

# Seymour

*in memoriam Donald White*

## 1

Too small to be a dorp, too dry  
and Eastern Cape for a village,  
its outline trembles on hot days.

In Xhosa it's known as *Mpofu*,  
which hints at dun, austere colours,  
the eland's name, and nourishment.

Its dam, its row of scraggy gums  
and corrugated-iron rooftops  
are perched below escarpment crags.

The view, across aloed thorn-veld  
down to the coastal-plain goes on  
and on until you see cloud shadow

scudding slowly towards the sea,  
until the land and sky are hazed  
and sight and vision start to blur.

## 2

The orchards of the orange farm  
that you, your father and brother  
built with the farmhands in the bush

greened the riverine soils below.  
Once, over a beer, you told me  
that years ago, before the change,

your farmer friends and families  
would motor up the mountain pass  
and weekend at the small hotel,

piling a bakkie with youngsters,  
gillies, fishing tackle and meat.  
'Hell,' you said, 'but what a party!'

3

One searing afternoon last March,  
I slowed and took the Seymour turn,  
wanting a break, a drink, a phone.

Its single street was much the same,  
a scratch on shale where little stirred  
except, this time, for listless goats

chewing a shrub in someone's yard,  
plastic bags spiked on thorn-bushes  
and stock that grazed a rubbish dump.

I parked and walked across the dust.  
The co-op's door had been torn off,  
its rows of window-panes smashed in.

The public phone hissed on its hook.  
A drunk snored in the empty bar,  
face down among a slew of quarts.

The radio in the hotel foyer  
was gabbling on about football  
being played before a Joburg crowd.

The manager appeared in socks,  
declined my bid to purchase tea  
yawned and scratched a shirtless chest.

4

It was the nightmare of your caste,  
the post-uhuru slide from hopes  
of jobs, clinics, houses and cars

to run-down courts and hospitals,  
armed thieves and dark imaginings  
of plague, looting and malls on fire.

As I reversed and bumped away  
you with your grey-blue eyes Donald  
returned to haunt me with a laugh.

'So? Didn't I warn you?' you asked.  
And I, that frayed riposte, 'Was there  
a choice? Besides, we're different

and hands long bound are always limp.'  
The sun ovened the mountain air,  
the road seemed steeper than before.

Prickling with sweat, I drove slowly,  
scheming like the hunter-gatherers,  
the pastoralists who came before,

ways to survive in that landscape,  
to extricate vision from sight  
and track the eland through the thorns.