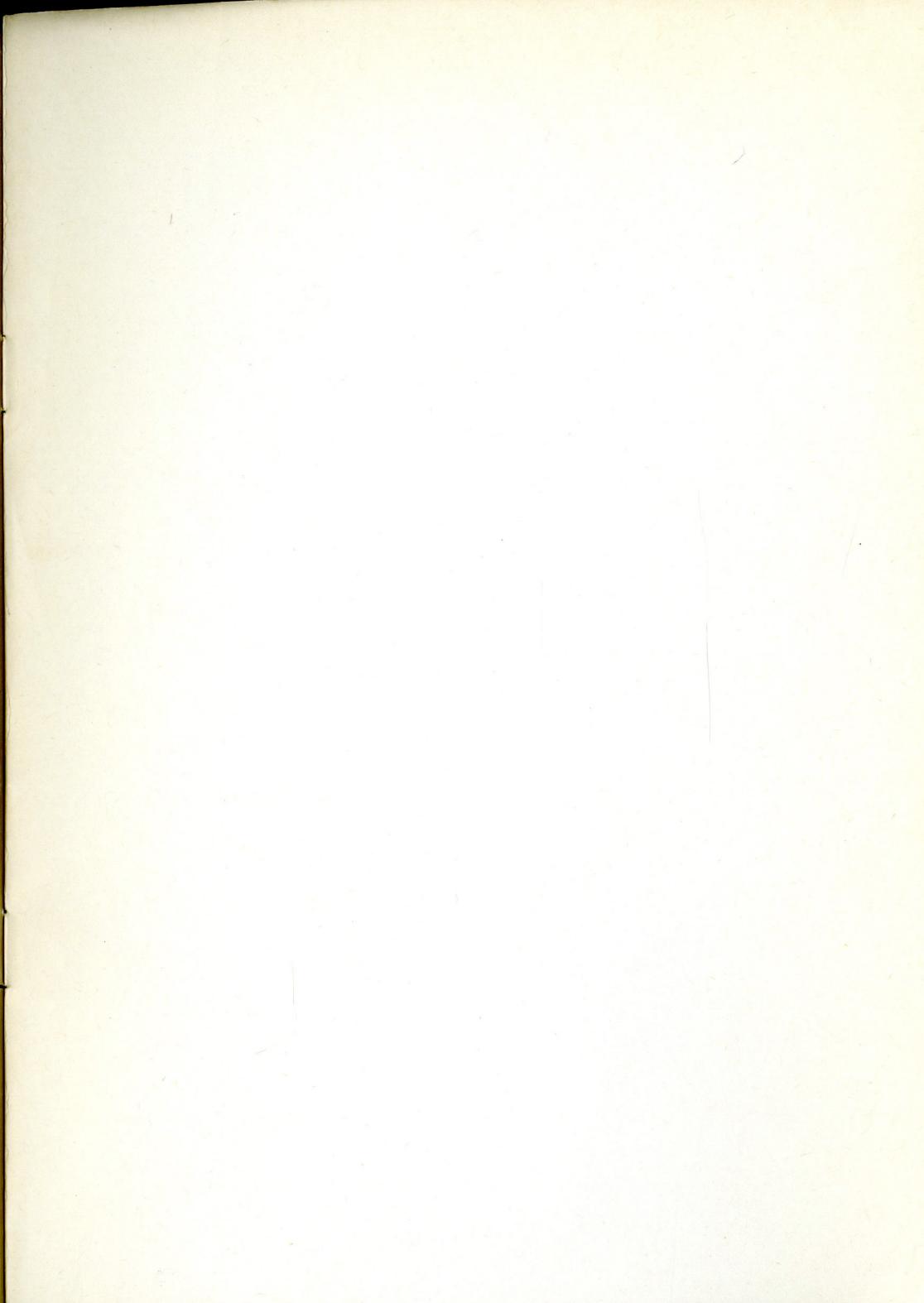
Into water

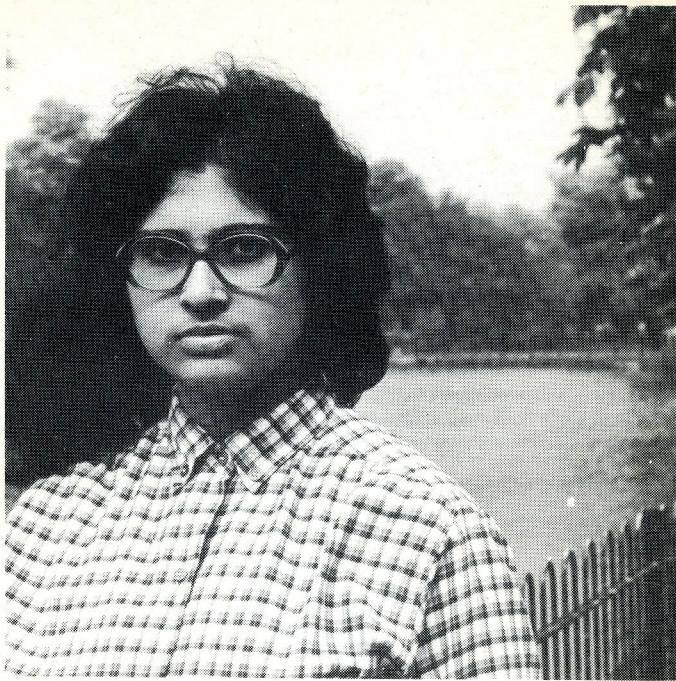
Boris wade

Sunbeam dance and

Ripples fade.







This collection of poetry and pictures is by two people who are still at school. Yet it reflects many of the serious issues in our present society, like racism, or survival in cities, as well as its complexities.

The poems are powerful images of life today in varying moods, some angry, others lyrical or with a surrealist sense of fun. Savi, who wrote the poems, won the Hackney Poetry Competition in 1976. Sarah, who did the illustrations, studied for 'A' Level Art in one year on her own, and is at present studying science.