

Adam Schwartzman
Rivonia Road 2
Even more challenging questions!

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Adam Schwartzman, a Jewish South African, was born in Johannesburg in 1973. He had therefore not yet been born when the Rivonia treason trial took place in 1963. Schwartzman's poem is an almost apocalyptic examination of the political storm that awaited the country as a result of the trial. It views the crisis of the "liberation struggle" in the 1980s as if still something of the future.

The poet, an academic who worked for a time at the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town, has been described as having "a strong sensual perception of South Africa, wrestling with the heritage of segregation and violence in this country".

There is a Rivonia Road in Sandton but it is hardly likely that the poet is referring to it. Instead, he is most probably looking at the metaphorical road which led from the Rivonia trial of 1963 and culminated in the armed struggle of the 1970s and 80s.

On trial were 19 African National Congress leaders who had been arrested at Liliesleaf Farm in July 1963. These included Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba.

Originally the death penalty had been requested but this was changed due to world-wide protests. Instead, eight defendants -- including Nelson Mandela -- were sentenced to life imprisonment.

The trial would be a pivotal point in the history of the liberation movement in South Africa. Indeed, the ANC evolved from an organisation that had been trying to achieve change through negotiation and then sabotage into one which sought the absolute overthrow of the racist regime through an armed struggle.

1. "Things will be darker, not dimmer. When it comes to us, we will be inside, safely, until, afterwards, we clear the garden table and find the wine-glasses brimmed and level."
 - Is there a difference between "darker" and "dimmer"? (2)
 - Why would the poet make such a distinction between "darker" and "dimmer"? (4)
 - To what is the pronoun "it" referring? (2)
 - The poet says that, when the storm arrives, they will be "inside, safely". What does he mean by this? (4)
 - What is the implication of finding the wine-glasses "brimmed and level"? (4)

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

2. Why is the poem titled "Rivonia Road"? (4)
3. Why would the poem's subtitle be "without words"? (4)
4. The poet uses the coming storm as an image of great catastrophe. What catastrophe is he referring to? (4)

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