

DON MATTERA
(b 1935)

Remember

GLOSSARY

- bliss – happiness
- pardoned – forgiven
- prejudice – judgements without knowledge

Remember to call at my grave
When freedom finally
Walks the land
That I may rise
To tread familiar paths
To see broken chains
Fallen prejudice
Forgotten injury
Pardoned pains.

And when my eyes have filled their sight
Do not run away for fright
If I crumble to dust again
It will only be the bliss
Of a long-awaited dream
That bids me rest
When freedom finally walks the land...

ABOUT THIS POEM

This poem was written during the days of apartheid, the days when black and coloured people had no opportunities nor any political freedom or representation. Mattera's involvement in the Struggle had implications for him – see his biography at the back of the book – and, when this poem was written, he had dreams and hopes of freedom but doubted that he would still be alive to see these dreams realised.

However, one does not see hatred in his writing. He, himself, said that he could feel bitterness and anger, but not hatred. In this poem, therefore, he shares his dream, hoping that others would dream with him and that "freedom" would come. It is interesting to note that this poem has been read at the funerals of a number of activists, notably that of Chris Hani.

THINK ABOUT IT

- Who is speaking? What is he asking us to do? Could the word "call" have more than one meaning here?
- What does he want to do? Would the paths still be "familiar"? Consider which of the lines 6–9 relate to the oppressors and which relate to the oppressed.
- What is the underlying touch of humour at the beginning of the second stanza? what emotion does this convey?
- What famous speech is echoed in this stanza? He repeats lines 2 and 3 as one line at the end of the poem.
- Is the difference in type-setting important?

TEST YOURSELF

1. What do we call a poem where only one person speaks his thoughts?
2. What does the title of the poem refer to?
3. What figure of speech is contained in "When freedom finally walks the land"? Why does the poet use this?
4. What does the poet include under the term "freedom"?
5. Explain what the poet means by lines 6–9.
6. Describe the poet's "long awaited dream".
- *7. How does the poem indicate that a new South Africa should not harbour hatred?
- *8. How has the poet established the rhythm and impression of walking in this poem?