Contributor: Kgomotso Masemola

Entry: Gwala, Mafika Pascal (1946–)

Born in the Verulam area of the then Natal province (now KwaZulu-Natal), the population of which was largely Indian and Zulu, Mafika Gwala’s response to the apartheid edicts of separation and segregation of races found expression in the short stories and passionate free verse exulting the cultural revival inspired by Black Consciousness which he initially wrote for Nat Nakasa’s The Classic literary magazine.

His commitment to the struggle led to his editorship of The Black Review, which was run under the aegis of the Black Community Programme. His position guaranteed him a place at the Black Renaissance Convention of 1974, held in Hammanskraal outside Pretoria, where he explicitly disavowed an elitist form of intellectualism that alienated the working-class black people who were part of the struggle collective. These anti-elitist views, along with the resolutions of the historic South African Writers Conference held at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1976, led to the founding of Staffrider in 1978, a journal with editorial policies that initially encouraged free expression and self-editing, in order to make the voice of the people known.

Gwala’s first collection of poetry, issued in 1977 under the title Jol’iinkomo (Bringing the Cattle to the Kraal), was written in an English that drew on black township speech idioms, patterns and tones. Along with expressing the political issues of the day, the poetry highlighted African dignity. Gwala’s second collection, No More Lullabies (1982), transcended narrow concerns with blackness or Africa by looking at the global stage and Western imperialism. It is here that Gwala’s Marxist sympathies become clear, when he eulogizes Vietnamese military leaders such as Ng-Gu Yen, from whom he drew revolutionary inspiration. In 1991, whilst living in Manchester, Mafika Gwala published an anthology, Musho: Zulu Popular Praises, in collaboration with Liz Gunner. The two praise poems contained in Musho preserve a traditional rhythm across the two languages of isiZulu and English, and also incorporate contemporary material, offering a fine example of local modernist syncretism.

**References and further reading**

Alvarez-Pereyre, J. (1984) *The Poetry of Commitment in South Africa*, London: Heinemann Educational Books.

**List of works**

*Jol’iinkomo*(1977)

*No More Lullabies* (1982)

*Musho: Zulu Popular Praises* (1994)