

## LADIES

How puffed and powdered they looked  
those middle-aged ladies of my childhood  
who stood chatting on Sundays  
outside the Protestant churches of Durban  
a growth of flabby fungi on green lawns  
decked out in pastel linens and laces and flowery hats.

Not absent either from Catholic congregations  
plump cheeks streaked with sweat under tulle veils  
as they allowed the wafer to melt on their tongues  
pecked at Christ's feet on the Good-Friday crucifix.

How could God love them, I wondered,  
so snug and smug in their bungalows  
with a black boy to polish floors, water their gardens--  
and oh! their church bakings, their morning teas!

In the Catholic cathedral one could sit near  
old Indian women with rings in their noses and dirty saris  
who muttered Hail Marys with garlicky breath  
African matriarchs of tribal proportions  
opening their throats to Gregorian chant . . . .

God loved them--no doubt about that--  
one could see them lining the streets of Jerusalem  
shouting Hosannas, weeping along the way of the Cross--  
but these prosperous white slugs--  
well perhaps they gave praise for their dahlias  
blushed before their guardian angels  
when accepting a third slice of cake.

I strained my imagination to the limit  
("God loves us all") to seize the soul inside them  
the purified flame flickering in God's sight,  
the wild and lovely bird hovering hidden within--  
but floundered on face-powder, over-fed flesh.

Is it maturity, this slackening skin,  
that brings a certain compassion? Whether  
or how God loved them I shall never know  
but I saw pastel linens give way to grey dressing gowns  
the last white sheet wound round the mystery  
of even the most complacent flesh.

**Elizabeth Jones**

We are reprinting this poem as an apology to Elizabeth Jones for our typing error in the last issue. (Eds.)