

Flying South Again

1987

The 747 fishtails endlessly
Across the Trade Winds; in the smoking section, numb
With sideswipe, after thirteen hours we all agree
Namibia itself will seem a condolence.
“Ontbyt?” the steward says. And as the sun comes up,
The Namib, in the colors of a flattened pearl,
Sorts out its fogs and dunes. The iridescent flats
Give way to golden morning on the Kalahari;
Fawn, the River Vaal appears. Then, neither white
Nor watered--center, not an edge--the all concrete
Witwatersrand. Below the left wing as we bank,
Enormous in its greedy sprawl, Johannesburg
Maps out the diggings of its gold. If on the ground
One still can be deceived, the townships from the air
Are too encompassing. But does Soweto fly?
Jan Smuts is any airport. Customs are not worse
Than elsewhere, nor security. The block of flats
I used to live in is a rainbow co-op, now
Legit? And at the entrance, somewhat heavier,
And with a broader range of huge cut flowers to sell,
The Tamil woman in her sari still is there.
I notice, as she gathers up the last unsold,
A new Mercedes Diesel comes to pick her up.