

Episode of the Transvaal – a novel written by Harry Bloom

Winner of the Authors Club First Novel Award in May 1957 and was presented to author Harry Bloom by Lord Dunsany. Re-published by Second Chance Press 1981:

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Episode in the Transvaal, an outstanding novel about apartheid, published by *Doubleday* (US) in 1955 and *Collins* (UK) in 1956 made **Harry Bloom** into an internationally esteemed writer. It was followed by two other books by Bloom - a highly acclaimed novel **Whittakers Wife**. Harry also wrote the book for the South African musical *King Kong*.

Episode was one of six books selected for republication by Second Chance Press (USA) in 1981 which seeks out contemporary books of exceptional quality deserving of wider audiences.

Les Bons Caracteres, a French Publishing House in Patin, France, have long been admirers of *Episode* and wished to republish it again as they believed it is still the most relevant and best written book about the anti-apartheid situation in South Africa during the 1950's.

Quotes on **Episode** by reviewers:

“Second Chance Press has done a true service to contemporary literature by publishing for the first time in the US this 1956 novel about the grisly aspects of life in apartheid South Africa...Bloom’s beautifully written novel is a classic of modern literature and deserves a wide audience.

Book List

“Fiery and admirable, it has power, passion and a controlled savagery that make it uncomfortable but fascinating reading.”

Daily Telegraph, London

“It is a brutal tale told without brutality...it judges without censoriousness. His story never happened – yet every word of it is true.”

Alan Paton

“I venture to state without qualification, that Harry Bloom’s EPISODE will stand in the front rank of all books about South Africa of the dark years.

Father Trevor Huddleston

“ Harry Bloom’s first novel is a rare find – a work in which style and subject, imagination and background blend into a story rich in power and promise.”

“I can remember well when Episode first appreaed in Johaannesburg and caused such a sensation: it was a suberb achievement and it remains one.”

Anthony Sampson

Whittakers Wife, Bloom’s second novel, was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection in 1963 and **King Kong** – a folk jazz opera, brought Miriam Mekeba to world-wide prominence after running in South Africa, London and New York. All the rights are now owned by Sonia Bloom.

Bloom was a highly respected attorney, novelist and playwright who lived most of his life in South Africa and who, since his student days in Johannesburg, committed himself to working – not in a desk in an office, but on the front line in actual locations - toward racial equality and justice in that country. *Episode*, as the novel was originally called, was first published in South Africa in 1956 and

sold over 20,000 copies and reprinted in 22 countries. As a hard-hitting study of apartheid it soon became so controversial that Harry Bloom was arrested and held for six weeks during a round up of outspoken opponents of the South African government that condoned apartheid. Subsequently he had his passport cancelled and was therefore unable to travel to London to receive the **British Authors Club Award** for the best novel of the year, awarded for *Episode*.

Harry Bloom will always be remembered with great esteem in South Africa, particularly for his work as a lawyer, and barrister, fighting apartheid on the front line by defending blacks in court and on Location, facing danger and government forces, being imprisoned and tortured in political round-ups during Sharpeville at the height of the apartheid movement during the 'fifties and 'sixties.

Outline Summary

SET IN THE TOWN OF NELSTROOM in the Transvaal, *Episode* is concerned with the relations between the Africans who live in the town's run-down "Locations" and their white neighbours, living in comparable luxury.

"One day a new man came to live in the Location. His name was Walter Mabaso and his arrival was the signal for new currents, new tensions, new emotions to stir in its shabby streets and houses. The location superintendent, Hendrik Du Toit, was a serious and hardworking man who set out not only to please his employers, the Town Council, but the location people too. But he would have been amazed to know that his honest, earnest and elevated motives made him into a tyrant in the location. These two men – Mabaso and Du Toit – are strongly drawn individuals. They are also symbols and are responsible, in some degree, for what follows. From a tiny incident in the life of the location grows a fire which sweeps the whole town and its inhabitants."

Richard Attenborough bid to make this novel into a film in the sixties, and there was dialogue and correspondence about this with Harry Bloom. In the end, Attenborough turned instead to make *Cry Freedom* - a film about apartheid in South Africa, nominated for Oscars but which divided **South African commentators** who asked why a film about the story of a black civil rights leader (Steve Biko played by Denzel Washington) focused so much on his white friend Donald Woods, the apartheid activist and his family who escaped from SA.

Another attempt to make the novel into a film was made by Penelope Casadesus in 1981, shortly after the death of Harry Bloom but was abandoned when the political apartheid issues were addressed by the Government.

One of the scripts commissioned by Ms. Penelope Casadesus and now in the possession of Sonia Copeland Bloom is "a film scenario by ANTHONY BURGESS based on the novel "Transvaal Episode" by Harry Bloom. The script is written very closely to the novel.

As Anthony Burgess died in 1993, this unknown, unseen piece of writing by Burgess, could be valuable for anyone interested in reviving an interest in making this book into a film. Comments from Apartheid experts have praised the script which is based very accurately on the book.

Anthony Burgess, (1917-1993) was a gifted English novelist, critic and composer. He was also active as a librettist, poet, pianist, playwright, screenwriters, journalist and essayist. Among his many works was the cult exploration of the nature of evil *A Clockwork Orange*.

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All the rights of this novel are now held by Sonia Copeland Bloom of St. Alphege House, 6 St. Alphege Lane, Canterbury, Kent CT12EB: scjcl@btinternet.com

Published in 22 languages including: Uitgeverij F.G.Kroonder – Bussum, De Internationale Pers – Berchem-Antwerpen (Belgium); France: Editions du Seuil, 27 rue Jacob, Paris VI; Hans E. Gunther Verlag, Stuttgart (German); Europaischer Buchklub, Stuttgart, Zurich, Salzburg; Aktiebolaget Skoglunds Bokforlag, Stockholm, Sweden; SNPL Praha 1960; Slivensky Spisovatel 1961 Prodalni Konyvkiado, Bukarest 1961.

BIOGRAPHY OF HARRY BLOOM (updated) :

HARRY BLOOM, barrister, scholar, novelist, academic, playwright and campaigner for civil rights, was born in Johannesburg South Africa in 1913. His mother Kitty was Polish and his father Jack, was Welsh. Since his student days Harry committed himself to working towards racial equality and justice in South Africa. He distinguished himself as a scholar of the Witwatersrand University, graduating in Law and was responsible for enrolling the first black student into that University. The outbreak of the Second World War saw him as a practicing barrister and solicitor in the South African legal system. After a spell in auxiliary war service, Harry Bloom covered the Nuremberg War Trials as War Correspondent with the British Forces in Germany.

TRANSVAAL EPISODE (original title **EPISODE**) was first published in South Africa in 1956, sold 20,000 copies and was reprinted in twenty-two other countries. As a hard-hitting study of apartheid, it soon became so controversial that Harry Bloom was arrested and held in detention without trial for six weeks during a round up of outspoken opponents by that government at the time of the riots of Sharpesville. Subsequently he had his passport cancelled with the result that he was unable to travel to London in May 1957 to receive the British Authors Club Best Novel of the Year Award for Episode, presented by Lord Dunsany.

Harry was later to write the highly acclaimed *Whittakers Wife* which was a Book-of-the Month Club selection in 1963 in the United States. He also wrote the book for the musical *King Kong*, a folk jazz opera about a boxer, which was hugely successful and brought Miriam Mekeba to world wide prominence when the musical came to London and was booked for New York.

In 1963, with his passport restored, he moved to Great Britain in search of a new life, mainly as an academic and journalist and married for the second time. He was then appointed a Senior Lecturer in Law at the University of Kent where he introduced a course on the Law of Mass Media and founded the Legal Research Unit for Computers and Communications. In 1978 he was appointed a visiting Professorship in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Electronics at Brunel University in recognition of his contribution in the humanization of technological artifacts.

After suffering a stroke in 1975, Harry Bloom continued to take an active interest in law and technology and pursued his contribution to the field as consultant and author and a critical reviewer of current literature on the subject. He died on August 31st 1981 and on Friday 20th December 1991, the Harry Bloom Room was opened in his memory in the Templeman Library, the University of Kent.